



CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS

Superior Generalis

Roma, November 9, 2012

*To Preach the Gospel ever anew (St. Clement)
Renewed Hope, Renewed Hearts, Renewed Structures
For Mission*

Dear Confreres,

1. With joy and hope, I greet you in the name of the General Council. Today we celebrate the 280th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation at Scala. Five years ago, as we marked our 275th anniversary, Father Joseph Tobin, Superior General, invited us to revitalize and deepen our missionary commitment through a year of reflection on and renewal of our Consecrated Life. I believe that we have taken this call seriously, not only during that special year, but over the past five years. This process of reflection and renewal of our Apostolic Life is ongoing. It is perhaps more necessary today than ever. This call to renewal and commitment was echoed in the theme for the sexennium chosen by the XXIV General Chapter.
2. My personal experience of the last three years has convinced me that the Congregation is continuing to respond to the challenges facing us today with hope, with heart, and with courage. The missionary spirit and dynamism of our Congregation is evident across the Units. We see it in the fidelity of the elder confreres, and in the excitement and enthusiasm of the young. It shines forth in the generous availability of so many confreres for leadership and in the ongoing renewal of our missionary methods and commitments.
3. As you know, we began the Mid-Sexennial Meetings on July 9th with the Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean. The last of these five meetings has just ended on November 6th, with the Conference of Europe. As we come to the mid-point of the Sexennium, I would like to share some reflections with the whole Congregation on this process of renewal and restructuring in which we have all been engaged as called by the XXIV General Chapter.
4. The Mid-Sexennial Meetings provide a moment to reflect on the work accomplished thus far in the Sexennium, and to address some of the principal projects and concerns for the second half of this mandate. At these meetings, the General Council, with the assistance of



the Coordinators of the Conferences, has engaged in a process of consultation with all the Conferences on both of these aspects.

5. The XXIV General Chapter chose the Theme for this Sexennium inspired by words of St. Clement: *To Preach the Gospel ever anew (St. Clement): Renewed Hope, Renewed Hearts, Renewed Structures for Mission*. The first part of the Theme reminds us of our missionary vocation ‘to follow Jesus Christ as he preaches the Good News to the poor’. The second phrase challenges us to conversion and renewal so that we may more effectively live and proclaim the Gospel “as helpers, companions, and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of Redemption”. (C. 2) I would like to consider these two parts of the theme individually, and then together.

I. To Preach the Gospel ever anew (St. Clement):

6. We are missionaries. This is our fundamental identity as followers of Jesus Christ in the spirit and tradition of St. Alphonsus and our Congregation. Like St. Clement Hofbauer, we are deeply aware that we need to learn to preach the Gospel anew in every age in a manner that people can understand, so that it can touch their hearts and draw them more fully into the plan of God which is that Reign of justice, love and peace proclaimed by his Son. This theme is echoed in the Instrumentum Laboris prepared for the Synod on the New Evangelization which took place in October, 2012. It is a challenge to the whole Church. As Redemptorists, we are reminded of the reflection of Fr. Francis Durrwell that our charism places us at the heart of Church which is missionary by its very nature (C. 1).
7. To preach the Gospel ever anew is not merely a question of finding more effective strategies to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ in this age of global electronic communication. More effective strategies are necessary, but they are a third step in the process of implementing this Theme.
8. **First**, we must recognize that the fundamental message we proclaim is a person: Jesus the Redeemer. He has not changed – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). However, the context in which Jesus and his message are proclaimed in today’s world has changed and is changing radically. In order to preach the Gospel ever anew, we need to reflect on the context in which we are called to mission, and we need to hear and “try to understand peoples’ anxious questionings” (C. 19). The reality of the post-modern world (which some scholars say has now entered a ‘post-postmodern’ stage), the influence of secularism, the phenomenon of the mass movement of peoples in worldwide migration patterns, the dialogue with world religions, and the continuing suffering of so



many people who live in dire poverty, and who experience violence and the precariousness of life: this is the world to which we are sent with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

9. **Second**, it is essential that we also recognize that we Redemptorist missionaries are also products of this radically changing world. These phenomena have formed us and shaped our ways of thinking and perceiving reality. It is in this context that we have committed ourselves to Jesus Christ the Redeemer and to giving our lives for plentiful redemption. How do the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit respond to our need for meaning? What is the response God offers to the peoples of the post-modern world? To the countless migrants? To the abandoned poor who are often also the victims of violence? Reflection on the reality of the world today must lead us to a deeper union with Jesus Christ who is the content of evangelization. We are called to rediscover the relevance of his gospel for the urgent longings of our contemporary world.
10. **Third**, to preach the Gospel ever anew invites us to explore and pioneer new and creative ways of communicating this message in an effective way which enables contemporary men and women to hear and to understand the message. This means making use of every means of communication which can help us to reach them: television and radio; the internet, cyberspace and social media; publications; as well as pulpits and parishes.

II. Renewed Hope, Renewed Hearts, Renewed Structures for Mission:

11. The XXIV General Chapter called us to conversion and renewal. This call is addressed not only to each Redemptorist missionary individually. It is also a call to community conversion – the conversion and renewal of our local communities, of our Units, and of the whole Congregation. “As a result it (the Community) walks in love, aflame with the apostolic spirit” (C. 12). In 1975, Pope Paul VI reminded us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that the contemporary world listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if people do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” The call to renew the Congregation, our communities, and each confrere will make us more authentic, effective and prophetic missionaries and evangelizers.
12. Our Constitutions remind us that “continual conversion, the result of our total surrender to God, increases our availability for the service of others...Religious profession, therefore, becomes the definitive act of the whole missionary life of Redemptorists (C. 54). This profession makes all Redemptorists truly missionaries” (C.55). Through our profession we have given our whole selves to God in the Congregation. *Giving our lives for plentiful redemption* makes demands on us.



13. As Redemptorist missionaries, what does it mean for us to live this profession as self-gift to God for the sake of others? This missionary profession challenges us to be authentic and prophetic – to live what we have promised. Today, the Church is facing a deep crisis of trust which affects the credibility of its witness. Consecrated Life is experiencing this same crisis of authenticity and credibility. The missionary witness of our Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer is deeply affected by this crisis of trust.
14. We need to renew the meaning of our profession for the sake of the mission. Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are not mere abstract concepts or spiritual practices. These vows are a clear expression of our missionary profession, of giving our lives for plentiful redemption. Financial abuses, sexual misconduct, and unhealthy individualism are ways of taking back the gift we have promised. Any such act is not only a personal matter of the individual conscience before God. Rather, these acts are a betrayal of our self-gift which injures the witness of the Congregation as ‘one missionary body’ (C. 2). They weaken our authenticity and our capacity to effectively preach the Gospel ever anew.
15. The XXIV General Chapter calls us to greater availability and fidelity. “Restructuring for Mission must stimulate a reawakening of our *Vita Apostolica*. It should prompt a new availability for mission” (Principle 2, Decision 1.3, XXIV General Chapter). This availability for mission is essential to the renewal of the Congregation. More importantly, it is essential for the task of evangelization.
 - a. *Evangelization, Renewal and Restructuring*:
16. From the beginning of the present process of restructuring the Congregation, the Superior Generals, the General Chapters and the General Councils have stressed that the purpose of this process is to renew our mission so that it is more effective. The Theme for this sexennium stresses this link. The process of restructuring is for mission. The primary purpose of the Conferences is wider missionary discernment and decision-making.
17. One of the most important aspects of this process is the renewal of our Redemptorist Missionary identity. It is essential that we develop and deepen the sense that we belong to a world-wide Congregation, and that this identity is much greater than belonging merely to the particular Unit in which we live and minister. “Above all, the Redemptorist Missionary will know that he belongs to and willingly participates in the mission of a world-wide Congregation that takes seriously the challenge of being alert to the signs of the times, and making vital apostolic decisions that respond ever anew to our call to mission” (Final Documents, 6.17). The renewal of our Redemptorist missionary identity is essential to effective restructuring and evangelization.



18. During the first half of this current sexennium, we have devoted a great deal of energy to establishing the structures which will make the Conferences effective. We are still learning how to do this. Every Conference has held at least two Assemblies. Most have celebrated even more. The Coordinators were appointed on Easter Sunday, 2011, and began their task in earnest one year ago. A Directory for Statutes of the Conferences has been prepared, and the particular Statutes for each Conference have been approved by the General Government.
19. Each Conference has been encouraged to specify their apostolic priorities. Some have undertaken new interprovincial projects for mission. The Conferences have made strides forward in the area of initial formation, with some interprovincial common formation projects strengthened and other houses of common formation established. Some Conferences continue to face the challenge of diminishing numbers and aging confreres, and some projects to restructure individual units in partnership with others are also taking shape. In each of these areas, there are real challenges. At the same time, there is real progress.
20. I would like to share some information with you about some of the progress we have made, and some of the steps we have taken as a Congregation, in two specific areas: the priority of Africa and Madagascar and Economic Solidarity. Each Conference has also made progress in many areas, especially regarding missionary initiatives, formation, solidarity, and in some cases, restructuring of Units. These are concrete signs of our commitment to renewal, not only of structures, but also of our hope and our hearts. Many of these steps have already been shared with you in communications from the Conference Coordinators and the Assemblies.

c. *New Structures for Africa and Madagascar:*

21. The XXIV General Chapter states that the Conference of Africa and Madagascar is a priority for the whole Congregation (Final Documents, Decision 8). This presents a challenge to the Congregation. Africa and Madagascar is the Conference with the youngest average age of its members, and it is also the fastest growing on a per capita basis. This Conference depends on the whole Congregation for resources, both human and economic. As a priority for the whole Congregation, we have implemented some concrete steps to address these challenges.
22. Since the General Chapter, several important decisions have been taken. The procurator - Fr. Gerry O'Connor, C.Ss.R. - and the commission for the fund for Africa and Madagascar have been appointed. They are working with the Conference to establish the fund, raise



money, and promote the missionary priorities of the Conference among Redemptorists and to the broader public. For this purpose, they have also established a website (www.africaredemptorists.com) and newsletter. Several Redemptorist Units have already begun to make contributions to the fund and to specific projects. But there is still a long way to go.

23. A new mission has begun as a joint project of the Province of Dublin and the Vice-Province of Fortaleza. Collaboration between other Units within Africa and Madagascar is already under discussion. Common Formation projects are being strengthened and expanded. The Network for Africa and Madagascar, comprised of the Provincials of the Mother Provinces and the Superiors of the Units within Africa and Madagascar, has held its initial meeting in this sexennium.
24. Each Unit and confrere is invited to deepen their awareness of the priority of Africa and Madagascar for the whole Congregation. Each Unit is asked to designate a confrere or lay Redemptorist as a point of reference with the Conference through the office of the Procurator, Fr. Gerry O'Connor. There are many other ways in which all of us can participate concretely in this missionary priority. A good start is to check the website and the newsletter.

d. Commission for Economic Solidarity:

25. The global economic crisis which began in 2008 has affected the Congregation in serious ways. The XXIV General Chapter decided to establish a Commission for Economic Solidarity to investigate and study a more satisfactory system for effective economic solidarity in the Congregation (Final Documents, Decision 19). This Commission has reported its progress to the mid-sexennium meetings. A final report with proposals will be presented to the XXV General Chapter for decisions.
26. Each Redemptorist Province, Vice-Province, Region and mission is aware of the financial challenges which it faces. At the level of the whole Congregation, we are aware that the present system needs serious adjustment for a more equitable sharing in the responsibility to support our world-wide mission. The progress report of the Commission will be circulated to all the confreres and communities, and we urge you to seriously reflect on it and offer your reflections and responses to the Commission as it continues to develop a more comprehensive report and proposals for the XXV General Chapter.
27. Our economic solidarity is an expression of our solidarity as one world-wide community of Redemptorist Missionaries – “one missionary body” (C. 2). Growing out of the renewed



mentality to which we are called by the XXIV General Chapter, an important dimension of the restructuring process is the restructuring of our economic solidarity.

III. To Preach the Gospel ever anew:

28. My brothers, we are missionaries. I return once again to our theme. Our vocation is to preach the Gospel in a language all people can understand. This proclamation must not be confined to fine words and lofty sentiments (see 1 Cor. 2:1- 5). Redemptorist Missionaries “share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption.” (C. 20)
29. As our Constitutions remind us, our “mandate to evangelize the poor is directed to the liberation and salvation of the whole human person. The members have the duty of preaching the Gospel explicitly and of showing solidarity with the poor by promoting their fundamental rights to justice and freedom.” (C. 5). “This message has for its special object plentiful redemption; it proclaims the love of God the Father “who first loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10) and through the Holy Spirit gives life to all who believe in him.” (C. 6).
30. The whole Church is reflecting on the nature, meaning and methods of the New Evangelization called for in the contemporary world and society. As members of the Church entrusted with the special mission of evangelization, and as Redemptorist Missionaries who follow in the tradition of St. Alphonsus, St. Clement and so many others, we must engage wholeheartedly in this process of reflection and in the ministry of evangelization.
31. I think that it is providential that the XXIV General Chapter, which focused so much attention and energy on the process of restructuring the Congregation, chose as our sexennial theme the primacy of our mission to preach the Gospel, and the call to conversion and renewal.
32. During the first half of this sexennium, we have devoted considerable energy to the process of restructuring – and this process is far from over. Let us be careful not to forget that we are also called to commit even more energy to the mission of evangelization. This commitment calls us to a deep reflection not only on our missionary methods (C. 17), but also on the very nature of evangelization today. It engages not only our study, but also our lifestyle and prophetic witness to the values of the Kingdom.



33. In the words of St. Alphonsus, describing the purpose of the Congregation, may we “follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor, as he declared of himself: ‘He sent me to preach the Good News to the poor’.” (C. 1)

Your brother in the Redeemer,

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

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