



SUPERIOR GENERAL'S REPORT TO THE XVI GENERAL SYNOD

RENEWING OUR MISSION
GRATITUDE, PROPHECY, HOPE
Rome, 11 – 21 September 2022

*“Nobody puts new wine in old wineskins;
otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and run to waste,
and the skins will be ruined.*

*No; new wine must be put in fresh skins.
And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new.
The old is good.”*

~ Luke 5: 37-39

INTRODUCTION – The Call to Renewal

Over the past few years, both the Church and our Congregation have been on a journey of **reform** and **renewal**: the Church, through the call of Pope Francis to a process of **synodality** which he is convinced *is precisely the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium*; and the Congregation, through its long-reflected theme of **Renewing our Mission – Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope** beginning with the 47th General Chapter in 2018, through to the jubilee commemorating the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation in 2020, and inclusive of this XVI General Synod in 2022. This journey of *reform* and *renewal* is a movement, a process, which cannot be once-for-all or static but must be ongoing and dynamic if we are engaged with God's mission which is to be alive, relevant, and meaningful for our times. *Reform* and *renewal* are a result of *listening* and *discernment* as to what God is asking of us today. It is *obedience to the will of God*.

Reform and *renewal* demand a *newness* and *change*. However, in the Christian logic this is not just a superficial change, but a profound one, and is the grace of God. The central call to *reform* and *renewal* is heard in the preaching of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Gospel” (Mk. 1: 15)*. It is the invitation to receive the grace of **conversion = repentance = metanoia** arising from an experiential sense of God's rule and influence which moves us to a *renewal of our minds*, to *re-turn to Jesus and the Gospel way* of love, compassion, justice, reconciliation and peace which characterize the kingdom of God.



A renewed Gospel-centred mind (the “new, fresh wineskins”) hears and accepts what God is asking and offering (the “new wine”). We learn that the “new wine” requires that it be stored in “new wineskins”. It is ineffective to pour new wine into used wineskins; its quality is diminished; it will not last, and it will destroy the skins. So also, trying to put into practice what God is asking of us now, with a mindset that is not renewed and not centred on Jesus and the Gospel way, becomes ineffective and fruitless.

THE SYNODAL WAY

As members of the Church, the People of God, it is incumbent upon us to heed the call of Pope Francis to **synodality**. This means adopting a new mindset in our approach to conducting ecclesial meetings such as Synods, Chapters, Congresses and Assemblies.

Fundamentally, **synodality** is about *journeying together* which happens through listening to one another in order to hear what God is saying to all of us. It is coming to the realization that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone in order to help us walk forward together on our journey as the People of God. Accepting the ecclesiology of Vatican II of **the Church as the People of God**, comprising of all the baptized, each according to his/her specific role and ministry, is fundamental. The Church as the People of God on pilgrimage, “walking together” in the midst of the world is at the heart of what the Church is all about. Synodality is a way of renewing the Church from her deepest roots, to be more united with one another and thus better carry out our mission in the world.

Concretely, the ‘synodal path’ is *a way of being* and *a way of working* that takes a more inclusive and collaborative approach. It requires patience and time to truly listen and discern the path forward together. It highlights the fact that the Spirit dwells in and inspires everyone, and so we all (the Community of Disciples) have something worthwhile to contribute to the common good of the Body of Christ. Thus, a ‘Synodal Church’ is **a Church that is inclusive and that listens**. As Pope Francis says: “*It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The lay faithful, the bishops, the pope: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn. 14:17), in order to know what God is saying to the Church.*”

The Synod Vademecum (p. 18) says:

Synodal listening requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. And not only to hear it, but to put it into practice in and through our lives.

Listening to those who have the same views as we do bear no fruit. Dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. Indeed, God often speaks



through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount. We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking.

Many of us are used to participating in our Congregation Synods, Chapters and other meetings in which we discuss issues, share opinions and make decisions usually based on the vote of the majority. In view of the 'synodal way', Pope Francis says: *"I want to say again that the Synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll; the Synod is an ecclesial event, and **its protagonist is the Holy Spirit**. If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod."*

I believe this aspect of **listening and discerning together the light of the Holy Spirit** is key. The synodal way is a structured conversation for the sake of hearing the voice of the Spirit. And so, in our present General Synod, which is our ecclesial and faith event, we will be attentive to and put into practice THE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION METHOD (from the Synod Vademecum, Appendix B, n. 8) which promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment.

Thus, in this General Synod, I invite us to follow the pathway of **synodality** which is not just a method, but the mode of being of a church which wants to go out in mission. It is a way towards a re-thinking, re-imagining of the Church's (and of our Congregation's) role in today's society. For us Passionists, our contribution in mission must also bear the mark and be inspired by the specific vision of our charism: the *memoria passionis*, with the awareness that, as Pope Francis said in his message for our Jubilee: *"For a charism to endure over time, it is necessary to adapt it to new needs, keeping alive the creative power of its beginnings."*

THE CALL TO RENEW OUR MISSION

Since the last General Chapter in October 2018, the Congregation was asked to reflect on the theme: **Renewing our Mission – Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope** and to continue to keep the focus of this reflection as we prepared for and celebrated the Jubilee Year commemorating the 300th anniversary of the foundation of our Congregation in 2020. This theme was chosen as a call for us to focus on the charismatic testimony of the Passionist mission, especially because of Pope Francis' emphasis on **evangelization** and **mission**: *proclaiming the joy of the Gospel to the poor and going out on mission to the peripheries and margins.*

However, we are reminded that our specific mission is *"to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our **life and apostolate**"* and, to fulfil this mission, *"we come together in **apostolic communities ...**"* (Const. 2). Therefore, **our mission** is integrally connected with **our life** in community. Our **community life** and our **mission** cannot be separated; they are two sides of the one coin. Our life is our mission (by witness),



and our mission is our life (by action). Together, they both shape us and give us our identity and authenticity as Passionists. *Who we are* and *what we do* are interconnected and interrelated. *“Our involvement in the apostolate flows directly from our life in community.”* (Const. 67)

The Chapter discerned three interconnected priority areas to be studied and reflected upon for the renewal of our mission: **community life; formation: initial and ongoing;** and **the revitalization of the Configurations – our principal structures of solidarity.** This work was a mandate to be continued after the Chapter. It was *a work in progress, a process* requiring the involvement and contribution of everyone. As a result, a document: **CALL TO ACTION: Reflections and Orientations from the 47th General Chapter** was composed inviting everyone at the level of community, Province/Vice Province and Configuration to participate and contribute their responses which would result in a Congregation-wide *Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission* to be presented and ratified at this General Synod which, due to the pandemic and after consultation, was postponed for a year from its original date in 2021 to this present time.

The ‘Call to Action’ document was well received, and I want to thank everyone who participated and contributed their views. The immense collation of responses from this exercise was then taken up by an appointed ‘Renewal of Mission Commission’ composed of: Fr. Juan Ignacio Villar (SCOR – General Consultor of Reference & President); Fr. José Luis Garcia (CJC-REG); Fr. Elie Muakasa Ngumba (CPA-SALV); Fr. Denis Travers (PASPAC-SPIR); Fr. Wojciech Adamczewski (CCH-ASSUM); Fr. Giuseppe Adobati (MAPRAES). With the resignation of Juan Ignacio from the Commission after 5 months, the General Consultor Fr. Gwen Barde was appointed as President, and Fr Omar Trejo (SCOR), as a new member of the same commission. We all should be deeply grateful to these brothers who, in addition to their already busy commitments, accepted the enormous task of working from a distance to prepare the *Instrumentum Laboris* which we have studied and which we will further discuss and refine during this Synod towards discerning a *Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission*.

TERCENTENARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION

Beyond the 47th General Chapter, the theme **Renewing our Mission – Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope** continued to be kept before our minds in the preparation and celebration of the Congregation’s 300th anniversary of foundation by St. Paul of the Cross (a Jubilee). From the outset, I proposed that the commemoration of the Jubilee be planned as **a celebration of a charism** which we are to proclaim by word and deed. The focus must be the *“keeping alive”* and *promotion* of the charism as is stated in Const. 6:

We express our participation in the Passion by a special vow, which is at once personal, communitarian, and apostolic. Through this vow we bind ourselves



to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ. By word and deed, we strive to foster awareness of its meaning and value for each person and for the life of the world.

Reflecting on the theme of the Jubilee: **Renewing Our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope**, I encouraged all parts of the Congregation to actively motivate the members of the Passionist Family to participate and be involved in:

- remembering the past humbly with thanksgiving to the God of Love and Compassion who has blessed us (**Gratitude**);
- reading the signs of the times and finding fresh ways to evangelize through the lens of the Passion of Jesus (**Prophecy**); and
- discerning God's plans and promises for a meaningful future (**Hope**).

I expressed my hope that this Jubilee time would be:

1. **Celebrations in gratitude and joy:** recounting the blessings of the Lord – emphasized by liturgical actions in prayer and the Eucharist. We remember, however, that the blessings of God have been 'incarnated' in the real lives of people, such as our Holy Founder St. Paul of the Cross, and the countless Passionists who have gone before us. Therefore, we wish to recognize their fidelity and repentance, appreciating with gratitude their witness and creative fidelity to the charism as we stand on their shoulders today, learning from their example and response, and looking to the future with hope.
2. **A continuing discovery:** by making the opportunity to return once again to the sources of our Congregation's foundation – the person of St. Paul of the Cross; his response to the Spirit and the signs of the times; his spirituality and teachings; the history of the Congregation's mission and development. It is hoped that this will open us to new discoveries and will deepen and enrich our understanding of the charism and its promotion as we profess to do.
3. **Personal and communal renewal:** by seeking God's grace and responding to God's call to follow Christ more authentically within the vocation of the Passionist charism. The motivation promoted by the Congregation during this Jubilee year is: "*Renewing our Mission*" by which is presupposed the *renewal of ourselves*. It is my hope that this time of Jubilee will give us a new impetus to reflect upon and seek the ongoing change of mind (metanoia) demanded by the Gospel. As part of our renewal, we seek to identify and cultivate the 'seeds' which will produce core values for our life today: prayer (contemplation, meditation, solitude), community life, solidarity, inclusion, hospitality, dialogue, compassion, option for the poor, hope and reconciliation.
4. **A renewed enthusiasm to be contemplative-apostolic missionaries:** the twin poles of standing at the foot of the Crucified contemplating the mystery and keeping memory of the Passion; and the consequent gaze and



reaching out to the 'crucified' world with compassion and hope arising from the power God's love for the world exhibited in the Passion of Jesus. While this is the core mission of every Passionist, my hope is that this Jubilee can truly inspire us with a renewed missionary outlook and enthusiasm that responds to the signs of our times by letting go of our comforts in obedience and service to God's salvific mission. As Pope Francis spoke in his message to the National Laity Conference, Madrid, 14-16 Feb. 2020: *"The outgoing people of God is called to leave their comforts behind and take the step towards the other, trying to give a reason for hope, not with prefabricated answers, but with incarnated and contextualized answers, to make understandable and accessible the Truth that, as Christians, moves us and makes us happy."*

The mandate to prepare for the Jubilee was given to a Commission appointed in February 2017. The initial members representing each Configuration comprised of: Fr. Ciro Benedettini (President) – MAPRAES; Fr. Francisco Chagas (GETH) – CJC; Fr. Vital Otshudialokoka (SALV) – CPA; Fr. Gary Perritt (SPIR) – PASPAC; Fr. Anton Lässer (VULN) – CCH; and Fr. Juan Ignacio Villar – SCOR. When Gary Perritt stepped aside due to health reasons, Fr. John Pearce (SPIR) was appointed, but on boarding the flight to Rome for his second meeting with the Commission, sadly passed away having suffered a heart attack. He was eventually replaced by Fr. Einstein Thyparampil (THOM). I express my deep gratitude for the creativity and hard work of the members of this Commission who had to work within the limits of the pandemic, resulting in some plans being either discarded or postponed. However, their creative idea to commission the writing of a Jubilee Icon which would travel to all parts of the Congregation together with the Relic of St. Paul of the Cross, was greatly successful in *keeping alive* and *promoting* the Memory of Passion and in making our Founder better known. This also gave greater impetus and encouraged the planning and celebration of the Jubilee at the local levels. Further, the production of a regular Jubilee communication bulletin and catechesis featuring aspects of Passionist spirituality were greatly appreciated. Two programs which were postponed are scheduled to take place soon: a) the first ever gathering and **meeting of our Passionist bishops** will take place at the conclusion of this Synod; and b) a **meeting of young religious** representing all parts of the Congregation will be held at the beginning of next month (October 3-12, 2022). A pilgrimage feature in the footsteps of St. Paul of the Cross will be included in both these events.

We are grateful to our Holy Father Pope Francis for granting our Congregation a **Holy Year** to celebrate this Jubilee, including the privilege of passing through the **Holy Door** to ask for the grace of *renewal of our life in Christ*. We are encouraged and challenged by the message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the Jubilee:

*This significant centennial anniversary represents a providential opportunity to **move towards new apostolic goals**, without giving in to the temptation to «leave things as they are» (Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii gaudium*, 25). Contact with the Word of God in prayer and reading the signs of the times in daily events*



will enable you to perceive the creative presence of the Spirit whose outpouring over time, points out the answers to humanity's expectations. No one can escape the fact that today we live in a world where nothing is the same as before...

*You are asked to **identify new lifestyles and new forms of language** in order to proclaim the love of the Crucified One, thus giving witness to the heart of your identity...*

*Your Founder, Saint Paul of the Cross... felt consumed by that love (of God) and wanted to set the world on fire with his personal missionary activity and that of his companions... Do not tire of accentuating your commitment to the needs of humanity. This missionary calling is directed above all towards the crucified of our age – the poor, the weak, the oppressed and those discarded by many forms of injustice. The implementation of this task **will require a sincere effort of inner renewal on your part**, which derives from your personal relationship with the Crucified-Risen One.*

I believe that the **Jubilee Year** (which was extended to 18 months) was a **time of grace**, despite the interruption posed by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Other than the more obvious visible activities (opening/closing Masses, the Holy Door, media promotion, writing of new books related to St. Paul of the Cross and Passionist spirituality, translation of original sources etc.), there are the more invisible personal and spiritual 'fruits' which many vowed and lay members of the Passionist family have shared, especially related to their personal renewal in Jesus Crucified and a strengthening of their identity as Passionist.

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

One planned Jubilee event which we desired to be our Congregation's Jubilee gift to the wider Church was the *International Theological Congress* on the theme: **The Wisdom of the Cross in a Pluralistic World**. This Congress was to bring together Church authorities and renowned scholars (both Passionists and others) from all parts of the world to reflect and present papers on the abovementioned theme. However, due to the limits and difficulties posed by the pandemic protocols regarding public safety and travel, the Congress was organised to be held both 'in person' at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome and with presentations 'online'. Despite our anxieties and concerns regarding participation, the results, both by those attending 'in person' and those participating 'online' were most unexpected and very pleasing. The three-volume set of printed and e-books containing all the papers and acts of the Congress in various languages (Italian, English, Spanish, French and Portuguese) will be available soon. I recommend this as a wonderful resource for our communities and libraries. The Congress was sponsored by the Passionist *Gloria Crucis* Chair of the Pontifical Lateran University and organised by the Director of the Congress, Fr. Fernando Taccone CP whose untiring work and commitment to realise this project is recognised and greatly appreciated.



In his message to the Congress, Pope Francis expressed his hope that it would promote “fruitful theological, cultural and pastoral interactions” and that it would “contribute to a renewed understanding of contemporary challenges in light of the wisdom of the cross, in order to foster evangelization faithful to God’s design and attentive to humanity.”

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic is another historical event which has affected us all decisively. It created a space for us to “read the signs” and truly listen and prayerfully discern. We cannot pretend that our lives have not been deeply affected (for good and for ill) by what we have experienced during this pandemic and, perhaps, by what we are still living through. In addition, we cannot presume to simply go back to where we left off once the pandemic has passed. No! Instead, we must **look forward with hope** and create the future we desire, or rather, the future that God desires. As the Argentinian priest, Fr. Augusto Zampini, appointed by Pope Francis as a member of the Vatican post-Covid-19 Commission with the mandate to spark reflection and be proactive in creating a future for the Church’s mission said: “COVID-19 is...pushing the Church into refining its mission. This is something that we have to respond to urgently. It’s very complex, but it requires simplicity in its solution... We cannot be the same institution in a different world. We need to be able to say something new, because the word of God is always new.”

Amid the tremendous suffering and overwhelming loss unleashed on us by the experience of the pandemic, it is also necessary that we look for **the opportunities** that have opened up and are being presented to us. I believe that the call to renew our mission must be discerned in the reality of the changed world situation, and in light of the personal and communal conversion which has happened during and post Covid-19.

We have all been living through this strange time and unprecedented experience with struggle, sadness, and grief, but also with grace, creativity, new strength, and hope. And while the easy way is simply to get back to business as before and to continue from where we left off, I don’t believe that this is, necessarily, the right course of action, because we risk being irrelevant, old and stale. The pandemic is not just a temporary disturbance and interruption in our lives; rather, it is a *watershed moment* for the world, i.e., a critical turning point in time where everything changes and will never be the same as before. As Pope Francis said in his General Audience of 19 August 2020:

The pandemic is a crisis, and we do not emerge from a crisis the same as before: either we come out of it better or we come out of it worse. We must come out of it better and build something different...Recovering from the pandemic will require action rooted in tangible love, anchored in hope and founded in faith, otherwise, we will come out of the crisis worse.



We have and continue to experience a season of change with the further threat of a World War, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the other conflicts raging around the world. This throws us off-balance, bringing confusion and uncertainty about the future. We don't know who to become or how to navigate ahead. We are living in this *liminal time and space* being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come. It is a time where we are experiencing great uncertainty which is beyond our control. But this is precisely what makes us empty and receptive and, therefore, most teachable. It is a **graced time** - a time when we are called to *live contemplatively*; it is an opportunity for *transformation*.

We can ask ourselves: *What is our call and response as Passionists in this situation and in these times? How are we responding to the crisis in these times? What has changed? What needs to change? Where to from here? What is the call and direction being discerned to take forward from now on?*

As I have been proposing in my opening remarks at the various Provincial Chapters and Congresses, I believe in considering the present call from the Congregation for "*Renewing our Mission*", we must continue with a "**vision of solidarity**". This is the vision which the General Chapter of our Congregation in 2000 chose to describe as "*a new way of being together as Passionists in our mission for the life of the world*". And so, I suggest that we not forget or ignore, but continue to pursue **evangelical solidarity** as the value which grounds us in our identity and life as Passionists today. This evangelical solidarity is, for us, the act of God's identification with us, in the giving of His only Son, Jesus, who "*emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming a human being...accepting death on a cross*" (Phil. 2:6ff). By this act of solidarity, God saves the world.

"*Solidarity is a contemporary expression of commitment for the **common good***" - but it demands from us a sense of sacrifice and a generosity in self-giving. The Gospel virtue of solidarity expands the concept of "the common good" and holds that for us, Christians and Passionists, **it is essential to act in favour of the wellbeing of all**, particularly those who are poor and marginalized, both within and outside our membership. This is a particular challenge for us because we are living in a world and society that is tempting us towards **individualism** and **self-centredness**, and not communion and community. I believe if we are honest with ourselves and each other, we know and we see signs (sometimes cleverly disguised) of the virus of 'individualism' which has crept into and is infecting our consecrated community life.

While the current pandemic has accentuated the mental, psychological and financial stress of us all, it has also highlighted our '**interdependence**'. Like it or not, we are all linked to one another, and we must relate with one another in *solidarity*. As a Passionist community, we are related to one another and interdependent on each other in a common mission. Our *interdependence* must be transformed into *solidarity*. *Individualism* interrupts the harmony between *interdependence* and *solidarity* and



creates a *dependence* of some on a few which contributes to bringing about a situation of inequality and marginalization. *Solidarity*, instead, demands a new mindset which thinks in terms of *community*. Pope Francis speaks strongly to this question in his message for the 2021 World Day for Migrants and Refugees which is titled, **Towards an ever wider 'we'**:

The present time...shows that this "we" willed by God is broken and fragmented, wounded and disfigured. This becomes all the more evident in moments of great crisis, as is the case with the current pandemic. Our "we", both in the wider world and within the Church, is crumbling and cracking due to myopic and aggressive forms of nationalism (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 11) and radical individualism (cf. ibid., 105). And the highest price is being paid by those who most easily become viewed as others: foreigners, migrants, the marginalized, those living on the existential peripheries... The truth however is that we are all in the same boat and called to work together so that there will be no more walls that separate us, no longer others, but only a single "we", encompassing all of humanity... building together a future of justice and peace, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

In this spirit of solidarity, I encourage our continued working, sharing, and growing together in communion and mission in the distinct and diverse entities which comprise the Configurations and our Congregation.

Possibly every one of us have tested positive at some time for the Covid-19 virus and have suffered symptoms of illness to varying degrees, some with long-lasting effects which has consequences upon and affects our lives in community and ministry. But it calls us to be attentive and understanding towards one another and to offer each other the necessary supports. We also remember and commend to God's care all those among our family and friends, especially those in our Passionist family, who succumbed to this deadly virus. May they rest in peace.

**The General Synod is primarily an assembly
that acts as a consultative body to help the Superior General.
It will examine the programmes proposed by the General Chapter
and evaluate their implementation.
Further, it will suggest initiatives to keep the Congregation continually up to date;
it will propose means of settling problems in a spirit of brotherly harmony,
and will call the attention of the various Provinces
to their duties towards one another.**

(Const. 144)

**GENERAL ADMINISTRATION PERIOD: October 2018 – September 2022**

Having re-elected me as Superior General at the 47th General Chapter in October 2018 to serve a second term, the Chapter chose to elect the Consultors representing the Configurations and gifted me with six fine collaborators who have been cooperative, hardworking, and diligent in their ministry of assisting me in the governance of the Congregation. They are: Fr. Ciro Benedettini (1st Consultor – MAPRAES); Fr. Rafael Vivanco Pérez (CJC); Fr. Juan Ignacio Villar Cabello (SCOR); Fr. Mirosław [Mirek] Lesiecki (CCH); Fr. Aloysius John Nguma (CPA); Fr. Gwen Barde (PASPAC). I value them and thank them sincerely for their collaboration in a co-responsible manner. Regrettably in June 2021, Juan Ignacio, after a process of discerning his vocation, came to the decision to leave the religious life and priesthood which was a great sadness for our team. However, with respect for his decision, we wish him every success and blessing in his future life. To fill the vacancy, we welcomed Fr. Eddy Alejandro Vásquez López who was elected by the Council as the new Consultor representing SCOR.

Because the Consultors were elected from each Configuration, it made sense that they would be *a reference* between their particular Configuration and the General Council. However, the Consultors were asked to be conscious of and respect, not overshadow, the role of the Configuration President. This required some sensitivity on the part of the Consultors. An evaluation with the Extended Council regarding this matter before the next General Chapter will be helpful. In any case, it was clear that every General Consultor was at my service and could be delegated by me to visit or intervene on my behalf in any entity of the Congregation. This has in fact happened with the canonical visitations in some entities, especially due to language needs.

In this General administration period, since October 2018, 17 ordinary General Council meetings were held and 3 Extended Council meetings. The General Council, together with the General Procurator and General Secretary, participated in a spiritual retreat each year guided by Fr. Rafael Vivanco following the “Castellazzo” experience.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions and protocols forced many of our plans and schedules to be postponed and changed, especially in the period beginning 2020 to the beginning of 2021. This meant that Chapters, Congresses, and canonical visitations which, later, due to rescheduling were held in close proximity of one to another, made it difficult to be present at every assembly. Personally, I was prevented from any travel for 18 months during the “lockdown” and, in addition, because of various health issues and surgeries encountered, regrettably, I was not able to attend and preside at a number of Chapters and Congresses. I am, however, grateful and thank those Consultors who were delegated to step in, sometimes at short notice. Likewise, due to these interruptions, my plans and desire to visit some entities in the Congregation where I have not visited, has not yet materialised.



I am truly grateful for the committed and hardworking team who serve the Congregation in the **General Curia**. Since the last General Chapter, the General Curia sadly lost in death two precious brothers: Fr. Fernando Alfredo Ruiz Saldarriaga, Secretary General in February 2020 and Fr. Paolo Aureli, General Secretary for Solidarity and Missions in August 2022. New appointments in the General Curia since the last General Chapter are: Fr. Alessandro Foppoli (MAPRAES) as Procurator General; Fr. Rafael Blasco Bordejé (SCOR) as Secretary General; Fr. Antonio Siciliano (MAPRAES) as General Econome; and Fr. Javier Antonio Solís Basilio (REG) as Director of Communications. I and the General Council are also grateful for the availability of Fr. Leonello Leidi (MAPRAES) as our Canon Law Advisor. His assistance and wise counsel to the Procurator and to the Council is always appreciated, more especially because of his many other busy commitments. We continue to be grateful for our lay employees and volunteers: Federica Franco (Assistant to Secretary General), Eunice dos Santos (Archivist), Andrea Marzolla (Assistant in Communications Office), and Franco Nicolò (who assisted Fr. Paolo Aureli in the office of Solidarity and Missions).

With the restructuring of the **Passionist Nuns** as the *Congregation of Nuns of the Passion of Jesus Christ*, and in line with their General Statutes #4 which states: *The Passionist Superior General, in agreement with the President, is to assign a religious of proven experience and virtue as General Assistant to the Congregation*, I appointed Fr. Antonio Munduate as the General Assistant to the Nuns Congregation in February 2019. I thank him for providing both spiritual and canonical assistance to our Nuns.

The **General House, SS. Giovanni e Paolo** has also seen a number of changes in leadership since the last General Chapter. After the Chapter, Fr. Luis Alberto Cano (SCOR) was appointed Rector, but unfortunately after two years, due to serious health reasons, resigned his position to concentrate on his medical treatment. In September 2021, Fr. Natale Panetta (MAPRAES) was appointed the new Rector. He is ably supported by Fr. Erasmo Sebastiano (MAPRAES) as Vice Rector and Econome. Another new appointment in the ministry of the House is: Fr. Graziano Leonardo as Rector of the Basilica.

Meanwhile, the number in the community of the General House continues to diminish and age, especially as the number of university students from overseas has dropped since the pandemic. The House continues to be ready to welcome our religious, both those seeking to do further studies, and others who can contribute to the life and ministries of the community. Like all places in the Congregation, the General House has also suffered severe financial loss during the period of “lockdown” and restrictions due to the pandemic, especially with the temporary closure of both the Retreat House and the Basilica. However, they have now resumed to full strength, and we are grateful to the committed efforts and hard work of Fr. Vito Patera (Director of the Retreat House) and Fr. Graziano Leonardo (Rector of the Basilica).



A new **Historical Commission** was appointed in 2020 comprising of: Fr. Pablo Gonzalo (SCOR); Fr. Andres San Martin (SCOR); Fr. Robert Carbonneau (PAUL); Fr. Lukasz Andrzejewski (ASSUM); and Fr. Giovanni Benenati (MAPRAES). However, due to the pandemic and illness of some members, the new team has not yet been able to meet together for planning their work. We hope this can commence soon.

With his election as General Consultor at the 47th General Chapter, Fr. Mirek Lesiecki who was serving in his fifth year as the Executive Director of **Passionists International (PI)** in New York, was required to terminate his position and was replaced by Fr. John Kathoka Muthengi (CARLW) in August 2019. However, with the difficulties encountered due to the pandemic which affected his immigration status making it difficult to secure his residence/work permit in the United States, an Executive Committee established by the PI Board requested John best step aside from the role, which he did in March 2021. Meanwhile, in April 2021, the Sisters Congregation *Hijas de la Pasión de Jesucristo y de María Dolorosa* made the decision to withdraw their participation from PI. So, in consultation with the surviving partner, the *Sisters of the Cross and Passion*, the decision was taken in September 2021 to appoint the first lay person: Ms. Annemarie O'Connor as Executive Director of PI in a part time position for a period of three (3) years with an annual evaluation of the Board which will be submitted to the Members. Annemarie is scheduled to present an online report and dialogue with the members at this Synod.

With grateful thanks to the *Gloria Crucis* Chair and the organization by Fr. Fernando Taccone, the Italian edition of the *Dictionary of the Passion* was finally published in August 2021. The Spanish edition was published in 2015. The English edition is yet to be published.

Three among our brothers in the Congregation have been appointed by Pope Francis to the Episcopate since the last General Chapter: **Jesús María Aristín Seco, C.P.** (SCOR) as Vicar Apostolic of Yurimaguas, Peru in July 2020; **Pedro Luis Fuentes Valencia, C.P.** (SCOR) as Apostolic Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of La Paz, Bolivia in February 2022; and **Valentinus Saeng, C.P.** (REPAC) as Bishop of the Diocese of Sanggau, Indonesia in June 2022. We congratulate our three brothers and assure them of our prayerful support as they take up their role as Shepherds in their local churches.

REPORT ON TASKS ARISING FROM AND MANDATED BY THE 47TH GENERAL CHAPTER

- 1) The three major documents which you have already received for your study and response, and which will be discussed and presented for ratification at this General Synod are:
 - i. the **Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission**,
 - ii. the **General Plan of Formation**, and



iii. the **Financial Regulations Directory** (Decree #1)

- 2) In regard to the suppressed Province GABR (Belgium): *“The Superior General with his Council, and in dialogue with the interested parties, will decide the matter of the religious, and the two houses of the former Province.”* (Decree #4)

The house and property of Wezembeek-Oppem has been sold in September 2020 and all the religious have been relocated in the only house in Kortrijk. The mortal remains of all the religious (more than 80) buried in the cemetery of the Wezembeek property were exhumed and re-buried in the Municipal Cemetery. As per the request from Bishop Nicholas Djomo and the Sisters of Tshumbe, Congo, the mortal remains of Bishop Joseph Hagendorens, C.P., was transferred to be interred in the Cathedral of Tshumbe.

- 3) In accordance with Decree #5, 10% of the Solidarity Fund was withdrawn to create an Extraordinary Maintenance Fund for the General Curia. The General Econome will report on the status of this Fund at this Synod.
- 4) In accordance with Decree #6, the budget of the General Curia is prepared by the General Econome and approved by the General Council at the beginning of each year, and then sent to the Provincial and Vice Provincial Superiors.
- 5) Recommendation #2 regarding the numerical composition of each religious house for the promotion of fraternal communion, prayer and apostolate, has not yet been dealt with, but could be taken up in conversation at this Synod.
- 6) Regarding Recommendation #4 concerning safeguarding creation and as inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *‘Laudato Si’*, the General Council, in partnership with Passionist Solidarity Network (Louisville, USA), has produced a six-series formation and action document which is sent to all members of the Passionist family who are encouraged to use it in communities and groups.
- 7) Regarding the mission of the Congregation and social/digital media (Recommendation #5), the General Council hired a company to assist us in drawing up a Communications Plan in preparation for our Jubilee. This was used effectively in the promotion of our Congregation's Jubilee by contacting various media sites and organisations. A qualified full-time Director, Fr. Javier Antonio Solis Basilio from Mexico has also been appointed in the Generalate Communications Office. He has improved and developed our social/digital presence on the website, Facebook and YouTube platforms. He also continues to produce the regular Passionist International Bulletin (PIB).
- 8) The General Council has not progressed very much in dealing with Recommendation #6 regarding the creation of an international commission of the Passionist family. This is still in the early stages and a work in progress.



SOME ISSUES FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION

I'd like to comment on and share with you some matters of concern by which I seek to consult you and listen to your opinion:

- ✚ Community life always surface as a concern. Usually, reasons affecting a healthy common life are due to issues which are not faced together and dealt with, thereby leaving the members dissatisfied, isolated, and divided. These concerns are generally tied to difficulties with relationships, lack of trust and dialogue, disagreement and differences of opinion with leadership and authority, failure of community leaders to animate, guide and act, or just those who prefer to live an individualistic life and be left alone to do as they please. This situation can be particularly pronounced in communities with a small number of religious (like 2-3) where the common prayer life (at least Lauds and Vespers), and common gathering points for meals or recreation can be non-existent or severely diminished. The demands of the apostolate, especially in the cases of parish pastoral ministry, takes precedence and becomes the usual excuse for absence from these common activities. Of course, such an excuse also plays conveniently in favour of those members who experience difficulties with relationships in the community. But it is important that we tackle the question of how we balance the demands of our service in the apostolate with the demands of our presence and service in the community. This is of serious concern for our community life, which otherwise reduces our living together to, basically, boarders sharing the same dwelling from which one wakes up each day and goes to work; whereas community life is not an option, but an essential component of the religious life and has its witness value that points to the kingdom of God, the way of Jesus and the Gospel. Our Constitutions is clear about this:

Our Passionist vocation is a call to live the fullness of Christian love in an evangelical community. We bear witness to our fidelity to Christ through the charity that makes us all one in mind and heart. "By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples". On his death-bed St. Paul of the Cross urged us his followers to remember this saying of our Saviour above everything else. (Const. 25)

St. Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all...Moreover, he wanted them to live their lives like apostles. They were to foster and develop a deep spirit of prayer, penance and solitude so that they could reach closer union with God and witness to God's love. (Const. 1)

Our "living together" (who we are in community life) and "proclaiming the Gospel to all" (what we do in the apostolate, work) are interconnected and



interrelated. Together, they both shape us and give us our identity and authenticity as Passionist religious. *“Our involvement in the apostolate flows directly from our life in community. Since we have been called to serve the Church in and through community, we should have special concern for those forms of the apostolate that are enriched by, and in turn nourish, community life.”* (Const. 67) Local communities and Provinces/Vice Provinces should give due consideration to protecting our common life when choosing apostolates and not be preoccupied solely about finances. In most parts of the Congregation, especially the newer and younger areas, the entities opt for parish apostolates which are more readily available in these times and assure a steady income. However, in many cases our community life is compromised because the parish can only maintain and support one or two priests. In these situations, it can be a challenge to maintain a healthy community life.

Parish ministry can be a valuable and necessary apostolate to engage in. However, it must be a well-planned apostolic activity which is discerned in light of our **community life** and specific **charism** and **mission** in the Church. *“Accordingly, we must never lose sight of our characteristic apostolate of preaching the message of the Cross; nor must we ever forget that our life in community is a necessary element of our religious life as well as being a most important witness for the whole Church.”* That is why *“only after careful discernment at local and provincial level, and with the consent of the Superior General with his Council, can we accept the care of parishes.”* (Const. 73)

- ✚ The consecrated/religious life is a LIFE – a particular way and style of being and living together, and from which, through our adherence to our religious vows, our prayer, dialogue and discernment, flows our apostolate. While it is necessary to value work which enhances our human dignity and our sense of contributing to the good of humanity, it is especially important that we, as religious, appreciate the connection and relationship between the *mission* of the community life and the apostolate. It is particularly important that this aspect be made clear to those in the initial stages of formation: that they are entering into and taking on *a particular lifestyle and spirituality*, and not just being trained for *a job and a career!* The Passionists are not a non-profit organization (NGO), but a group of missionary disciples in the mission of the Church.

Some of you may be aware (because it is initiated from your particular Province and Vice Province) that the General Council have had to deal with many requests from our religious seeking ‘*exclaustration*’ and ‘*incardination*’ in dioceses. It is almost becoming fashionable! Often, though not solely, the reason given for their decision is “*not feeling part of*” or “*not fitting into*” community life. Is this, perhaps, an indictment on our community life? Or is this aspect of commitment to religious community life an area that needs better attention and supervision in the initial formation stages?



- ✚ Another area in which I seek your opinion is the request for absence from the religious house (beyond what can be permitted) for the purpose of *caring for sick and aged parents or other significant family members*. In some cases, this becomes long-term, spanning many years, and the request for renewal of the permission is made multiple times. How should we deal with these situations? Our Constitutions state: *“The parents of our religious are the community’s greatest benefactors. They should be treated with honour and warm-hearted consideration and visited as circumstances permit and the rules of the Congregation allow. The same thoughtful courtesy should be extended in due measure to other relatives, friends, and benefactors.”* (Const. 36) Should there be some Congregation policy regarding this matter?
- ✚ The proper exercising of the leadership role by the Superiors (Local and Provincial) has a major impact on the welfare of religious in the Local and Provincial communities. Frequently, it seems, that due to fear or a lack of trust towards the religious on the part of the Superior, engaging in personal dialogue and communication, and even providing the forum of regular community meetings, is avoided, thereby failing to address real issues which in turn lead to a climate of resignation and disenchantment by the members. Sometimes it is unresolved and unhealed past (and present) conflicts and hurts among the members which contribute to a lack of serenity and peace. Our Constitutions gives us a direction:

Community life flourishes when its members are careful to maintain and foster fraternal personal relationships. We therefore need to come together on a regular basis to discuss matters affecting our life in common. Through our exchange of views and ideas in such meetings, we can come to see more clearly what it is that God wants of us...taking as our standard the Gospel, our Constitutions, and the signs of the times...we shall be able to help, encourage, and forgive each other. Through these discussion, we can come to discover those forms and practices of community living that will help us best to reach the goal of our religious lives. (Const. 27)

- ✚ While the promotion of new vocations to our life and the area of initial formation is given good attention in most parts of the Congregation, there is often the lament that new trained formators are lacking. On the other hand, finding appropriate religious for the ministry of formation can be difficult, either because they do not exist in an entity, or because those identified are not interested to accept this ministry. This creates the situation of either ‘perpetual formators’, i.e. the same people being left in the role for long periods, or appointing unqualified members to fill the position which, in some situations, has proved to be disastrous. We need to remember that, rather than “going-it-alone” as an entity, the Configurations have established *structures of solidarity for formation, personnel and finance* by which the entities can



collaborate in a spirit of sharing for the *common good*. Despite the challenge of perhaps having to learn a new language and live in a multicultural environment, joint regional and Configurational formation programs (novitiate and post-novitiate) in different parts of the Congregation, have proven to be successful and a good experience.

- ✚ An issue which the Congregation needs to study is the future of Provinces in which the number of religious are diminishing due to age and lack of new vocations. This affects areas such as capacity for leadership, ministerial commitments, community life, healthcare, finance, property, morale etc. What role can the Configuration play in these situations? Merging with, joining, or being incorporated into another entity is not always an easy solution, especially when language and culture are totally different. How do we deal with this emerging reality? What is the responsibility of the Congregation in such situations?

CONCLUSION – Jesus, our Centre, our Motivation, and our Hope

It is my hope that the Congregation's journey and programme over the past four years to ***Renew our Mission*** has indeed challenged us in our call to be ***missionary disciples*** of Jesus and ***evangelizers*** in the Church, working for the coming of God's kingdom of justice, peace, compassion, mercy, truth and love. As ***missionary disciples***, we are sent by Jesus to "*Go, make disciples of all nations.*" As ***evangelizers***, we are to "*baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave*" (cf. Mt. 28: 19-20).

However, *the Church has entrusted us, Passionists, with a mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate, remaining faithful to the patrimony and evangelical spirit of our Founder (Const. 2)*. Specifically, as Passionists, we are to find inspiration in the experience and response of Jesus in his Passion and discover there the saving power of God's mercy and love which, in turn, empowers us to bring healing and hope to all areas and circumstances we encounter in our lives and ministries.

What is it that should motivate us? Each day we are called upon to make many decisions in our lives and apostolates, and we know how often these decisions are influenced and motivated by politics, or finance, or what is socially acceptable and popular. As missionary disciples and evangelizers, however, our decisions must be influenced by Christ. For this, we must *encounter* Christ in prayer, we must *listen* to his Word, and we must *discern* his call. Hopefully our journey of ***renewal*** has moved us to be increasingly aware of making JESUS the centre of our lives, and to be motivated by his Gospel and his example in all we do and speak. In this way we become the '*new wineskins*' ready to receive the '*new wine*' being filled by God.



Gratitude – Prophecy - Hope

For all that *has been* and all that *will be*, we are filled with **gratitude** and give thanks, because “*God’s love is everlasting; God’s faithful love endures forever*” (cf. *Ps. 136*). It is God’s love that has brought us to this moment, and it is God’s love that will sustain us into the future.

In the present – *the ‘now’* – let us strive to live as ‘kingdom people’, **prophets** called to speak the truth as revealed in the Word of God and to discern the action of the Holy Spirit in the signs of the times. With renewed minds and hearts, we want to live as God desires of us: “*to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God.*” (*Micah 6:8*)

We look to the future, the yet unknown, with **hope** – *trust* and *confidence* in the promise of Christ: “*I will be with you always; yes, to the end of time*” (*Mt. 28:20*). We believe that true hope is found in Christ, as St. Oscar Romero reflects in the following reflection from his book The Violence of Love with which I close:

*I believe that our church...
is giving the reason for its hope,
because it does not put its hope in power or money
but in the source of its hope,
which is Christ crucified.
Its faithfulness to the gospel is its hope;
its hope is in being faithful to God.
I tell my beloved priests,
the religious communities,
the Catholic schools,
the parishes,
the grassroots communities:
don't be led astray
either by the allure of power and money
or by following false ideologies.
True hope is not found there either.
True hope is not found in a revolution
of violence and bloodshed,
and hope is not found in money and power –
neither on the left nor on the right.
The hope that we must account for
and that makes us speak with valor
is found in Christ,
who reigns even after death,
even after murderous death.
And with him reign
all who have preached
his justice, his love, his hope, his peace.*