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The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God

Dear Confreres, Sisters, and Partners in Mission,

Over the past few months, the Congregation has conducted the Mid-Sexennium Meetings in each of the five Conferences. One of the principal tasks of these meetings was to present, discuss and vote on the Apostolic and Restructuring Plans and submit them to the General Government for approval. The Apostolic and Reconfiguration Plans were the result of much dialogue, reflection and discussion on the part of the Commissions (CARP) in each Conference. These Commissions were appointed by the Conference Coordinators after consultation with the Conference Assemblies in 2017.

This process of consultation continued with the Extraordinary Visit of the General Government to the Congregation in 2018, which involved all the confreres, along with many lay partners, Sisters, and experts. The draft Plans were initially presented to the Conference Assemblies in 2018, and subsequently, in the Assemblies and Chapters of every Unit. This process of dialogue and consultation resulted in the Conference Apostolic and Restructuring Plans presented in the Mid-Sexennium Meetings. In undertaking this process, and in the resulting plans, we see the fruit of the “wider missionary discernment” envisaged by the 24th General Chapter when it established the five Conferences of the Congregation in 2009.

From December 4 to 14, the General Council met in Rome with the Coordinators of the Conferences to study and approve the plans from each Conference. This was an extraordinary time of discernment, prayer, and careful and prudent planning for the future of our Congregation in the light of our charism, the signs of the times, and the invitation of Pope Francis and the Church for a new era of evangelization.

During these meetings, the General Government with the coordinators first considered the Apostolic Plans for each Conference – the Missionary and Apostolic Priorities, the Fundamental Priorities, and also the initial steps for a new pastoral plan to implement these priorities in concrete and strategic ways. As the last several General Chapters reminded us, any restructuring and reconfiguration in the Congregation must respond to our Mission and our Priorities.

CONFERENCE APOSTOLIC PLAN:

After careful study and discussion, the General Government approved the Apostolic Plan submitted by each Conference. We appreciate the quality of the reflection on our Mission and discernment of priorities in which you engaged in each Conference, in the different contexts and cultures in which you are called to mission. It is particularly encouraging to see the common



nature of the missionary priorities which were explicitly proposed by all or almost all of the Conferences. As Redemptorists, we realize that we are sent to those who are abandoned and in greatest need, and especially the poor. At times we use different names to identify these groups, but this common understanding of our mission is found in every conference. Every Conference identified with the wounded world through the choice of these *"Missionary Priorities"*, including:

- Migrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples – 5 Conferences;
- Young people, especially those in greatest need – 5 Conferences;
- Materially Poor on the margins of society – 4 Conferences;
- Families in need, women, children, Elderly – 4 Conferences;
- The 'spiritually abandoned', those who profess no faith, those seeking meaning in a secularized world – 2 conferences.

To respond to the wounds of those to whom we are sent, there was a great congruence among the Apostolic Priorities proposed by the Conferences. Explicit preaching has a special priority in every Conference, as do Shrines, reconciliation, social ministry, justice and peace, care for creation, communications and Moral Theology, which were identified as underlying all our *"Apostolic Priorities"* including:

- Preaching, Missions, and Retreats – 5 Conferences
- Shrines and ministry of listening and reconciliation – 4 Conferences
- Social Ministry and JPIC – 4 Conferences
- Missionary Parishes – 3 Conferences
- Communications, Publishing, Media – 2 Conferences
- Moral Theology and Faith Formation – 2 conferences

Each Conference also began the process of indicating lines of pastoral action to implement these Missionary and Apostolic Priorities in the Conference and in every Unit. The Apostolic Plans of all 5 Conferences also stress the *"Fundamental Priorities"* of:

- Formation, both ongoing and initial;
- Apostolic Community, and especially, community discernment of our mission;
- Shared Mission with our lay partners.

Now that each Conference has identified the Missionary, Apostolic and Fundamental Priorities, this process must continue at the level of each Province, Vice-Province and Region. Our priorities actually take flesh and are carried out on the local level. So, each Unit must continue its process of missionary discernment in the light of the Conference Apostolic Plan.

CONFERENCE PLAN FOR RESTRUCTURING/RECONFIGURATION:

At the same time that each Conference has been working on identifying and designating its priorities, the Commissions have also been seriously engaging with Decisions 1-6 of the 25th General Chapter, which continue the process of restructuring in the Congregation in the light of an apostolic plan. The General Government, in dialogue with the Conference Coordinators, approved the Restructuring Plans of Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean,



and Africa and Madagascar. We also affirmed and supported the ongoing dialogue planned for the Conference of Asia-Oceania as they continue to discern the decisions for restructuring needed in the light of their Apostolic Plan.

In a letter such as this one, it is impossible to go into all the details about the Restructuring and Reconfiguration Plans of each Conference. These will be addressed more particularly in a subsequent letter to the Major Superiors and members of the Conference Assemblies. However, I would like to highlight here some of the proposals approved by the General Government in consultation with the Conference Coordinators. I will take each Conference in order and offer some brief reflections on the results of their consultation, study and discernment.

EUROPE – 9100

It is important to remember that both Europe and North America have already been in an ongoing process of reconfiguration of Units since 1994. Europe decided at the Third Phase of the 25th General Chapter to continue their discernment in three 'zones': Southern Europe, Northwestern Europe, and Eastern Europe. Each of these 'zones' is quite distinct, both historically and culturally. At the same time, they face similar and common challenges, including diminishment and aging of members and secularism. In their Reconfiguration Plan the 18 Units of Europe (2016) will move towards forming six Units. This process will involve greater collaboration in formation and mission. To respond to the challenges involved, several Units will form a Federation, and the Slavic Units of Eastern Europe will establish a formal association.

NORTH AMERICA – 9200

Since the 25th General Chapter, the 8 Units of North America (2016) have already restructured to become 3 Provinces and 1 Vice-Province. They will continue the necessary process to really form 'one missionary body', and to grow in the spirit and practice of collaboration. In the light of their Apostolic Plan, they are discussing further restructuring and reconfiguration, as well as formal structures of collaboration similar to Federation. There are also some initiatives for greater collaboration with Units in Latin America especially.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN – 9300

Latin America and the Caribbean have been the most radical of all the Conferences in their Reconfiguration and Restructuring Plan. From 23 Provinces and Vice-Provinces with 3 interprovincial missions at the 25th General Chapter (2016), they will form 7 Provinces with 3 interprovincial missions. 'Vice-Provinces' will disappear as a structure in this Conference. The Apostolic Plan will guide greater collaboration between these 7 Provinces in their 3 missions, and also in the worldwide mission of the Congregation.



ASIA AND OCEANIA – 9400

The Conference of Asia-Oceania is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse areas of the world. As well, there are enormous geographic distances between the 13 different Units. This Conference also contains the fastest growing Units in the Congregation! It also contains some very small and fragile Units. In the light of the Apostolic Plan, they have committed to an ongoing dialogue among designated Units in 2020 which will help them better discern how restructuring and reconfiguration will assist them in the mission according to their missionary and apostolic priorities. The General Government has affirmed this commitment to greater and structured dialogue and will assist them in the next phase of their Restructuring Plan.

AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR – 9500

Africa and Madagascar faces unique challenges regarding restructuring. Only one Unit in the Conference is a Province. There are 9 Vice-Provinces, Regions and Missions in 14 countries, all of whose Mother Provinces are in the other Conferences. In order to strengthen the Redemptorist Mission in Africa and Madagascar in the light of their Apostolic Plan, they have proposed to become two Provinces – Northwest Africa, and South-Central Africa. This plan will face great challenges and require the support and encouragement of the Mother Provinces, as well as the whole Congregation! The General Government approved this plan to strengthen our mission, formation and leadership in Africa and Madagascar.

CONCLUSION:

As you can see, with these Restructuring Plans for the Congregation, we will move from 75 Units in 2016 to 36 Units over the next few years. Far from concluding the implementation of the Decisions of the 25th General Chapter with the Mid-Sexennium Meetings, we have begun a new phase in our process of restructuring and missionary conversion.

Some questions, such as representation of Units and Conferences at the General Chapter, Assembly of the Conference, etc..., will need to be treated by the General Chapter in 2022. There will be other issues which we will need to face at the appropriate time, after appropriate dialogue and discernment.

In the 1840's, the Congregation first introduced the Province structure in order to strengthen our mission in Europe and North America. During that period of expansion, Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Regions served the Congregation and our Mission very well, and these Units multiplied around the world. These structures continue to support Redemptorist Missionaries in our commitment to bring the Good News to the most abandoned and the poor. However, at this moment in our history, along with all Congregations of apostolic religious, we need to restructure to strengthen our missionary availability. These decisions of the Mid-Sexennium Meetings and the Apostolic Restructuring Plans for every Conference mark an historic moment for all Redemptorist Missionaries, for affiliated Congregations and for our lay partners in mission.



As we respond to the needs of our wounded world, and the changing 'signs of the times', we want to witness to our prophetic vocation to form 'one missionary body' which transcends cultures and language, race and nation. These Apostolic and Restructuring Plans offer an example and evangelical witness to our missionary solidarity. Their implementation is the responsibility of all of us together – not just the Superiors and other leaders in our communities. Together we are called to be witnesses to the Redeemer in solidarity for mission to our wounded world.

In this spirit, I ask each confrere and every community in the Congregation to carefully study the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan for your Conference. Continue to be involved in the wider missionary discernment of how to put your Missionary and Apostolic Priorities into concrete and strategic ministries. Engage in the Assemblies and Chapters of your Unit and participate fully in the process of forming a new Unit with confreres from other cultures and experiences. During the Mid-Sixennium Meetings, many confreres reminded us that our Missionary Vocation as Witnesses of the Redeemer requires much more than beautiful documents and plans.

Our Redemptorist Missionary Vocation calls every one of us and the whole Congregation to an ongoing process of *missionary conversion to Christ the Redeemer*, greater distacco and missionary availability, solidarity as 'one missionary body', and the joy of prophetic evangelization.

May Mary, our Mother of Perpetual Help, St. Alphonsus, and all our saints, beati, and martyrs accompany and inspire us to follow Jesus the Redeemer with renewed hope and energy. May St. Clement teach us to 'preach the Gospel ever anew'. And may each one of us contribute together to God's plan for our Congregation today.

Your brother in the Redeemer,

Michael Brehl, C.S.S.R.

Michael Brehl, C.S.S.R.,
Superior General

