

**REVITALIZING OUR VITA APOSTOLICA:  
*Priorities for Restructuring for Mission***

***Communicanda 1***  
***2016-2022***

**WITNESSES OF THE REDEEMER:  
*In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World***

(Rome, November 9, 2017)



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JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES: *“You are my witnesses”*

*While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.*

*Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”*

(Luke 24:36-40, 45-49)

## INTRODUCTION

### ***LIVING OUR “VITA APOSTOLICA” AS PROPHETIC WITNESS IN AND TO A WOUNDED WORLD***

1. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter presented each confrere and the whole Congregation with an important challenge: we are called to be “Witnesses of the Redeemer: in solidarity for mission to a wounded world”. At the heart of this challenge, which is our sexennial theme, is the call to *witness* in solidarity with one another and with the poor. We choose to respond to this challenging call because of our option to follow Jesus. As a consequence, it is not possible to become prophetic witnesses of the Redeemer in this wounded world without renewing and revitalizing our whole Redemptorist *Vita Apostolica*, our very ‘being’ and identity as Redemptorist missionaries.
2. The first way in which we witness to the Redeemer as Consecrated Religious is to read and assume our own personal history as a story of Plentiful Redemption. God’s call has made each of our lives a profound sign of the divine kenosis through which God calls the whole world to open itself to his love. Just as Jesus fixed his eyes with love on the rich man and called him to follow (Mk 10,21), we can remember that day when our Redeemer fixed his eyes on us, loved us and called us to leave everything and follow him. Without dwelling on our past, without questioning our motives or judging our present reality, Jesus welcomed us entirely, just as we are, with our sins and our virtues. He invited us to become his disciples

- and his companions, and to witness to the love of God incarnate in the world today and offered freely to all.
3. When we accept our own personal history as a concrete expression of Redemption, we begin to read and understand our own life in the light of the paschal mystery. Within each Redemptorist missionary, and indeed, within the whole Congregation, there exists a profound experience and memory of *plentiful* redemption. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we need to recover this experience and place it at the centre of our personal lives and our Congregation so that our hearts may burn within us (Lk 24,32). Pope Francis emphasizes that when we encounter Jesus as our Redeemer, the joy of the Gospel fills our hearts and our lives (EG 1). We then witness to this joy as consecrated religious in our ‘wounded world’. Thus, we embark on a ‘new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy’.
  
  4. We know that our world is deeply wounded. However, our experience of personal and communal redemption encourages us to see this wounded world, not as a menace or a threat, but rather as loved by God – “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). In the story of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, Jesus begins to teach the teacher about the real meaning of redemption and eternal life – what it means to be born again of water and the Spirit. Today, Jesus invites us to this same renewal of our very being, and to listen attentively to the wounded world, so that our whole *Vita Apostolica* will be revitalized: as individuals, as communities, and as a Congregation. The Redeemer calls us to return to the sources of this new life – for us, the Gospel and our foundational charism – so that we may be guided by the Spirit, the Lord of history.

5. Led by the Spirit of Jesus, we can read the ‘signs of the times’ and live our Charism with creative fidelity in order to respond to the new challenges of today. In order to be prophetic witnesses of the Redeemer, then like Nicodemus, like St. Alphonsus and so many of our blessed confreres, we must go out to meet the Lord where he is to be found today. We must encounter him just as we are, with our fears, uncertainties, hopes and dreams, confident that our missionary charism, born of the Spirit and made concrete in the foundation of the Congregation, continues to be incarnated in each confrere from our origins up to the present moment.
  
6. The Spirit continues to lead us today. Guided by this Spirit, the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter carefully pondered the state of the Congregation. We listened to and discerned from many sources, including the participation of the overwhelming majority of the confreres in the process. The Capitulars dared to confront the challenges which face our mission of evangelization, following the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor (Const. 2). The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter is convinced that the Congregation must continue this process of discernment, attentive to the wounds of the world, so that God can renew and revitalize our Consecrated *Vita Apostolica* (*Message of the Chapter to the Congregation, 2-4*).
  
7. Many important decisions were taken by the capitulars gathered in Pattaya, Thailand. In this *Communicanda*, the General Council wants to treat two decisions which we believe are fundamental to achieve the renewal and revitalization so important today and for the future:

- a. **To continue the process of restructuring with all its implications** (Decision 1);
  - b. **To produce criteria for apostolic activity so that each Conference will develop an Apostolic Plan for implementation** (Decision 5).
8. We encourage each confrere and community to read and study this *Communicanda*, asking the guidance of the Spirit and the courage of St. Alphonsus to follow Jesus the Redeemer.

*Jesus spoke to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you." (John 15:1-4)*

## **Part I: THE PROCESS OF RESTRUCTURING**

*The General Government, in coordination with the Conference Coordinators and the Units of the Congregation, will continue the process of restructuring for Mission with all its implications. This process will involve all the Units of the Congregation. Special attention is to be given to GS 088. (Decision 1, 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, 2016)*

9. What does it mean to continue the process of Restructuring today? The Chapter became aware that for many confreres the spirit of restructuring has not yet penetrated their consciousness. Many believe that ‘restructuring’ is a process of reorganization or reconfiguration required by diminishment in the aging Provinces of Europe and North America, and some aging Provinces in secularized societies in the other Conferences. Still others understand restructuring as a process to redistribute personnel and resources throughout the Congregation. Unfortunately, many confreres have not yet understood that a true restructuring of the Congregation must engage every one of us, each community, and each (V) Province and Region.
10. Each of these understandings contains a partial grasp of the process of restructuring – but none of them expresses the full and deeper meaning of restructuring for mission as it was adopted at the 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 2009. Restructuring is first and foremost a question of personal and community conversion so that we can more fully live our *Vita Apostolica* in order to witness more effectively to the Redeemer today.
11. We are living in a critical moment of epochal change. There are signs of this change everywhere, in civil and political society as well as in the Church. Among these ‘signs’ in society are the rise of fundamentalism and the growth of secularization; the mass movement of peoples in numbers never seen before; the transition from a predominantly rural society to a new urban society; the breakdown of traditional families, communities and their values; the indications of drastic changes in our climate and environment; the menace of war and violence; globalization and universal access to

internet. These are just some examples. This is not an exhaustive list.

12. At the same time, the election of Pope Francis, his teaching and the recent Synods on New Evangelization and the Family have clearly indicated that the Church must engage with this new reality. Pope Francis has placed a clear focus on mercy and joy, on creating and nurturing a culture of encounter and dialogue, on accompaniment and discernment, and on inclusion. Pope Francis has once again placed the poor and the abandoned at the centre of the Church's mission. He has called all Christians to participate in the mission of the *Church-going-forth*, going out to the peripheries - geographic but also existential. He teaches that we are sent not only as apostles but primarily as *missionary-disciples*. This is a call to conversion – a call to restructure our understanding of evangelization, of mission, of community, of solidarity.
13. Understanding the process of restructuring for mission as a process of continual personal and community conversion means that we must open ourselves to the newness of the Spirit. It is a call from the Redeemer to be led by the Spirit in a process of Exodus from our familiar worlds and 'comfort zones' so that the Redeemer can immerse us in the wounded world which God loves so much.
14. In this new situation and context, traditional ways of thinking and methods of missionary activity are no longer as effective as they were. In fact, as we prepared for the General Chapter, we heard from many confreres who do not feel that the ministry in which they are engaged is truly 'missionary'. They expressed frustration at the difficulty encountered in leaving traditional commitments to seek new missionary initiatives

which respond more fully to the needs of the world today - in other words, they want to truly live the Constitutions today (see especially Const. 15).

15. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter decided to “continue the process of restructuring for Mission with all its implications. This process will involve all the Units of the Congregation” (Decision 1). This decision affirms that this process is not just for a few Units, primarily those in the northern and western world. It must actively engage every confrere, each community and all the Units.
16. This ongoing process of restructuring must take place on many levels, beginning with the Spirit-led conversion and openness of each confrere and every community. It must also engage every Unit in the internal restructuring necessary, reviewing and renewing their Apostolic priorities and ministry commitments, as well as their community life and formation process. Restructuring must also take place between (V) Provinces and Regions, leading to greater solidarity and collaboration, implementing the principles adopted at the last two General Chapters. This will involve a reconfiguration of the Provinces, Vice Provinces and Regions of the Congregation. This process of restructuring must always serve the mission of the Congregation, as well as the needs of the confreres.
17. At the same time, the process of restructuring must engage every Conference as they determine their Apostolic priorities and Apostolic Plans and as they serve the mission not only in their geographic territory but also globally. The mass movement of peoples alone requires that restructuring also

take place between the Conferences. Concern for the Redemptorist presence and mission in Europe and North America also highlights the need for this inter-Conference collaboration and restructuring.

18. This process will also require serious reflection on how to facilitate a restructuring of the General Government and the Institutes of the Congregation for which the General Government is responsible: The Alphonsian Academy, the Historical Institute, the Collegio Maggiore, the Casa Sant'Alfonso.
19. As a process of continual conversion, restructuring addresses the hopes of our Constitutions (cf. 41, 17, 107) that our *Vita Apostolica* will be renewed and revitalized in each generation of Redemptorist missionaries: led by the Spirit, “following Christ the Redeemer with hearts full of joy” (Const. 20), proclaiming the love of God the Father (Const. 6).
20. Certainly, this process will involve reconfiguration of (V) Provinces, Regions and Missions both internally and with other Units. It will also require the redistribution of personnel and resources in a spirit of missionary solidarity. The process must address the real concerns of diminishment and give special attention to the care of our senior and aged confreres. We will return briefly to these dimensions of the process of restructuring later in this *Communicanda*. But first it is important to emphasize that restructuring is for mission. In this spirit, we treat the question of our apostolic priorities and apostolic planning.

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)*

## **Part II: PRIORITIES**

21. With the introduction of Conferences by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, and following the principles of restructuring provided, each Conference was asked to discern carefully those to whom we are sent to proclaim “plentiful redemption.” Having identified those to whom we are sent, each Conference was then asked to articulate the apostolic priorities for their particular situation. These efforts by the Conferences profoundly influenced the decision of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter to continue the process of restructuring.
22. Throughout our history, according to diverse traditions, cultures and languages, we have used various terms when discussing our apostolic, pastoral or missionary priorities. To develop a common understanding in the Congregation, it is important to clarify what we mean by these terms, which we often use interchangeably.
23. In this *Communicanda*:
  - “**Missionary Priorities**” refer to those to *whom* we are sent or the *preferential recipients of our mission* – the most abandoned and the poor.

- “**Apostolic Priorities**” refer to our missionary work and ministries – *what we do* in order to serve those to whom we are sent.
- The “**Apostolic Plan**” determines what ministries are to be given priority and *how* they are to be undertaken, and indicates *where* these ministries will be located.

24. We are living this historic moment of epochal change as members of the human family, as Christian missionary-disciples of Jesus, and as Redemptorist missionaries continuing in the spirit of St. Alphonsus to follow the Redeemer “as helpers, companions and ministers in the great work of Redemption” (Const. 2). Today, perhaps more than ever, it is necessary that we make concrete decisions and choices about how we are called by the Redeemer in the power of the Holy Spirit to devote our missionary energy. It is precisely for this reason that the Constitutions and Statutes speak to us about priorities and criteria in the evaluation of our missionary fidelity (Const. 17-19; 107-108).

25. The 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1979 urged each (V) Province and Region to begin a process of discernment in order to establish the apostolic priorities which would guide their apostolic plans. Subsequent General Chapters returned frequently to this question, treating the priority of explicit proclamation and the call to evangelize and be evangelized by the poor. The “Apostolic Priorities” of every (V) Province and Region required the approval of the General Government, and became a focus of Visitations of the General Government to the Units. General Chapters reminded the Congregation that these priorities must be reviewed periodically by the (V) Provincial

Chapters, and adapted/updated as necessary to meet changing circumstances (Const. 17).

26. Unfortunately, there has been a general lack of clarity in the Congregation over the nature and function of such priorities. Many Units have made a list of their most important ministries and designated these as their ‘apostolic priorities’. Some Units have included every Provincial commitment among their apostolic priorities – including formation and vocation promotion! When everything is designated a priority, there are no real priorities which provide criteria for the difficult decisions and choices we are called to make! Many of us also remember the divisive debates about our Congregational commitment to the materially poor and the spiritually abandoned. Other discussions focused on the priority of popular mission preaching as *the* charism and only true apostolic priority of the Congregation.
  
27. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter has once again returned to this question and mandated the General Council to offer criteria for the apostolic activity and missionary work of the Congregation. The discussion during both the process of preparation for the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter and at the Canonical Phase suggested that such criteria reflect:
  - a. The principal themes of the teaching of Pope Francis embodied in *Evangelii gaudium*, *Laudato si’*, and *Amoris Laetitia*;
  - b. The criteria contained in our Constitutions and Statutes;
  - c. The priorities proposed by recent General Chapters;
  - d. The ‘signs of the times’ revealed to us by the Spirit in the world today.

### **Missionary Priorities.**

28. The role of **missionary priorities** – *those to whom we are sent* or the *preferential recipients of our mission* – is fundamental to our process of discernment and restructuring. Clear priorities will deepen and strengthen the missionary identity of the Congregation and of each community and confrere. They are fundamental to a renewal and revitalization of our whole *Vita Apostolica* and Redemptorist identity. They offer us a basis for all apostolic activity and for the building of real apostolic communities, where there is genuine sharing on the human and spiritual level (Const. 21). Clear **missionary priorities** (*to whom we are sent*) help clarify our apostolic priorities and activity (*what we do*), and become the framework of each Apostolic Plan, and each Plan for Community Life.
29. Once clarified, **missionary priorities** offer us criteria for decisions and decision-making which include all the members of the Redemptorist family. They will help us discern how to decide about the ministries through which we live our missionary charism. They will provide us with criteria for the reconfiguration of our Congregation, and for the internal restructuring so necessary in every Unit. They will offer us greater clarity in the promotion of the Redemptorist missionary vocation, and the discernment of those called to minister with us, including our lay partners. And they will help us shape our process and programs of initial and ongoing formation.
30. Reading anew the Constitutions and Statutes in the light of the Gospel, the teaching of Pope Francis, and the ‘signs of the times’, it seems clear to the General Council that the choice of

priorities must begin with a discernment to determine *those to whom we are sent* today (our **missionary priorities**). General Statute 09 makes it clear that a fundamental criterion for us remains seeking out those peoples ‘who are more deprived of spiritual help, especially the poor, the powerless and the oppressed’. Redemptorists ‘can never be deaf to the cry of the poor and the oppressed’. This preference for situations where there is pastoral need, ‘together with the choice in favour of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church, and is the badge of its fidelity’ to the Charism (Const. 5).

31. For this reason, the exchange between Cardinal Bergoglio and Cardinal Hummes at the Conclave in 2013 speaks so powerfully to the heart of Redemptorists. When it became clear that Cardinal Bergoglio would be elected to succeed Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Hummes hugged him and whispered, “Do not forget the poor”. Pope Francis explained that this encounter with Cardinal Hummes led him to choose the name ‘Francis’, after the “man of poverty”. Explaining this to the media representatives gathered in Rome for the conclave, Francis then said: “How I would like a Church that is poor and is for the poor!” This message has been at the heart of his pontificate. It is also at the heart of our missionary charism and vocation.
32. In General Statutes 09-15, the Congregation established the *general* criteria for determining those to whom we are sent by the Redeemer. Fundamental to this *Communicanda* is our commitment to the most abandoned and especially the materially poor (Const. 1). It is also important to consider the statements from General Chapters which have given special attention to:

- a. The Materially Poor;
- b. Youth and Young Adults;
- c. Migrants, and those affected by the mass movement of peoples, including those left behind;
- d. Victims of human trafficking;
- e. Victims of violence, racism and intolerance;
- f. Those who are excluded, on the peripheries of society, and often, on the margins of the Church;
- g. Africa and Madagascar.

### ***Apostolic Priorities.***

33. Once we have clarified the missionary priorities which determine the people to whom we are sent, we can then discern our **apostolic priorities** which will enable us to make concrete choices about the missionary work and apostolic activity which we offer those to whom we are sent. Our **apostolic priorities** offer us criteria for making choices about our specific and concrete ministries – *what we offer and how we reach* those to whom we are sent, as well as measures for assessing the effectiveness of our ministry.
34. The 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1979) identified the explicit proclamation of the Word as one apostolic priority of the Congregation. The Redemptorist tradition of popular missions, as well as the extraordinary preaching at our Shrines and in our retreat houses, are ministries through which this apostolic priority is carried out. It is important to remember that it is understood by the General Chapters as a privileged way of evangelizing the abandoned, and especially the poor. This apostolic priority must always be evaluated through the lens of those to whom we are sent and to whom our preaching is directed.

35. The 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1985) reminded Redemptorist missionaries that a constitutive element of our ministry of evangelization is closeness to and solidarity with those to whom we are sent. They become ‘interlocutors’ (‘dialogue partners’) with us in the ministry of evangelization. In this way, Redemptorist missionaries are themselves evangelized by those to whom we are sent – *“To evangelize and be evangelized by the poor”*. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter emphasized this dimension once again, calling us to listen attentively to the ‘wounded world’. This ‘listening’ and ‘being evangelized’ must be a constitutive dimension of all our apostolic priorities.
36. Both the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapters also indicated the priority of our tradition of moral theology, in the spirit of St. Alphonsus, which serves our mission to the abandoned and the poor. In this sense, moral theology must be among our Apostolic Priorities which determine how we serve those to whom we are sent. This tradition, especially for the formation of conscience, is as relevant today as ever before. The common good, social responsibility, and solidarity are moral concerns which resonate with Redemptorist missionaries. These concerns are also clearly highlighted in the message and teaching of Pope Francis.
37. This process of discernment will help us to focus our resources and energy, and strengthen our missionary identity. Just as each Conference must engage in this process, so this discernment must also be carried out in each (V) Province, Region, Mission, and indeed, in each local community. This discernment will guide our decision-making as we determine which ministries we need to strengthen, and which ministries

must be let go. These criteria will also guide our decisions about new initiatives, both in the Conferences and in the Units. Because this is a process of discernment, it must be guided by the Spirit of the Redeemer who continues to call us and send us forth in mission today.

*Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from us through many witnesses, entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. (2 Tim 2:1)*

***Fundamental Priorities: Essential to Support and Carry-out the Mission: Shared Mission, Formation, Community, Governance, Leadership and Administration***

38. Although they are not the prime concern of this *Communicanda*, it is important to consider briefly other fundamental priorities which are essential to effectively carry out our mission today.
  
39. It is very important to remember that **missionary and apostolic priorities** are not the only priorities for the Congregation. In order to support and sustain our mission in the world today, it is essential that shared mission with the laity and the promotion of our missionary vocation are a priority in every Unit and in every community. It is also fundamental that we have the necessary resources, human and financial, as well as the structures, to guarantee that we can not only accomplish the mission, but also that we can

sustain it. These ***fundamental priorities*** must be part of every apostolic plan.

### ***Shared Mission with the Laity.***

40. Shared Mission with lay men and women is essential to the mission and apostolic planning of the Congregation today. However, it is not an ‘Apostolic Priority’ as such, but rather a means to carry out our apostolic priorities more effectively. Beginning with the 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter (1991), the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer officially recognized the importance of genuine collaboration with lay men and women in mission on the basis of partnership. This Chapter established the category of “Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer” as one of the formal ways of association between the Congregation and lay collaborators.
  
41. In *Communicanda 4* (1995), Fr. Lasso issued General Guidelines for collaboration with the laity, as well as General Norms for the Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer. On the basis of these guidelines and norms, and encouraged by subsequent documents, the Redemptorist family has continued to develop our shared mission to the abandoned and the poor.
  
42. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter has affirmed this direction, and mandated the General Council and each Conference to integrate more fully our shared mission with the laity into all our apostolic planning. The General Council affirms that this is now a fundamental priority for the Congregation which each

Conference and each Unit must embrace and encourage. The General Secretariat for Evangelization, in close collaboration with the Commissions for Shared Mission with the Laity at both the General and Conference levels, will offer further guidance and encouragement on how to more fully integrate this priority into our apostolic planning.

### ***Vocation and Formation of Missionaries.***

43. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter insisted that the promotion of the Redemptorist Missionary Vocation must be a priority in the apostolic planning of all Units and every local community (Decision 29). In the promotion of our missionary vocation, special attention must be given to the promotion of the vocation of the Redemptorist brother. It was also clear at the Canonical Phase in Pattaya that this promotion must include the promotion of the vocation of lay partners for shared mission with the Congregation (Decision 11).
44. We cannot prepare a viable apostolic and restructuring plan to implement our missionary priorities and to carry out our priority ministries without promoting our missionary vocation at all levels. And, of course, this requires that we also engage in both initial and ongoing formation for the mission (Decisions 30 to 36). Promotion of our missionary vocation also requires initial and ongoing formation programs which prepare all Redemptorist missionaries and lay partners for the mission to which we are called. The priority of this ministry was clearly affirmed by the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (Decisions 30, 31, 11).
45. This ***fundamental priority*** will be a principal focus of the General Secretariat for Formation, in collaboration with the

Office and Commission for Shared Mission with our lay partners. Although it cannot be treated at length in this *Communicanda*, it must remain a focus of the renewal and revitalization of our Congregation.

***Apostolic Community Life dedicated to Christ the Redeemer.***

46. Another *fundamental priority* for us in our apostolic planning is our life in Apostolic Community. Redemptorist community life and our consecration to the Redeemer are important concerns for the whole Congregation and provoked much discussion at the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. Although the Chapter did not take many decisions about this important area of concern, it is reflected in both the Message and in Decisions 20-21. It is no longer possible to ‘legislate’ authentic Apostolic Community. However, renewal of our community life is fundamental to the revitalization of our Apostolic Life.
47. Our Apostolic and Restructuring Plan requires that these concerns be addressed throughout the Conference and in each local community, (V) Province and Region. At the very least, the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan must take into account the need to provide adequate personnel and structures for healthy community living.
48. Faithful to our Charism and the central role of the Apostolic Community dedicated to Christ the Redeemer in the Constitutions (Const. 21,22), we realize that the witness of our common life (Const. 7-11) is central to our proclamation of plentiful redemption. As Pope Paul VI affirmed in *Evangelii nuntiandi*:

*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.’ St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity. (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 41).*

49. In today’s world, the witness of our community life is perhaps more significant than ever. This requires the witness of a simple life-style that is counter to the excessive materialism and consumption with which we are confronted, a life-style that is sensitive to the created world with which we have been gifted and for which we are asked to care.
  
50. Redemptorist Apostolic Community, and the essential role of the community in the acceptance and carrying out of our missionary work (Const. 21), is a fundamental criterion of our apostolic planning in every Conference. As Fr. Lasso, Superior General, wrote in *Communicanda* 11 (1988): “*The Redemptorist apostolic community, by which we live and work together, is itself part of the very content of our prophetic and liberating proclamation of the Word of God to the abandoned, and especially the poor.*”

51. Our apostolic planning must also take into account the present reality of diminishment in many Units and Conferences of the Congregation. Redemptorist Community life requires a minimum number of confreres, normally at least three – and remember that this is a *minimum* number. Experience shows that even three members is often insufficient for healthy community life. In some Units, this has become much more difficult to provide. To be really effective, every apostolic plan must seriously consider the need for the redistribution of personnel across the boundaries of our (V) Provinces and Regions, as well as across the borders of our Conferences. This redistribution will require the careful preparation of international and intercultural communities.
52. As the General Chapter stated clearly, this redistribution and reconfiguration must be in favour of our missionary presence, especially including new missionary initiatives, and not in the service of maintaining old structures and houses, some of which are no longer effective for mission today. At the same time, every apostolic plan must take into account the care of our senior and infirm confreres.
53. By virtue of their missionary profession, our senior and infirm confreres are integral to our Apostolic Community and our missionary work (Const. 55). As Fr. Tobin, Superior General, reminded us in *Communicanda* 3, n 4, (2000): “the deeper challenge for older Redemptorists is not how to cope with health problems but rather, how to live their religious consecration, particularly when they are forced to limit or, at times, suspend their ordinary pastoral activities. At this stage of life, redefining or reshaping one's concrete identity as a missionary can threaten one's self esteem.”

### ***Governance, Leadership and Administration.***

54. Nor can the mission of the Congregation be sustained without good governance, leadership, and responsible administration of our resources so that they serve our Apostolic and Restructuring Plan as a Congregation, as Conferences, and in each Unit. This is especially important in a period of diminishment. As reflected in the Decisions of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the General Government, the Conferences and (V) Provincial Superiors will also address these areas of special concern during the course of the Sexennium.

### **Part III:      *CRITERIA***

#### **Criteria for *The Apostolic and Restructuring Plan of the Conferences.***

55. In order to revitalize the Apostolic Life of the Congregation and deepen our Missionary identity today, the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter directed the General Government to continue the process of restructuring with all its implications, guided by the Principles for Restructuring and Missionary Solidarity (Decisions 1, 2, 3). The General Government was also mandated to produce criteria on which each Conference will develop an **Apostolic Plan** for implementation (Decisions 5, 6). To carry out this mandate from the General Chapter, the General Government has instructed each Conference to establish a special Commission which will assist in this task. In order to do this, the General Government offers the

following criteria and process to assist these Commissions and the whole Congregation in this crucial task.

### Criteria for **Missionary Priorities: TO WHOM ARE WE SENT?**

56. As stated earlier in this *Communicanda* (see Paragraph 23 above), **Missionary Priorities** answer the question: *To whom are we sent?* They designate the “People to be Evangelized” (GS, Art. 1). In the following paragraphs, we will consider the principal sources in our Redemptorist tradition for determining those to whom we are sent by the Redeemer.
57. Rooted in the vision of our Founder, St. Alphonsus, these **Missionary Priorities** are already articulated in our **Constitutions** (cf. 3-6) and **Statutes** (009-015). Clearly, these texts deserve our careful attention as the Congregation engages in this process. Each confrere should read and ponder once again these fundamental texts. It is clear that the principal criterion is our call to seek out the poor and the abandoned (GS 009). This is the very badge of our fidelity to our charism (C. 5), which directs us to “the liberation and salvation of the whole human person... promoting fundamental rights to justice and freedom.”
58. Since the renewal of our Constitutions and Statutes mandated by the Vatican Council II, **General Chapters** have consistently articulated special groups which are designated as ‘priorities’ for our missionary activity:

- a. The Materially Poor;
- b. Youth and Young Adults;

- c. Migrants, and those affected by the mass movement of peoples, including those left behind;
- d. Victims of human trafficking;
- e. Victims of violence, racism and intolerance;
- f. Those who are excluded, on the peripheries of society, and often, on the margins of the Church;
- g. Africa and Madagascar.

59. These statements from General Chapters highlight some groups in greater need of our mission of evangelization today. And they offer us important criteria as the Congregation, and each Conference, determines our *Missionary Priorities* at this moment in our history.

60. At the same time, our Constitutions and the General Chapters call us to discern the ‘**Signs of the Times**’ and to listen attentively to the cry of the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In particular, the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter challenges us to deepen our solidarity with the ‘wounded world’ in which we are immersed today.

61. Faithful to our Charism, every generation must discern the *missionary priorities* to which we are called to respond, carefully attentive to the criteria offered by the Constitutions and Statutes, the General Chapters, and the ‘signs of the times’. In this way, our mission will take flesh in solidarity with the wounded world in which we are called to serve and to minister in each Conference.

Criteria for *Apostolic Priorities*: **WHAT ARE WE SENT TO DO? HOW DO WE DO IT?**

62. Our ***Apostolic Priorities*** will guide the process for the ***Apostolic and Restructuring Plan*** by responding to the questions: *What are we sent to do today? How do we do it effectively here and now?* We cannot respond to every need, and we are not called to exercise every possible ministry. We must make choices and decisions. The criteria for these choices are drawn from sources we already know very well.
63. First of all, we turn once again to our **Constitutions** (cf. 7-17a) and **Statutes** (cf. 016-024). The principal criterion offered to help us discern our ***apostolic priorities*** is closeness to the people to whom we are sent, becoming a living witness through life and charity, so that the Lord can open the door to the explicit and effective preaching of the Gospel. We are blessed with the ministry of reconciliation and to strengthen and develop Eucharistic communities. These criteria must become effective in new initiatives, popular missions, parishes, spiritual exercises and retreats, promoting justice and human progress, communications, moral theology and any ministry entrusted to us so that it truly becomes missionary.
64. The more recent **General Chapters** have also offered us important indications to guide the criteria for choosing our apostolic priorities. Among others, they offer us these criteria for our missionary work:
- a. Extraordinary and explicit proclamation of the Word;
  - b. Shrines and Churches as places of welcome and encounter;
  - c. Moral Theology and formation of conscience;
  - d. Full and equal partnership with lay men and women;
  - e. Communications and Media;
  - f. Social Ministry and Human Development;

- g. Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation;
- h. Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry.

65. Although at first glance, it might seem that with these criteria we could justify or rationalize any ministry in which we are engaged, it is important that we apply these as a whole – in the spirit of the Gospel and the Constitutions, and always bearing in mind those to whom we are sent. ***Apostolic Priorities*** must be in the service of our ***Missionary Priorities***, those to whom we are sent.

66. Once again, discernment of the ‘**signs of the times**’ is essential to the discernment of our ***apostolic priorities***. In a wounded world which seems to be growing more polarized and divided, our Congregation has discerned an urgent call to solidarity. Today, perhaps more than ever, we are called to greater solidarity in the service of the mission. This call requires solidarity among ourselves as a worldwide Congregation, and it also challenges us to a deeper and more profound solidarity with the abandoned and the poor. We have also witnessed the difference that such solidarity makes when it is lived with integrity and transparency.

### Criteria for Preparing the ***Apostolic Plan***: **WHERE AND HOW DO WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO MINISTRY?**

67. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter decided that the General Government would initiate the process of apostolic planning by offering criteria for our mission in today’s world. The

General Government would then animate the Conferences to prepare their *Apostolic Plan* using these criteria, attentive to the wounded world in which they live. This *Apostolic Plan* will then be implemented in each Conference, with implications for each (V) Province, Region, Mission and local community. Once again, it is important to return to the sources in order to understand the essential elements of the planning process.

68. Our **Constitutions** (cf. 17, 18, 19) and **General Statutes** (cf. 025) offer us clear indications of how this process of planning and implementation is to be carried out. First of all, co-responsibility requires that decisions must be taken together, in Assemblies and Chapters, and guided by the General Government. Regular evaluation is important. Collaboration with the Universal and local Church, and their pastoral programmes, must be taken into account. Our Constitutions and Statutes emphasize that our apostolic planning is not the task of individual confreres. It is an exercise of the community as ‘one missionary body’. This process must engage the Conference, the Unit, and the local community working together in complementarity and collaboration. As well, regular assemblies and other meetings will help to facilitate this process and ensure that it is indeed the discernment of the community.
69. We can also hear the call of the Spirit to communal discernment in the decisions of recent **General Chapters**. In 1979, the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter decided that each (V) Province would discern their *Apostolic Priorities* in Chapters and Assemblies, and then submit them to the General Government for approval. In 1997, the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter mandated that

every local community would prepare a *Plan for Community Life* (PCL), which would also contain the pastoral plan for that community. In 2009, the 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter restructured the Congregation into five Conferences for ‘wider missionary discernment’, and every Unit was urged to evaluate their apostolic priorities in the light of the apostolic priorities of the Conference. In 2016, the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter decided that each Conference would develop an *Apostolic Plan* based on the criteria offered by the General Government (Decision 5), with special application in the Conferences of Europe and North America (Decision 6).

70. The principal criterion offered from the recent General Chapters is communal discernment as one missionary body, animated by the General Government, and coordinated by the Conferences and the Coordinators. An important part of this communal discernment is careful attention to our real situation throughout the Congregation: reading the ‘**signs of the times**’. The General Council believes that the *Working Document* and the *Report of the Superior General to the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* offer valuable information and reflection on the actual situation of the Congregation today.

### Criteria for **The Process of Restructuring and Reconfiguration of the Congregation.**

71. In order to effectively respond to the challenge of developing the criteria which will assist in the development and implementation of the *Apostolic Plan* of each Conference, it is necessary to include criteria for continuing *the process of*

*restructuring for mission* as mandated by the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. This will involve the reorganization and reconfiguration of the Units and Conferences of the Congregation, and require inter-Conference dialogue as well.

72. It is important to emphasize once again that **the process of restructuring is for mission**, to reawaken and strengthen our missionary identity, and to call forth a greater missionary availability throughout the Congregation. Our objective is to strengthen our Provinces and offer structures for greater freedom and agility in the service of our mission to the abandoned and the poor. We do not seek to preserve or maintain established structures or houses which no longer effectively respond to our missionary vocation. As Decision 1.2 of the 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter reminds us, “Not every apostolic endeavour, no matter how praiseworthy in itself, can be identified as an expression of our missionary [*or apostolic*] priorities. (cf. Consts. 13-17)” While such restructuring and reconfiguration may create a sense of fear or insecurity among some of us, at the same time, it is both challenging and exciting, as it revitalizes our missionary dynamism and opens up new possibilities.
73. In addition to the criteria which we find in the Constitutions and Statutes, and the priority given to this process by previous General Chapters, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapters have given us clear criteria and guiding principles. These deserve our attention and prayerful reflection as individuals and communities. They have been articulated once again in the *Decisions of the Final Documents of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, Phase II, November 2016* (Decisions 1 – 6).

74. Among others, these criteria for restructuring include:

- a. The Principles of Restructuring and of Missionary Solidarity (Decision 2, 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter);
- b. Involvement of all the Units, for the sake of the mission (Decision 1, 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter);
- c. Creation of stronger and more agile Provinces, Vice Provinces, Regions and Missions, which can more effectively implement the Apostolic Priorities;
- d. The criteria articulated in GS 088, concerning minimum number of confreres and communities, as well as financial sustainability;
- e. Missionary dynamism and freedom which result in 'missionary availability' (C. 14-15);
- f. Creation of Apostolic Communities which are intercultural, and prepared to implement the Apostolic Priorities and Apostolic Plan, as well as the Plan of Community Life;
- g. 'Common formation' which implements the Decisions on Formation of the General Council (April 10, 2015);
- h. Promotion of Missionary Vocations, including lay missionaries and associates;
- i. Requirements of Formation for mission (Decision 30, 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter);
- j. Preparation of sufficient and suitable Formators;
- k. Genuine collaboration with lay partners in mission as active coworkers and participants in the apostolic life of the Congregation (Decision, 60a, 21<sup>st</sup> General Chapter; Decision 11, 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter);
- l. Effective leadership and administration.

## **Part IV: CONFERENCE COMMISSION FOR THE APOSTOLIC AND RESTRUCTURING PLAN**

75. The Criteria above – for *Missionary Priorities, Apostolic Priorities, Apostolic Plan, Restructuring Plan* – will serve the following process to develop *the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan* for each Conference.
76. To assist in the process of developing *the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan* for each Conference, the General Council has mandated the appointment of a special Commission for this purpose. It will be composed of the Conference Coordinator and the Consultor(s) from the Conference, with at least two members proposed by the Assembly of the Conference in 2017, and appointed by the Conference Coordinator and his Council.
77. These Commissions have begun their work in each Conference following the Third Phase of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter and the Conference Assemblies. Each Commission will prepare a proposal of the *Missionary and Apostolic Priorities* of the Conference which will be presented to their Conference Assembly in 2018. To prepare this proposal, each Commission will undertake a careful analysis of the ‘wounded world’ of the Conference. To guide this analysis, the Commission will use the criteria proposed in this *Communicanda*.

78. Each Commission will also prepare a proposal for the restructuring and reconfiguration of the Units of the Conference, and of the Conference itself, which will also be presented at the Conference Assembly in 2018. To prepare this proposal they will conduct an analysis of the situation and missionary dynamism of each Unit in the Conference. This analysis requires the cooperation of the Units, and will use the criteria for restructuring offered in this *Communicanda*.
79. At each Conference Assembly in 2018, these proposals will be discussed and revised. They will then become the basis for preparing the draft ***Apostolic and Restructuring Plan*** which will be submitted to the Conference Assembly at the Mid-sexennium meeting in 2019. At this Assembly, the Conference will discuss, revise and adopt the plan. It will then be presented to the General Government for approval. If approved, the General Government will initiate the implementation in the Conference, in coordination with the Conference Coordinator and the Units of the Conference.
80. Because we form one Congregation, and one missionary body, the General Council realizes that these plans will also involve inter-Conference networking. The General Consultors and the Coordinators will ensure that this networking takes place, and when necessary, facilitate the coming together of all the Conference Commissions for further reflection, discussion and planning.

**Conclusion:                    **EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE AS ONE MISSIONARY BODY.****

*“Redemptorists, as apostolic and genuine disciples of Saint Alphonsus, follow Christ the Redeemer with hearts full of joy; denying themselves and always ready to undertake what is demanding, they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption.” (Const. 20)*

81. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter recognized that the Congregation, and the whole Redemptorist Family, is living a critical moment in its missionary vocation. Facing the challenges of evangelization today, and fully aware of our limited resources, God is calling us to witness to Jesus the Redeemer in our wounded world with courage and hope – and to do so **together**, with a renewed spirit of communion and solidarity. For this reason, the General Chapter gave us this inspiring and energizing theme: ***Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World***. May we hear in this theme the call of God to renew and revitalize our *Vita Apostolica* for today!

82. However, the General Chapter wanted to avoid the danger that our theme might remain mere words. It also mandated that we respond with very concrete actions. Each Conference must develop an apostolic plan based on clear missionary and apostolic priorities, and continue the process of restructuring for the sake of this mission. The General Council, in collaboration with the Third Phase of the General Chapter, has directed that this Apostolic and Restructuring Plan be developed and presented for approval at the mid-sexennial

meetings. In this way, each Conference will be able to begin implementation of this plan by 2019.

83. We recognize that engaging fully in this process without yet knowing all the implications may be frightening. It seems clear that God is calling us out of our comfort zones and our present reality to enter a future which is not yet clear. This calls for a new missionary availability in the Congregation, and in each confrere and local community. It demands a renewed solidarity with the abandoned and the poor of our wounded world. It challenges us to a new communion with the ‘wounded world’ itself, listening attentively to the cry of the earth, our common home (see *Laudato si’*). In so many ways, the ‘signs of the times’ make clear to us that God is active and alive among us, stirring our hearts to embrace this vision and embark on this journey together – confreres and lay missionaries, Sisters and associates, and all who share our missionary charism.

84. This *Communicanda* offers criteria to guide us on our journey together. However, the General Council is aware that this will not protect us from mistakes, detours, and maybe even a few dead-ends along the way. This was also the experience of St. Alphonsus, of St. Clement, and of so many others. Like them, we will learn from our experiences. As one missionary body, we are engaged in a process of discernment guided by the Holy Spirit as we listen attentively to the wounded world and to one another. The Holy Spirit is calling us today to let go of our comfort zones, plans and projects, so that we may welcome God’s plan already stirring among us. Like Mary, our Perpetual Help, may we respond: “We are witnesses of the Redeemer. Let this be done in us according to your Word.” As

we embrace this Word with hope, we will discover new and abundant life.

85. May God, who has called us to follow the Redeemer, guide us with the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. May St. Alphonsus and all our saints, martyrs and blessed confreres accompany us on the journey, and inspire us through their example and prayers. I offer you these reflections in the name and on behalf of the General Council. Let us continue to pray for and walk with one another!

Your brother in the Redeemer,

*Michael Brehl, C.S.R.*

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

November 9, 2017

*Foundation Day of the Congregation*