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Il Superiore Generale

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CIRCULAR LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION

***“Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges;
can you not see it?” (Is. 43:19)***

I find this inspired word of God tremendously hopeful and motivating. It shakes me from my lethargy and challenges me *“to look”, “to see”* – not just with the human eye and not just what is on the surface – but to *“look and see”* much deeper with the enlightened mind and heart, which necessarily calls for a *deep listening* to all of life – and the God of Life. I believe this *listening* and *seeing* to be the contemplative dimension which is an inherent part of every human person and, it goes without saying, a necessary dimension of our Passionist life and vocation.

In the story of salvation, God was constantly leading and guiding the people to see their future with hope – especially when they lost their way, or found themselves in difficult situations. God was calling them (often through their leaders) to see deeper with renewed minds and hearts what God was doing, and consequently what **change** and **renewal** was asked of them in their relationship with God, with others and with the whole universe.

***“Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges;
can you not see it?” (Is. 43:19)***

***“Yes, I know what plans I have in mind for you...plans for peace,
not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer. 29:11)***

The Holy Spirit who is moving in our lives and our world is a **renewing** Spirit, constantly re-creating anew... *“can you not see it?”* We need *to see* with renewed minds and hearts, *to look deeper* for the movement of the Spirit, and *to listen* and *respond* to the call for ongoing renewal.

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Like it or not, newness and renewal means **change**, which is a normal part of life and growth and transformation for all created things. As difficult as we find and experience change, on the one hand there is nothing that we can do about it, because it is just part of how life is and how things are. Therefore, we must embrace change; it is inevitable. Cardinal Newman said: *"To grow is to change, and to have changed often is to have grown much."*

On the other hand, our resistance to the change which is within our control, only serves to stunt our growth, keep our vision narrow, and perpetuate a future that is lifeless and hopeless. Someone put it this way: *"People need change. It awakens something deep inside allowing them to grow. Without change something sleeps inside and seldom awakes."*

The 46th General Chapter - Passionist Life: Solidarity and Mission

The General Chapter held at the Retreat of SS John and Paul in Rome from 9th September to 7th October 2012 was **a time of renewal**. The Capitulars, representing all the areas of the Congregation, gathered to discern and to listen to the Spirit renewing and calling us to be more authentic Passionists in our life and mission in today's world.

Precisely because the Chapter was a time of renewal, **change** is an inevitable consequence. The 46th General Chapter instituted **a new time** in the history of the Congregation, principally through the decrees it promulgated and the decisions it took, which cannot, and must not, leave any of us going about life and carrying on as we have always done; as if nothing has changed. The typical attitude of fear and control is: *"this is how we have always done it!"* This kind of attitude will only lead to a deafness and blindness, a fearful resistance to the *"something new"* which God is doing, and which will be an obstacle to the hope-full plans of God's future and God's dream.

Listen again: ***"Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges; can you not see it?" (Is. 43:19)***

Configurations: Solidarity for Passionist Life and Mission

The 46th General Chapter confirmed and institutionalised the six 'Configurations' which we have been developing. These consist of mutually supportive entities which have been building closer ties and relationships of collaboration over the past 4 years, focusing on Solidarity, particularly in the areas of formation, personnel and finance so as to give greater vitality to the Passionist life and mission. Each Configuration has chosen the best way to work together and to collaborate having developed solidarity structures suited for their respective Configuration. Four of the Configurations have chosen to work as an aggregation of several autonomous juridical entities (i.e. Provinces, Vice Provinces, Vicariates); while two of the Configurations have chosen the path of a single juridical entity with different internal structures (i.e. a Province with regions).

The Configurations – which is a **new way of being Passionists** in today's world and church – will continue to develop. In my homily at the closing of the Chapter, I stated: *"This remains a great challenge and calls for a radical response from us all. This radical response means a renewal of mind and attitudes; collaboration through dialogue; the removal of barriers and a letting-go of 'my patch' which has kept us safe and secure."* Without genuine **conversion (metanoia, renewal)** - both personal and communal - nothing will change. Therefore, I believe, we must consciously make efforts to engage in dialogue with one another; to grow in respect of the diversity of cultures; to accept and not fear difference; to be aware of the subtleties in language which we use (e.g. 'ours' instead of 'mine'); to share personnel, formation and financial resources where most needed so that, not 'parts', but 'the whole' may benefit. I encourage you to proceed in this spirit.

In order to promote the work of solidarity and guard the efficacy of the Configurations, the Chapter decided that the Configuration leaders (Presidents/Coordinators) will be a consultative body meeting with the General Council at least once annually as the "Extended Council".

The six Configurations established by the General Chapter are:

- **Configuration of Blessed Eugene Bossilkov (CEB):** PRAES, DOL, PIET, CORM, LAT, CFXI (Italy), MICH (France), FAT (Portugal,

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including Angola, Bulgaria & Nigeria). *This Configuration has chosen the model of a single juridical entity by 2015.*

- **Configuration of Jesus Crucified (CJC):** PAUL, CRUC (USA), REG (Mexico), CALV, LAT-ISID, PRAES-DOMIN, SPE-LIBER, DOL-VICT (Brazil, including Mozambique), CONC (Argentina, Uruguay), PAC (Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico).
- **Configuration of the Sacred Heart (SCOR):** CORI, FAM, SANG (Spain, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Panama), FID (Colombia), CORI-RES (Peru). *This Configuration has chosen to be a single Province by July 2013.*
- **Configuration of Passionists of Asia and Pacific (PASPAC):** SPIR (Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea), PASS (Philippines), MACOR (Korea, including China), REPAC (Indonesia), MAIAP (Japan), THOM (India), LAVA (Vietnam).
- **Configuration of Saint Charles Houben (CCH):** ASSUM (Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic), GABR (Belgium), IOS (England, Wales, Sweden), PATR (Ireland, Scotland, France), SPE (The Netherlands, North Germany), VULN (South Germany, Austria).
- **Configuration of the Passionists of Africa (CPA):** SALV (Congo), CORM-GEMM (Tanzania), PATR-MATAF (Botswana, Zambia, South Africa), CORM-CARLW (Kenya).

Change and Growth toward Maturity

The General Chapter approved the elevation of several entities to a greater autonomous status thereby recognising their respective growth to maturity. These are:

- The Vice Province of Holy Faith (FID Colombia) as a Province;
- The Vicariate of Our Lady of Peace (CORI-PAC The Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) as a Vice Province;

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- The Vicariate of St Thomas the Apostle (CRUC-THOM India) as a Vice Province;
- The Brazilian Vicariates of Blessed Dominic Barberi (PRAES-DOMIN), Christ Liberator (SPE-LIBER) and Our Lady of Victory (DOL-VICT) as a Province in 2014.

In addition, the Chapter approved the request of the Provinces of Calvary (CALV Brazil), Immaculate Conception (CONC Argentina) and the Vicariate of Blessed Isidore de Loor (LAT-ISID Brazil) to form one new Province in 2016.

These are bold moves! But it is encouraging to see the growth and confidence by these entities towards greater autonomy on the one hand, while, on the other hand, recognising also the need for support and dependence. With the reality today of growing and declining areas of the Congregation, we need to find new and effective ways, not just to keep the name of the Passionist Congregation alive, but more importantly, “to keep alive the Memory of the Passion” – that for which we exist in the Church and for what is our mission in the world.

Plan for Prophetic Mission as Passionists Today

Over the past 12 years, the Congregation has made great efforts and strides in Restructuring for the sake of revitalising and giving greater authenticity to our **Passionist life** and **mission**. The 46th General Chapter highlighted six aspects of our life and mission as a prophetic vision for Passionists today. In the homily of the closing Mass of the Chapter, I stated my desire that *“focusing on these areas of our life and mission in the local realities we hope will give an impetus to the whole Passionist Family to be affirmed in their identity, witness and reason for existence.”*

If change and growth is to be effective, then we cannot just keep on going as we always have. We must search for **new ways** for a **new time**! I strongly encourage each Configuration, entity and local community to give attention in your reflections and plans to the following aspects of our life and ministry as discerned by the Chapter:

➤ ***Community Life - Identity - Charism***

While it is true that the subject of 'Community Life' comes up at every Chapter (be it Provincial or General), I felt that the General Chapter expressed a great concern and deep desire for a renewal of our community life so as to be rooted in our Passionist identity and charism: *"To be witnesses to the power of the Lord, Crucified and Risen"*. I wholeheartedly commend to you the following actions of the Chapter:

- ✓ Undertaking a 'community life project' with regular reviews;
- ✓ Discerning and reflecting on the constitutive elements of the Passionist Community and its effectiveness for our life and mission;
- ✓ The inter-connection between our community life and apostolate.

➤ ***Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation***

As Passionists, we believe that the Passion of Christ continues in the suffering people and creation of all times – especially those we encounter in our daily life and ministry who are treated unjustly, exploited, marginalised and are searching for meaning and hope. Our Passionist vocation equips us to find and experience this hope in Jesus Crucified and to communicate God's compassion and love through the saving Word of the Cross.

The Chapter challenges us:

- ✓ To a genuine solidarity with "the crucified" of the world as a response of our charism;
- ✓ To establish JPIC Commissions as effective structures to inform our formation, to reflect on our charism, and to promote solidarity;
- ✓ To be a voice for the voiceless and suffering humanity and creation through 'Passionists International'.

➤ ***Evangelization and New Evangelization***

As Passionists, we are to find new ways and expressions of proclaiming the Good News of the Word of the Cross which speak to the varied cultures and traditions in which we minister, to those who

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feel alienated in the Church, and to fostering dialogue within our ecumenical and inter-religious reality.

The Chapter encourages:

- ✓ Evangelization teams of religious and lay people;
- ✓ Formation in our preaching apostolate through study, prayer and renewal courses;
- ✓ Use of modern mass media and new forms of proclamation.

➤ ***Formation in Passionist Spirituality***

There has been a growing appreciation of the need for formation in our Passionist charism and spirituality so that the specific nature of our witness and mission may be emphasised.

The Chapter highlighted:

- ✓ The creation of an Office for Formation for the Congregation;
- ✓ The need for formation plans/programs for religious and laity of the Passionist Family;
- ✓ The need for greater research and resources on our charism, history and spirituality;
- ✓ Facilitation and promotion of dialogue among and between formation personnel in the Congregation.

➤ ***Passionist Laity***

The Passionist charism is a gift of the Spirit for the life of the Church. We recognise as part of the Passionist Family all those lay men and women who share our charism and, in respect of this fact, the 46th General Chapter approved the inclusion in the General Regulations of the Congregation the following:

Rooted in Christ through baptism and sharing in the universal call to holiness, and following the spirit and teaching of Saint Paul of the Cross, we share with the lay faithful the mission entrusted to us by the Church to announce the Gospel of the Passion to the world through our lives and our apostolate (cf Const. #2).

Respecting the identity and the uniqueness of each vocation, we open ourselves to a fruitful exchange of gifts, in reciprocity, to

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promote together with the laity who share our charism the grateful memory of the Passion of Christ, in all men and women whom we meet on our way, especially the 'crucified' of the present day.

The Chapter proposed:

- ✓ Recognition in Chapters/Congresses of the vocation of lay men and women who share our charism;
- ✓ Welcome and hospitality to the lay members of the Passionist Family in our houses;
- ✓ Promotion of dialogue with lay members at the level of life, action, theological exchange and religious experience.

➤ ***Passionists and Youth in Life and Mission***

As Passionists, we have a strong concern for youth and the world in which they encounter life. There is a desire to accompany young people respectfully in their life and faith journey, offering them our Passionist spirituality and charism as a guide.

The Chapter encouraged:

- ✓ Vocational guidance of young people;
- ✓ Inviting young people to a missionary commitment with Passionists through voluntary work;
- ✓ Welcoming young people in vocational discernment to share and experience Passionist life in community;
- ✓ The celebration of the feast of St Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows as International Day of Passionist Youth.

Conclusion

With this letter I did not intend to communicate all the decisions of the General Chapter which will soon be available to you when the printing is complete. However, I wanted to highlight the significant changes emanating from the process of restructuring, with the formal establishment of the Configurations and the call to work in solidarity, which has a bearing on our being Passionists today.

Additionally, I feel it is important that the aspects of Passionist life and mission discerned by the Chapter for focus over the next six years is shared with you, so that these priorities can be programmed into the plans for your individual entities and Configurations. I urge you in communities and assemblies, to consider these aspects of mission from your own unique perspectives and situations by discussing and sharing relevant possibilities for implementation.

It is clear that the Chapter members, bringing the hopes and dreams of their brothers from around the Congregation, were hoping that, in listening to the Spirit, we would hear the call and have the courage to respond to our future with fresh and renewed hearts. In this way the hope was for greater authenticity, relevance and renewal in our Passionist community life and mission. The Writing Team heard and expressed it in this way:

“A sharing of ‘Our Deepest Desires’ emphasised the hope for a renewal of the power and vitality of Passionist Community Life, of being more deeply faithful to our charism of the Memoria Passionis so that, strengthened in our religious vocation, we would be empowered to face the great challenges and opportunities for the proclamation of the Gospel in our modern complex world.”

The Chapter, I believe, made some bold choices and took some radical decisions in the hope that how we live and what we do will be in accordance with the values of God’s kingdom and will witness to God’s dream for the world. This necessarily implies our living a reflective and continual contemplation for enlightenment, listening to the signs of the times, and responding to the ongoing call of Jesus for reform, renewal and conversion.

***“Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges;
can you not see it?” (Is. 43:19)***

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May we live our Passionist vocation joyfully and contemplatively, always listening and searching to “see” the “something new” which the Lord is doing in our lives and in our world. Let us not limit our efforts to ‘see deeper’ by closing ourselves from a meaningful search and from asking the right questions which can challenge us to a new change.

I close with this challenging and inspirational call to renewal by Pope John XXIII:

*“We are not here on earth
as caretakers of a museum
but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life
and to prepare for a glorious future.”*

Feast of the Commemoration of the Passion
8 February 2013
SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Roma

(Most Rev) Joachim Rego CP
Superior General