# REDEMPTORIST FORMATION

**VOLUME 5**

**CONGREGATION**

**OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER**

#### JOSEPH WILLIAM TOBIN, C.Ss.R.

**Superior General from 1997 to 2009**

**COMMUNICANDA AND DOCUMENTS**

##### General Secretariat for Redemptorist Formation Rome, Italy 2017

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## PRESENTATION

Dear Confreres, Sisters, Lay Missionaries and Associates,

Greetings to you as together we witness to the Redeemer in solidarity for mission to our wounded world! Among you, I would like to greet especially those in Initial Formation, their formators, and our Lay Redemptorist partners! It is our hope that this fifth volume from the General Secretariat for Formation will be especially useful to you, as well as for the ongoing formation of the whole Redemptorist family.

Inthespiritofthe 25th General Chapter, thewhole Redemptorist family is called to touch the wounds of the Redeemer in the wounds of the world, and so renew our Apostolic Life. Discerning the signs of the times, the Congregation is committed to developing a more effective apostolic and missionary outreach. In order to do this, the Chapter mandated that we continue the process of restructuring for mission, with clear criteria, and in partnership with those who share our call.

As we give ourselves fully to this mission, the publication of this fifth volume is an important resource for all of us. After serving one sexennium as General Consultor, Fr. Joseph W. Tobin was elected Superior General at the 22nd General Chapter held in West End, New Jersey, U.S., in 1997. Under his leadership, the Congregation continued to develop its collaboration with lay men and women, as well as deepening our commitment to pioneer new ways to preach the Gospel to the abandoned and the poor (see especially Comm. 2, 1999, and Comm. 1, 2004).

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Under his leadership, new resources were developed to

strengthen this call: the Communicanda on Spirituality (1998), and the establishment of the Centre for Spirituality, and the work on Redemptorist Spirituality and Redemptorist History; the Communicanda on the “Third Age” (2000); the Communicanda on Solidarity (2002); the Communicanda on Redemption (2006), as well as the Restructuring Commission; a reform of the model for Visitations; the Formation of New Superiors; the Pastoral Guide; and continuing emphasis on the ministry to youth and young adults.

Perhaps one of the most influential of his contributions as Superior General is *A Letter to the Confreres* (2009), which was a parting gift to his beloved Congregation as he completed his second mandate. It remains important for us today as we discern the will of God for the Congregation, and as we renew our missionary availability for the common mission we have received from the Redeemer.

The Biographical Note on Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, which is included in this volume, further develops the importance of his ongoing ministry and contribution not only to the Congregation, but also to the Universal Church. Upon completion of his service as Superior General, Fr. Tobin was called to serve the Church and Consecrated Life as Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Archbishop Tobin was subsequently appointed to Indianapolis, and named a consultor of this Vatican Congregation, and recently appointed Archbishop of Newark and named Cardinal by Pope Francis.

In this volume, the six Communicanda of Fr. Tobin are included, along with the Final Documents of the 22nd and 23rd General Chapters and two discourses of Pope John Paul II to the

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Redemptorists. This is an important collection of materials for those who wish to understand more fully our missionary vocation, and this important period in the life of the Church and the Congregation (1997 – 2009). I strongly encourage all Formators to promote the documents contained in this volume.

However, its value is not limited to those in initial formation. I am certain that all Redemptorist Missionaries, Sisters of affiliated Congregations, Lay Redemptorists and others will benefit from a careful reading of the themes included here. May it deepen our commitment to witness to the Redeemer in our words and our deeds so that as one missionary body, in solidarity with one another and with the poor, we may touch the wounds of Christ in the wounded world which is our common home.

May Mary, our Perpetual Help and Mother of the Redeemer, teach us how to treasure all these things and ponder them in our hearts, so that together with her Son, we may preach the Gospel to the poor with greater love and compassion.

Your Brother in the Redeemer,

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R. Superior General Rome, Easter 2017

#### Cardinal Joseph William Tobin, C.Ss.R. Biography

Joseph William Tobin was born on May 3, 1952 to the late Joseph W. Tobin and Marie Terese Kerwin in Detroit, Michigan. The first of 13 children, Joseph was baptized on May 8, 1952 at Most Holy Redeemer Church, a large Redemptorist parish in the southwestern part of the city.

Young Joseph attended Holy Redeemer Elementary School, which had an enrollment of nearly 1,000 students at that time. Inspired and influenced by the Redemptorist missionaries who served at the parish, he attended St. Joseph’s Preparatory College in Edgerton, Wisconsin and graduated in 1970.

Blessed with exceptional intelligence, athletic ability and musical talent, Joseph had an affinity for languages and unbounded curiosity in his pursuit of knowledge. He continued his education at Holy Redeemer College in Waterford, Wisconsin and professed temporary vows as a Redemptorist on August 5, 1973. He graduated first in his class, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy in 1975.

A prayerful man with deep convictions about religious life and priesthood, Joseph attended Mount Saint Alphonsus Seminary in Esopus, New York. His family had moved across the border to Canada, but his father had continued to commute to work in Detroit and unexpectedly suffered a fatal heart attack after helping many people stranded in the historic Blizzard of ’77. A few months after the devastating loss of his father, Joseph graduated *summa cum laude* with a Master’s in Religious Education. He continued his studies at Mount Saint Alphonsus Seminary and earned a Master’s of Divinity in 1979. A natural leader with an affable sense of humor, Joseph was a

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great defender of the downtrodden and the poor, and was thought to be well suited for any Redemptorist ministry. He professed perpetual vows as a Redemptorist on August 21, 1976, and was ordained to the diaconate on April 30, 1978 and to the priesthood on June 1, 1978.

Fluent in Spanish, Fr. Tobin returned to Most Holy Redeemer Parish in Detroit to serve the growing Hispanic community in his first ministerial assignment. In addition to *Cursillos de Cristiandad* and occasional retreat preaching, he became involved in youth ministry. He was appointed pastor in 1984, and was assigned additional responsibilities as local superior in 1988. During this time, he chaired the Hispanics Commission for the St. Louis Province and served as a member of the Extraordinary Provincial Council for two terms, from 1984 until 1990. He also served the Archdiocese of Detroit as Episcopal Vicar and a member of both the Presbyteral Council and the Metropolitan Tribunal. He joined the Canon Law Society of America in 1985, and was appointed to the General Secretariat for Pastoral Matters for the worldwide Congregation in 1987.

Fr. Tobin was appointed pastor and local superior of St. Alphonsus Parish in Chicago in 1990. After only one year of service, he was elected Consultor to the Redemptorist Superior General Fr. Juan Manuel Lasso de la Vega in Rome in 1991. He served in that position for six years, and was elected Superior General on September 9, 1997. He was confirmed for another term as Superior General on September 26, 2003. He was elected vice president of the Union of Superiors General that same year, and was a member of the Council for Relations between the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the International Union of Superiors General from 2001 to 2009. Father General Tobin visited 71 countries during his service to the worldwide Congregation, and became conversant in five languages: English, Spanish, Italian, French and Portuguese. He also was appointed Synodal Father to five Synods of Bishops: 1998, 1999, 2001, 2005 and 2008.

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His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVInamedhimtitular Archbishop of Obba (Africa) and appointed him to the Roman Curia post of Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, overseeing the more than 1 million men and women religious worldwide, on August 2, 2010. He was ordained an archbishop at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome two months later, on October 9, 2010.

Pope Benedict XVI appointed Archbishop Tobin to serve as the sixth Archbishop of Indianapolis on October 18, 2012, and he was installed on December 3, 2012.

His Holiness, Pope Francis, made Archbishop Tobin a member of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on March 29, 2014. He has served as the Co- Chairman of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation and as a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Sub-Committee on the Church in Africa since June 2013, and currently serves as Chairmen of the USCCB Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations.

Pope Francis named Archbishop Tobin to the College of Cardinals on October 9, 2016. He was created Cardinal at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on November 19, 2016. Pope Francis appointed Cardinal Tobin as the Sixth Archbishop of Newark, and he was installed on January 6, 2017.

Cardinal Tobin is the first American Redemptorist – and only the sixth member of the Congregation – ever selected to serve in the College of Cardinals.

Kristine Stremel Public & Community Affairs Director Redemptorists/Denver Province

#### INTRODUCTION

**JOSEPH WILLIAM TOBIN, C.Ss.R.**

**Superior General from 1997 to 2009**

**COMMUNICANDA AND DOCUMENTS**

Dear Confreres, Sisters, Lay Redemptorists and collaborators involved in Redemptorist Formation, Formandi and Formators in particular:

With great joy, the General Secretariat for Formation is pleased to offer you this new volume, number 5 of the collection REDEMPTORIST FORMATION, *Joseph William Tobin, Superior General from 1997 to 2009, Communicanda and Documents*. In addition to this printed version, there is a digital version, which can be viewed and downloaded from the website of the Formation Secretariat: [www.formacioncontinuacssr.com.](http://www.formacioncontinuacssr.com/)

Given that there are a large number of documents during the tenure of Fr. Tobin which could be presented, the Secretariat has had to make a selection from among these documents and has decided on those presented here. Thus you will find in this publication 6 *Communicanda*, a letter to the confreres, the Final Documents of the XXII General Chapter (1997) held at West End and the XXIII General Chapter (2003) held in Rome. Also included are the messages from His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Redemptorists during these years.

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The historical, ecclesial and congregational period running through these *Communicanda* and the other documents presented in this issue served as a bridge between the conclusion of one millennium and the beginning of a new. The Jubilee Year 2000 offered us new hope to move on guided by the Spirit offering our lives for Plentiful Redemption.

While this volume and the entire collection were conceived with the objective of helping Formators in the Congregation, all Redemptorists, religious and lay missionaries can make use of these materials which, although belonging to a certain historical period, have not lost their actuality and freshness in the issues they treat.

With these brief lines we wish to thank Fr. Joseph W. Tobin for his guidance and direction of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer during these years. We wish to thank also the General Consultors who served during these two mandates, and the confreres who collaborated with them during these years to painstakingly bring to us, these materials of great value and relevance to our Redemptorist Charism.

May Blessed Gaspar Stanggassinger, Saint Alphonsus and our Mother of Perpetual Help guide our steps and intercede for us, especially for our Redemptorist Formation.

*General Secretariat for Formation*

## XXII GENERAL CHAPTER

**West End - USA - 1997**

**Message Orientations Postulata**

#### General Curia C.Ss.R. Rome 1998

##### MESSAGE FROM THE XXII GENERAL CHAPTER TO OUR REDEMPTORIST CONFRERES

Dear Confreres,

1. We are happy to send you a message at the close of the Chapter. We have lived these weeks of Chapter as a Redemptorist community, sharing our faith and our missionary experience. We were a community of prayer, work and friendship. We also had a keen sense of being called to conversion. Throughout the Chapter we have been repeatedly challenged to ask ourselves, if we have a real relationship to Jesus, and if that relationship is in fact the primary motivating force of our way of life.

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1. Coming from so many countries we faced many difficulties

of communication and of understanding one another. Nonetheless, we did have an opportunity, through the regional reports, to get a glimpse of the life of the Congregation in its cultural and pastoral diversity. We were greatly encouraged by the extraordinary creativity in living out our option for the most abandoned, especially the poor.

1. The tone of the Chapter was set by a day of retreat, conducted by Fr. Raphael Gallagher, and by Fr. Juan Manuel Lasso’s report on the state of the Congregation. In the light of Fr. Lasso’s affirmation, “I believe that the Chapter should take spirituality as the primary challenge now faced by the Congregation,” we soon came to recognize that the most urgent issue for us Capitulars, and we believe for the whole Congregation, is the place of God in our lives. This was expressed in many ways:- the crisis of faith, the anguish of spirit, the plight of the poor, the priority of spirituality, and the call to holiness. Some confreres live in situations where religious language is part of everyday life, others come from countries where any utterance about God or religion is problematic; yet others live and work in regions where Christians are still a tiny minority of the population. Whatever the context, we believe that all Redemptorists are being called at this time to focus on a central aspect of our spirituality, i.e., on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus.
2. Since our beginnings as a Congregation we have been guided by a simple phrase of St. Alphonsus, “to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor.” In previous sexennia we have made giant strides in our understanding and practice of preaching the Good News to the poor and of being evangelized by the poor. During the past sexennium, we sought coherence between our inculturated evangelization, our

***XXII General Chapter - West End - USA, 1997 - Final Document*** 21

community life and our spirituality. The call of today to focus very sharply on the following of Jesus flows out of that ongoing concern.

1. We believe that the Congregation is being offered a great grace of conversion to the Redeemer. This conversion must be seen to make a difference in the lifestyle and work of our communities. This is why we chose that, for the next sexennium, spirituality be the lens through which we view all aspects of our lives.
2. Spirituality is at once the source and the fruit of Mission. Mission that is not undertaken as an expression of a deep commitment to Jesus is doomed to failure. We are faced with the question: are our missionary efforts moments of growth in holiness or merely tasks to be performed? Our spirituality is also shaped by the challenge to enter into the struggles and sufferings of the poor, where Jesus is revealed as a suffering servant.
3. Notwithstanding our inspirational Constitutions and Statutes on apostolic community, the quality of community life varies enormously. Some communities are vibrant and attractive. Others are quite dead. A strong personal and community relationship with Jesus is essential if we are to face the pressing challenges in our community life, e.g., common prayer, making Gospel poverty meaningful, having time for one another, reserving time for serious personal and communal study, being open to the real needs of the people around us.

Our frustration in handling the question of having a Brother on the General Council was symptomatic of the urgent need to address the role of the Brothers in the Congregation.

1. Since “preference for situations where there is pastoral need, that is, for evangelization in the strict sense together with the choice

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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 vocation it has received” (Const. 5), then it is imperative that involvement with the poor be constitutive of our spirituality. We asked ourselves in what practical ways our commitment to the poor is an expression of our spirituality, and in what ways it helps us to develop a more authentic spirituality.

1. During the Chapter we were made very conscious of the many lay collaborators who give generously of their time and talents in the service of the Kingdom, and without whom many of our apostolic undertakings would be difficult. But we must ask: what relationship is there between Redemptorist spirituality and collaboration with the laity? Do we have a genuine appreciation of the missionary vocation given to all in baptism, or are we simply concerned about getting helpers for our work? We need to develop partnership with the laity, not just on the basis of shared responsibility, but also on the basis of shared faith and spirituality.
2. The visit of some young people to the Chapter reminded us that youthministry is a priority in the Congregation. The creativity of the prayer service which they conducted helped us to appreciate their spiritual quest; it also made us think about the quality of the witness which we give to young people.
3. We are aware that many confreres and communities are wrestling with the issues mentioned above and we encourage all to seek creative answers to these testing questions. An honest appraisal can only help all of us towards a more authentic way of life.
4. A moment of great joy for us was the election of our new Superior General, Fr. Joseph Tobin, and his Council. Under their leadership we can all bring the Congregation into the new

***XXII General Chapter - West End - USA, 1997 - Final Document*** 23

century with hope. As we approach the new millennium we have confidence in the Congregation’s ability to further the work of evangelization in all our units. Our confidence for the future is rooted in our vocation to continue the mystery of Christ. We believe that there is no limit to His abundant Redemption and hence we are impelled to share our faith and hope with everyone.

1. We urge you, as individuals and communities, to study and pray about our message, the Chapter orientations, and the *Communicanda* in which the General Council will address these issues in greater depth. We ask you to share the spirit of the Chapter and the theme for the next sexennium with all those who share our charism, especially our Redemptoristine Sisters.
2. We have full confidence that our focus on spirituality during the years ahead will help us to be faithful to our vocation “To follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor.”

Your brothers in the Redeeming Christ.

*(The original text is English)*

#### ORIENTATIONS

**ON THE SUBJECT OF SPIRITUALITY**

**Introduction**

We, the members of the XXII General Chapter, affirm our commitment as a Congregation to the themes of recent chapters. This is a gradual development still in process for all Redemptorists.

The last General Chapter stated: “We want to put the emphasis on the explicit, prophetic and liberating proclamation of the Gospel to the poor, allowing ourselves to be called by the poor (*evangelizare paupenbus et a paupenbus evangelizari*), in accordance with the charism of our Congregation expressed in Constitutions 1, 3, 4, 5 and in Statutes 09 and 021... To achieve this, we see the need to emphasize the coherence between our inculturated evangelization, our community life and our spirituality.” (XXI GENERAL CHAPTER, ***Final Document***, Itaici, 1991, n. 11).

We believe that the living out of this theme demands a contemplative outlook on life, which helps us to read the signs of the times. This is not easy, and requires a conversion which is a gift of the Spirit. For this reason, we ask that Redemptorists concentrate on our Spirituality as foundational so that the work of the new Evangelization may be built on rock and not on sand.

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1. **Spirituality: The Most Important Challenge for the XXII General Chapter**

The XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That the Congregation take Spirituality as the theme of the next Sexennium. All aspects of our life -Mission, Community, Consecration, Formation, Government- should be understood and lived from the point of view of spirituality.
  2. That the Congregation reaffirm its option for the poor, intensifying the dimension of social justice, peace, solidarity and the integrity of creation in our consideration of our spirituality. This will help us to “read the signs of the times.” In doing so, we will deepen our commitment to justice, the defense of life, and human dignity. In our spirituality we want to avoid all forms of clericalism, sexism, elitism, social domination and all other forms of injustice.
  3. That, attentive to the spiritual hunger of so many in our society, we seek new and creative ways to share our spiritual heritage with others.

##### Spirituality and Mission: Towards an Apostolic Spirituality

In order to carry out the mission of our community, we want to return to the living font of the Alphonsian spirit, and to the intention that inspired St. Alphonsus Liguori to choose the poor of Scala. This intention found new expression in the life of St. Clement Hofbauer in Warsaw and Vienna. It has been expressed by generations of Redemptorists, especially our saints and beatified, according to their concrete historical context.Therefore, the XXII General Chapter recommends:

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1. That each unit continue to evaluate its pastoral works in

a spirit of fidelity to our foundational charism. In the choice of pastoral work, preference must be given to those works that are missionary and extraordinary. An effort must be continued to establish communities among the abandoned, especially the poor. We must try to be present to those circumstances of most urgent need.

1. That each unit critically examine its lifestyle to see if it is consistent with the Gospel we preach and the ideals of our own Constitutions.
2. That our love for the poor inform our explicit proclamation of the Gospel, our moral teaching to all social classes, as well as the witness of our community life.
3. That every member of the Congregation, regardless of age, search for ways to be faithful in service to the most abandoned, and especially the poor in favor of whom we have made an option on the day of our profession.

##### Spirituality and Apostolic Community

Apostolic Community Life is the primary form of the proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore the XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. that the units experiment with new structures and models of apostolic community life which encourage creative dialogue and genuine witness of life.
  2. that those responsible for animating each unit ensure that there are support systems and structures in every community which

***XXII General Chapter - West End - USA, 1997 - Final Document*** 27

promote community and personal prayer, common celebration of the Eucharist, communityrecreation, communitymeetingsforfaith- sharing and pastoral planning. This will require experimentation and generous cooperation more than norms and statutes.

* 1. That both as communities and individuals, we make every effort to improve the quality and provide adequate time for personal and community prayer. That we create environments in our communities which encourage the spirit of prayer and meditation.
  2. That our life of prayer reflect our missionary commitments and be an expression of solidarity with the abandoned, especially the poor. This aspect should be remembered and expressed in our common prayer, especially our prayers of petition and our liturgies.
  3. That we carefully examine and renew our living of the evangelical counsels in the light of our community and mission.
  4. That each unit examine and renew the role and mission of the Brothers, as equal members, in the Apostolic Communities of the unit.

##### Spirituality and Vocation Ministry

To speak of vocation ministry is to speak of the future of our Congregation. We must look to the future with hope, regardless of our present situation, because we have a profound confidence in God who has called us to be disciples of Jesus. We can be assured that it is possible to create a new future for religious life.

Therefore, the XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That each unit have its own vocation ministry, and that the

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different Units help one another with personnel, resource material, and financial resources to better accomplish the purpose of this ministry.

* 1. That the General Government prepare adequate instruments in order to help those confreres who are entrusted with vocation ministry and to facilitate the work of each unit. Among other suggestions, we propose: collections of books, brochures, newsletters, videos, material for the internet, etc.

That the vocation ministry of each unit take into account the promotion of vocations to the Brothers.

##### Spirituality and Formation

The XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That, where appropriate, the Ratio Formationis of the units be updated in light of Constitution 78 and Statute 058, keeping in mind the needs of a world that is in continual and sometimes accelerated change.
  2. That every effort be made to provide directors of formation with an adequate preparation for their task, taking special account of Redemptorist spirituality.
  3. That initial formation, in its different stages, offer programs on our history and spirituality, especially when our students pursue their academic studies in other institutes. The same stands for additional training in moral theology and the art of preaching. In faithfulness to our charism, which presupposes the preferential option for the poor, there should be opportunities for really coming close to the most abandoned.

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* 1. That each unit implement the Ratio Formationis for the Brothers in the formation programs of their Unit.
  2. That the Regions encourage meetings of formators and, where possible, exchange of academic staff.
  3. That the units give special attention to the transition from initial formation to other apostolic communities in the unit.
  4. That the units keep in mind that formation is a life-long project. We need continual personal and community renewal and updating in order to be of greater service to the mission. Continuing formation programs should be directed to this end.

##### Spirituality and Lay Collaboration

The XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That each unit, within the parameters of its own culture, continue to clarify and intensify the different levels of lay collaboration essential to the effective fulfillment of our mission, and in particular, that of “Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer.”
  2. That as an expression of our openness to Lay Collaborators, communities find creative new ways to pray with them.
  3. That our communities be more open to welcome and integrate lay people in their lives, while respecting the identities of both lay people and Redemptorists.
  4. That we open our resources for the formation of lay collaborators and Redemptorists for our mutual integration.

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* 1. That we foster the bonds between Redemptorists and

those religious sisters who share our Charism, especially the Redemptoristines.

##### Spirituality and Youth Ministry

We want to affirm the importance of youth ministry: it is an urgent need in today’s pastoral ministry because young people are abandoned and have need of help to grow in faith. The future is in their hands and they are called to assume responsibility. Youth ministry is the proper place where young people discover meaning for their lives and their proper vocation.

Therefore, the XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That our communities and our parishes make a serious effort to care for youth: by closeness to them, by creating groups of young people, by opening the doors of our houses, by allowing ourselves to catch their energy and their joy and by carefully assuring that these groups never become elitist.
  2. That experiments in the formation of open communities be encouraged which integrate Redemptorist confreres and young adults living together. These communities will be able to welcome other youth.

##### Spirituality and Government

The XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That, given the present decentralization, all the units are invited to increase the sense of effective collaboration with the whole Congregation as a large community of brothers, in communion with the General Government.

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* 1. This mutual solidarity must be effective especially in the regions, and above all, in the areas recommended in these orientations.
  2. That all superiors receive an adequate formation to be the spiritual animators of their units and communities. The Pastoral Guide for Superiors is one instrument available to help in this task.

##### Sources for our Spirituality

The XXII General Chapter recommends:

* 1. That each unit continue a thorough study of the Constitutions and Statutes.
  2. That the practice of annual common retreats be revived where it is possible, and affirmed where it is already the norm.
  3. That the confreres be encouraged to participate in ongoing formation in scripture, theology, moral theology. We can make good use of programs that are already available in collaboration with other religious and lay people.
  4. That the works of St. Alphonsus, and the more recent studies on him, St. Clement, and our Redemptorist heritage in general be promoted in the local communities.

1. 5 That we read and study the postsynodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata* in our communities.

9.6 That, recognizing the value of the great religious traditions of the world, we encourage the confreres to engage in inter-religious

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dialogue, searching for the truth with our brothers and sisters of different religious traditions.

##### Accountability

10.1 The General Chapter recomends that the General Government hold meetings of major superiors and regional superiors in the regions by the mid-point of the sexennium to evaluate the response of the units to the XXII General Chapter.

*(The original text is English)*

#### POSTULATA APPROVED BY THE GENERAL CHAPTER

###### *The postulata are grouped thematically*

*(The official language and the original numeration of the postulata on which they were voted appear within parenthesis)*

1. **The General Chapter**

1.1 Instructions to the XXII Chapter - 1997 (Alternative to 211.English)

* 1. The Chapter prepare a brief, simple, short, direct and concise statement addressed to the whole Congregation.
  2. The Chapter direct its attention principally to defining the directives for the next sexennium as demanded by Constitutions 107 and 109a.
  3. The message and the directives approved by the Chapter shall be made known immediately to the whole Congregation.
  4. The new General Government shall then present a document to the Congregation (*Communicanda*) which shall comment and give a more profound interpretation of the message and the directives mentioned above.

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* 1. Evaluation of the Chapter (413-English)

1. The General Government conduct a thorough evaluation of the methodology employed at the XXII General Chapter.
2. The Norms of Procedure be revised in the light of this evaluation, and, if possible, these revised Norms of Procedure be presented to the regional meeting at the mid-point of the sexennium.
   1. Representation within the Chapter (Alternative to 202. English)

A revision of the legislation on representation at the General Chapter be undertaken in order:

* that all professed members have active voice;
* that the legislation on passive voice remain unchanged.
  1. Preparation for the next General Chapter (411-Es. Spanish)

The Chapter asks that the preparation of the XXIII General Chapter end with the redaction of an *Instrumentum laboris* that gathers the most salient elements of the Reports of the General Government and of the pre-chapter meetings into an organic synthesis, and that serves as the basic text for the reflection and decisions of the Chapter members. The General Government, either directly or through a commission of experts, is responsible for the redaction of this *Instrumentum laboris*.

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##### Changes in the law

* 1. Blessed Sarnelli

(104, added to the text of Gen. Stat. 05. Latin)

*... and most recently Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli, faithful companion of St. Alphonsus.*

* 1. Length of time in government

(101: modifies General Statute 094-b. Latin)

b. So that superiors do not remain in office continuously for too long a period, (Vice-)provincial statutes must decide

* the length of time that members may hold the office of local superior without an interval;
* the length of time that members may hold the office of (Vice-)Provincial superior; not, however, for more than three triennia.
  1. (Vice-)Provincial assembly with rights of Chapter (102: modifies n. 602-g of the Directory of Chapters)

If more than one-third of the professed members of the (Vice-) province are not personally present, apart from those who have been excused by the legitimate authority because of ill health or some other personal reason, the assembly cannot be held as a Chapter.

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##### Community life

* 1. Plan of community life (215. Spanish)

The General Chapter insists that all the communities of the Congregation produce each triennium a plan of community life, with yearly programs based on: consecrated life, fraternal life and the Redemptorist apostolate. This plan must be approved by the (Vice-)Provincial government.

* 1. International communities (Alternative to 103-204-209/1-English)

The General Chapter supports the efforts by the General Government to aid regions in the establishment and/ or maintenance of interprovincial, and even international, Redemptorist communities where the needs of ministry and/or apostolic community suggest such interprovincial communities are appropriate.

* 1. Open communities (303. English)

The General Chapter recommends to the new General Government to clarify the concept of “open community” and to promote it, taking into account the deliberations of the General Chapter of 1997.

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##### Life in the Spirit

* 1. Program of renewal (213. English)

The General Chapter directs the General Government to develop a renewal program for the confreres based on Alphonsian and Redemptorist sources, if possible at the historic Alphonsian sites.

* 1. Courses of spirituality (219. English)

The General Chapter mandates the next General Council to pursue the idea of providing more courses on spirituality in a form which is appropriate (e.g.: at a centre and/or through a mobile team.)

##### Brothers

* 1. “Ratio Formationis” of Brothers (216. English)

Taking into account the new Ratio Formationis for the Brothers, produced by the General Secretariat for the Brothers, each (V)Province should have a concrete program for the promotion of vocations and initial formation for the Brothers, which shall include the various stages of formation up to perpetual profession.

* 1. Study opportunities for Brothers (205. English)

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The Brothers who desire and present the need to obtain an

academic degree or other qualification to enhance their apostolic life, in accordance with the needs of each unit, be granted that opportunity.

* 1. Role of the Brothers (410-E. English)

The question of the Brothers’ role in the Congregation must be thoroughly reflected upon by the General Government. During the sexennium it should launch a process of reflection at all levels of the Congregation in order to present the next General Chapter with some mature suggestions. This process should develop a method which would assure that Brothers received adequate consideration in the process of choosing the members of the General Council. In this process, the Secretariat for the Brothers should have a significant role.

* 1. Secretariat for the Brothers (210. English)

The Secretariat for the Brothers should continue during the coming sexennium.

* 1. Representation of Brothers (214. English)

In order to affirm the equality of Brothers with other members of the Congregation, the General Chapter directs the Superior General to continue to work in union with other Superiors General to effectively bring representation before the Holy See for the changing of those elements of Canon Law which are restrictive of eligibility for office in a clerical Congregation.

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##### The presence of the Congregation in Africa

(218/1-French)

The General Chapter still considers Africa as a priority for the Congregation. Consequently, it demands the General Government to intensify the assistance of the Congregation in personnel and finance.

##### Collaboration with the laity

* 1. Communicanda 4 (302. English)

The General Chapter stresses the necessity that all units of the Congregation implement Communicanda 4, in order that collaboration between Redemptorists and laity progress in a positive manner.

* 1. Redemptorists and laity (305. English)

The General Chapter stresses once again the necessity of an adequate preparation of Redemptorists for collaboration with the laity, both on the level of initiation and of permanent formation, so that this dimension becomes adequately developed in all formation projects.

* 1. Formation of the laity (304. English)

The General Chapter, in order to guarantee the formation of lay people corresponding to the different forms of their participation in

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Redemptorist Mission, asksthe General Government: 1) tostimulate and help the (Vice-)Provinces to develop formation programs for lay collaborators, 2) to formulate, if General Government considers it opportune, the Ratio Formationis for the Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer.

* 1. Participation of the laity at the General Chapter (301. English)

The Chapter asks the General Council to examine the question of the participation of our lay collaborators in General Chapters, and authorizes the General Council, if the Council deems it opportune, to provide for such participation at the next General Chapter.

##### The ministry of Moral Theology

* 1. Commission for Moral and Pastoral Theology (307. Spanish)

The Chapter recommends that the General Government create a Permanent Commission for studies in Moral and Pastoral Theology in the Congregation.

This commission will have as its objective to promote mutual exchange of and reflection in common by Redemptorist theologians, especially by means of general and regional congresses. Also, the General Government could give them other tasks related to the promotion and coordination of studies in Moral and Pastoral Theology.

By means of this recommendation the Chapter wants to uphold a claim on our mission that is expressed in Constitution

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90: “Following in the steps of our holy founder, our Congregation promotes higher studies of the sacred sciences, in order to attain its missionary purpose more successfully.”

* 1. Tribute to Father Haring (000-Es. Spanish)

The General Chapter recognizes with gratitude and satisfaction, the academic and pastoral contributions that Father Bernhard Haring has rendered and continues to render in the field of Moral Theology.

Remaining faithful, in a creative ecumenical way, to the valid traditions of the christian communities, and following, as well, the intuitions of Saint Alphonsus, Father Bernhard Häring has worked intensely, courageously and effectively to reformulate the message of Christian morality for the world of today. We value in his extensive work, both oral and written, above all:

* his understanding of moral behavior within the mystery of Christ;
* the importance that he has given to the moral conscience of each believer;
* his emphasizing the spiritual and pastoral dimension of moral theological reflection.

On expressing this recognition to Father Häring, the Chapter prays that he receive, as the Lord’s special gift to him on his 85th birthday, an increase of apostolic charity, “the principle that unifies the entire life” of every Redemptorist. (Const. 52)

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##### Government and Administration

* 1. Restructuring (407. English)

The General Chapter requests the General Government to continue the process initiated in the 1991 General Chapter Final Document number 62 which states: “This process should focus on two principal points: a) to help units that have fallen below the personnel requirements of Gen. Stat. 088, as well as groups of units that are showing signs of decline in personnel; b) to stimulate renewed pastoral initiatives not easily managed by single units alone.”

* 1. Regions of the Congregation (Alternative to 201. French)

The General Chapter recognizes in the Regions the role of coordination between the different Units of the region -at the level of their life and mission-. Consequently, the General Chapter gives a mandate to the General Government, as one of the priorities of the coming sexennium, to see with each region, how it can improve solidarity between the different Units in all areas of Redemptorist life.

* 1. Analysis of administration (408,1. English)

The General Chapter recommends that an analysis of the whole administration of the General Government, including job description, should be made so that the General Government could function more effectively, and to reduce undue tension of confreres doing too many tasks, that rightfully do not belong to the position. The analysis should be made by a professional Consulting firm.

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* 1. A plant-manager for Sant’ Alfonso in Rome (408,2. English)

Because of the serious obligations of the Treasurer General we recommend: There should be a plant manager, who supervises the buildings of the General Government, the shops and the apartments, and we suggest that he supervise the whole complex including Casa St. Alfonso and the Accademia, the legitimate autonomy and internal statutes of both being properly respected.

* 1. Increasing the Patrimony (408,5. English)

The General Chapter recommends that an adequate Patrimony of the General Government be developed by the following means:

* Donations from units, as it was done in the appeal for restructuring the buildings of the General Government and Casa St. Alfonso.
* Fund Raising should be established to cope with the ever increasing costs.
* By establishing a group of lay advisors to help develop and administer the Patrimony.
  1. Plan for increasing the Patrimony (408,6. English)

The General Government should develop an operating plan as regards increasing the Patrimony of the General Government before September of 1998.

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* 1. Solidarity Fund (105. English)

The General Chapter mandates the General Government to

further develop financial solidarity in the Congregation through the following means:

1. THE SOLIDARITY RESERVE: This reserve, as at present established, should remain in place and continue to be funded as in the past. However, financial assistance from this reserve will be limited to providing funding for more urgent cases and for specific projects.
2. SOLIDARITY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: This form of solidarity will address the on-going needs of both new foundations, and those already established but financially insecure.
3. Where the mother province is unable to fund a new unit, or where there is question of an already established unit that is financially unstable, the General Government will establish linkages between a sponsoring Unit and the developing Unit.
4. The sponsoring unit’s role will not be confined to providing financial support. It should work with the unit to help establish stewardship and management policies and procedures that will help the developing unit on the road to financial viability. Above all, it will be asked to help the unit establish a stable patrimony that will become the foundation of its eventual independence.
5. This development program will be under the care of the General Government which will determine appropriate guidelines and procedures.

#### ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

**TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER**

**Monday, 15 December 1997**

Dear Fathers of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer,

* 1. I joyfully extend my welcome to you who represent the entire spiritual family founded by St Alphonsus de’ Liguori and who, after the recent General Chapter, wished to meet the Successor of Peter to renew your devotion to him and your sentiments of full communion.

I greet Fr. Joseph William Tobin, the new Superior General, and I extend to him my best wishes for the difficult task to which he has been called. I thank Fr. Juan Manuel Lasso de la Vega, who during his years of service as the Supreme Moderator of the Redemptorists made every effort to lead the institute to an ever more conscious fidelity to the charism of the founder, the third centenary of whose death you recently celebrated.

In affectionately greeting each of you, I wish my cordial thoughts to be conveyed to all the Redemptorists, who work in the Church with generosity, skill and faithful adherence to the Gospel.

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* 1. The anniversary of the birth of St Alphonsus was for your

institute a fitting occasion to highlight how the radical option for the Gospel, fidelity to the Word of God, profound and sincere communion with the Church and solidarity with the poor led the great Doctor of the Church to create during his era a new style of evangelization. At the same time, his example and teaching confirmed the original timeliness of his message in today’s Christian community, showing the path to follow even today, as we advance towards the third millennium.

He never ceased to emphasize how necessary it was to be faithful to the choices, the words and the style in which the Redeemer was the Gospel of God among men. In fact, in his Rule he always recommended “following the example of Jesus Christ by preaching the Word of God to the poor,” and he made himself an example and model for those who were carrying out the apostolic or pastoral ministry.

His “zeal for the house of the Lord” (cf. Ps 69 [68]:9) made him a teacher and witness for his many contemporaries, and his teaching continues today to nourish the thought and action of the Church.

His pastoral commitment, exercised with generosity and skill, drew vitality from the ardent and constant prayer that marked his life. From his intimate dialogue with the Source of Wisdom, he received the answers for enlightening, encouraging and comforting those who turned to him for guidance and support.

* 1. Dear brothers, the figure of your founder, always so timely, is a gift for the Church and a valuable encouragement for your Congregation, which is called to a renewed and enthusiastic adherence to Christ. By looking to him, you can work with

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greater generosity in the service of the new evangelization to which the whole Church is now committed. Certainly, the ways of proclaiming the Gospel must be constantly and courageously adapted to the concrete situations of the various contexts in which the Church lives, but this involves an even greater effort of fidelity to your origins, so that the apostolic style proper to your family may continue to respond to the expectations of the People of God. I know that this is the commitment that motivates you and I urge you to proceed with courage in that direction.

Be ready, dear friends, to carry out your mission among Christ’s poor with renewed vigour, proclaiming the Gospel of hope and love to them.

May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the Redeemer, whom you love with special affection, sustain you always and obtain for you abundant apostolic fruits.

With these sentiments and expressing again in the name of the Church my profound gratitude for your work in the service of the Gospel, I cordially impart my blessing to you and willingly extend it to your entire Institute.

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

#### COMMUNICANDA N. 1

**SPIRITUALITY**

**Our most important challenge**

###### *COMMUNICANDA N.1*

Nr. Prot. 0000 0028/98

Rome, February 25, 1998

Dear Confreres,

* + 1. “We always thank God for you all, and always mention you in our prayers. For we remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard and how your hope in Our Lord Jesus Christ is firm” (1 Thess 1: 2-3). Five months after the close of the XXII General Chapter and on this day, the anniversary of the Approbation of our Constitutions, we send you this document as a follow up to the Chapter, indicating as well some possible ways by which we hope to be of service to the Congregation.

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* + 1. The General Chapter entrusted to the General Government

the composition of a *Communicanda* in order to introduce a more thorough study of the Message and the orientations already sent to the whole Congregation (*Postulata of the XXII General Chapter, 1.1.4*.). You are already aware that these Chapter documents are centred on spirituality, the theme chosen for the present sexennium, in the light of which the Congregation wishes to understand and live every element of its life. The desire to treat this subject was, however, already expressed in some of the pre-chapter regional meetings, confirming that this need is felt throughout a significant part of our missionary family.

* + 1. We consider, moreover, that the choice of spirituality is in keeping with the direction taken in recent years by General Chapters. This is clear from the respective Final Documents and in particular from the commitment “to put the emphasis on the explicit, prophetic and liberating proclamation of the Gospel to the poor, allowing ourselves to be evangelised by the poor” (XXI General Chapter, *Final Document, No. 11*). In this context, the option for spirituality can be seen in all its depth and urgency.
    2. This *Communicanda* does not intend to approach the subject of spirituality in an exhaustive or scholastic manner. Rather, we wish to launch a reflection on this subject chosen by the General Chapter and offer our confrères some help to be authentically Redemptorist today. Spirituality is essentially a personal and communitarian experience of God in Christ, the Redeemer, by the work of the Holy Spirit. But we know too that this personal experience is lived out differently according to culture and region. So, we hope that this document will be taken up by each unit and studied by all the members.

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* + 1. We wish to call your attention to a certain risk of which the Chapter itself was aware. The subject of spirituality could divert us from our everyday work and from the pressing and difficult problems of the mission. Let us say at once that spirituality does not mean a turning in on oneself. Neither is it an escape from personal responsibility nor from an essential involvement in the events of our daily life. We have no desire to theorise on spirituality, but to remain keenly aware of our customary duties as well as the urgent needs which call for our effective response. In addition to our own efforts, we also depend on the collaboration of the laity, who have become closely involved in the ministry of different units. If, on the one hand, they can assimilate our spirituality by living and working with us, they likewise can help us to remain closely connected with reality and life’s daily problems.
    2. We do not want to give the impression that we are discussing this subject of spirituality simply because it is fashionable today. We are aware of the present popularity of spirituality and even its commercial success. There exists a veritable supermarket of spirituality, ranging from “New Age” to assorted esoteric sects, which seduce many of our contemporaries. This phenomenon has little in common with the demands of a revealed faith, which begins by an obedient listening to the Word and aims at a responsible encounter with a person, Jesus Christ.
    3. Spirituality is something which should unite the entire Congregation. Nonetheless, we must not forget the great diversity of its situations and expectations. This is true both of regions and cultures as well as of individuals. There are some confrères who are fortunate to possess a stable and solid spirituality, while others are confused and yet others who see themselves still searching for something which seems to elude them. These interior states, in which the grace of God mingles mysteriously with the events

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of one’s life, are not limited to any particular age group. Each unit should be aware of these different situations and adapt these reflections appropriately.

**The reasons for this choice**

* + 1. We must ask ourselves first of all: why did the Chapter choose the subject of spirituality as the most important challenge for the whole Congregation in this sexennium? A response to this question will enable us to make our first entry into the urgency of the theme. We are convinced that the following reasons provide some answers to this question. However, we expect that our thinking will be examined in each community.
    2. The Congregation has evidently identified an excessive activism in our life or, at the very least, an insufficient measure of reflection in the face of the abundant activity we undertake. We need to rediscover the deepest reasons for what we do. For Redemptorists, these reasons should bring us back essentially to a person, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer: “the one thing necessary” (Luke 10: 42). The Chapter itself clearly recognised this need when it said that our “principal concern ought to be the place which God occupies in our existence”(*Final Message, n. 3*). This is a reality we dare not ignore. We will find human fulfilment and realise ourselves as Redemptorists according to the measure in which we do indeed make God the centre of our life.
    3. A further reason for this choice by the Chapter is clearly linked to the present moment of Redemptorist history. Many of us remember our formation -- we refer to the years preceding the Second Vatican Council -- which was greatly inspired by the norms and values of *observance*. In the wake of the Council, another

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understanding became popular and emphasised the fulfilment of the person and his *freedom*. The events of recent years suggest that these models are not mutually exclusive. If in the judgement of some, the first model had at times favoured “an observance without heart,” in the opinion of others, the second model at times created “a freedom without direction.” As a frequent result, dialogue within the community has just been marking time, apostolic projects proved to be of short duration and there came about a crisis of identity. We believe that the General Chapter saw in spirituality an element capable of making sense of the concept of freedom in community by outlining a possible and more credible way forward for the immediate future.

* + 1. The urgent choice of spirituality may have yet another explanation. We live in an era of constant change and of ever increasing technological progress, even though not on at an equal rate in all the Regions. It requires an effort to keep in step with the times in which we live. Not only technological and scientific changes but, in a more profound way, the cultural changes that surround us severely test the standards by which we live. If in the past our Rule, our traditions, heroic confrères or the saints on our altars have all constituted certain credible points of reference for us, today we find ourselves unsure as we face a new world in which the relevance of these models is not easily recognised.

To be able to speak convincingly of “*following Christ*” in a world which apparently has no one to follow, we ourselves need a steady anchor which prevents us from drifting with the tide and living in a purely superficial manner. We recognise the need for something which would help us achieve a synthesis within ourselves in order to arrive at an inner cohesion, independent of external factors that are forever changing. This “something” the Chapter has glimpsed in spirituality.

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* + 1. Our difficulty in achieving this inner cohesion has roots,

too, in some developments in theological thinking. Consider how much more broadly the notion of Redemption has been conceived in recent times. Those of us who have been formed with a certain emphasis on the salvation of the soul, have gradually seen this concept extended to include the salvation of the whole human person (*Const.* 5) and we now understand that *Copiosa Redemptio* places us in a new relationship with other cultures and religions. We cannot exclude from its scope such issues as ecology, the defence of human rights, etc. On the purely theoretical level it is not difficult to understand this relationship, but in practice how many of us have experienced a decrease of missionary zeal, precisely because we are faced with a new purpose which often seems to be beyond our own personal resources?

* + 1. We have had many opportunities for study and ongoing formation, whether on extraordinary occasions, such as the centenaries of our saints, beatifications, etc, or in the normal programme of the various Units. We have to admit, however, that a profound renewal of our life is not always commensurate with the considerable effort made in organising these initiatives. We must surely admit that we feel in the deepest part of ourselves that rupture between faith and life which continues to be one of the disconcerting signs of our time. Precisely because we have so many possibilities to increase our knowledge and be renewed, we are all the more distressed by the difficulty we experience in incarnating in our ordinary life all that we are learning.
    2. Our way of praying reflects clearly this dichotomy between faith and life. Already the Chapter of 1991 recalled that “we abandoned ‘spiritual practices’ considered inauthentic or unsuited to the present day without substituting others capable of filling the vacuum produced” (*Final Document, n. 33*). This has resulted in the

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recurrent lack of a programme of common prayer and, in general, in a certain spiritual void in which many confrères have difficulty in finding their way. Given the spiritually listless atmosphere of some communities, we might well ask ourselves whether it is legitimate to speak of these as a religious community at all? We have to ask if it is right, in the light of our consecration, to be passively resigned to such a secularised ambience. We must ask ourselves if this manner of presenting our community life -- or rather not presenting it -- can have even a minimal attraction for the younger generation? Each confrere must search for his own personal responsibility in this area.

* + 1. This spiritual void has often been the reason for confrères searching elsewhere for other forms of spirituality or ecclesial movements: seeking outside what they could not find within the community. No one, of course, can be denied the right to his own personal spiritual development. But where this phenomenon continues to exist, certain questions should be asked. Is the community capable of creating a suitable environment for the fulfilment of the confrères? Does it offer that human space necessary for the expression of our deepest desires? Does it seek to respond to these desires in the context of “a well ordered community” (*Const*. 44-45; *Stat.* 041) and in an satisfactory programme of prayer?
    2. We cannot remain indifferent either to the number of confrères who leave the Congregation after a few years of profession or ministry. The very fact that some of them are still unhappy after leaving makes it imperative to ask if we have helped them to fulfil themselves humanly and spiritually. Even though similar phenomena have appeared in periods before ours and are perceived in other religious families as well, we cannot exempt ourselves from posing certain questions. What did these confrères seek and

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not find in a Redemptorist community? Do we consider ourselves fraternally responsible for each other’s vocation? These questions naturally ought to make us think not only of the confrères who leave, but also of those who, while remaining in the Congregation, have nonetheless adopted, in an imperceptible way, an aimless style of life which calls in question the very basic reasons for our living together.

* + 1. In a more general sense, we must admit that in our daily life, in our interpersonal relations and in our pastoral work, we do not always succeed in communicating the real reasons for our consecration and our ministry, answering “anyone who asks us to explain the hope we have in us” (1 Pet 3: 15). Have we learned to share our religious experiences among ourselves? What would the world lack today if suddenly it were deprived of the Redemptorist charism? What have the insights of Alphonsus to say to our culture? Are we succeeding in showing how our Redemptorist spirituality is contemporary and apt for today and are we offering it to the laity that they may share it? Are we proposing it to young people as a way of life ? In what way do we understand ourselves to be “a school of true evangelical spirituality”(*Vita Consecrata*, 93)?
    2. These questions not only call for serious consideration, but also for an effort to recover our particular identity and to restore our authentic family milieu. Perhaps a good way of gauging where we stand spiritually is the measure to which, as individuals and as members of a community, we are content and at peace. We all ought to recover a sense of belonging and a healthy pride in being a Redemptorist. Perhaps this is the fundamental reason which led the General Chapter to opt for spirituality.

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##### Elements of Redemptorist spirituality

* + 1. Those who took part in the XXII General Chapter, followed it via the Internet or have read the Final Message, the Orientations and the Postulata, are aware of what the Chapter wanted to say to the Congregation. They have probably noticed that the Chapter spoke more frequently of spirituality rather than Redemptorist spirituality. We do not suggest that there exists a dichotomy between these values. Basic spirituality lived out according to our proper vocation becomes Redemptorist spirituality. Here we wish merely to draw attention to the language of the Chapter. Its insistence on the use of the simple word “spirituality” implies at least three consequences.
    2. **The first** is that we are becoming aware of the need to return to the fundamentals of our spiritual life. Much more than any specific knowledge of our charism, we need to rediscover the true structure of a life of faith and the basic meaning of our consecration. If knowledge of our specifically Redemptorist charism becomes an end in itself, it runs the risk of becoming simply an academic exercise.
    3. **The second** consequence is that we must not err by being short sighted, that is, by focussing our attention simply on what is specific to us and forgetting the wider horizon of spirituality in which the Redemptorist charism is to be found. “In the vast holy Church, the Congregation is not a side chapel. Its mission places it right in the choir of the Church, where the altar is and where is celebrated the Passover of Christ for the salvation of the world. It is called to perform that which is essential, to prolong Christ and the process of salvation which is in Christ. What then is its specific mission within the whole Church? *Its specific mission is*

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*to carry out the essential mission of the Church, fully and intensively*” (F. X. Durrwell, C.Ss.R). We cannot claim that our spirituality has exclusive elements, marking us out as distinctive in the Church. Many of the factors traditionally considered as Redemptorist -- preaching to the poor, parish missions and the *Devout Life* -- can be found in other forms of spirituality and in other religious families. It is rather the manner in which these elements are bound together which, in a certain sense, characterises us. This manner in its turn includes many other factors: personal life-style, how we relate to others, how we speak to them and a specially friendly community atmosphere. All these elements make those who approach us and know us well say instinctively “he is a Redemptorist.”

* + 1. **A third** consequence**,** and surely the most important, is that the choice of spirituality, even before that of “Redemptorist spirituality” obliges each one of us to focus our attention on our personal relation with Christ, to see if this is “the primary motivating force of our way of life” (*Final Message*, n. 1). “Whatever the context, we believe that all Redemptorists are being called at this time to focus on a central aspect of our spirituality, i.e., on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus (*Final Message*, n. 3). It is the Holy Spirit who ceaselessly draws us to this relationship and energises it. It is He who awakens the desire to respond fully, making each one of us configured to Christ (*Vita Consecrata*, 19). It is He who convinces our intellect, making it accept in joy and love what in the eyes of the world may appear as foolishness.
    2. Turning more directly to our Redemptorist spirituality, we will find in our Constitutions ample material to define it. By praying them and studying them, we can understand the meaning of our vocation and the essential traits which characterise it. These pages provide us with the means to understand the various aspects of our Redemptorist identity, which substantially consists in “the

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following of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor” (*Const.*1). A growing familiarity with our “Rule of Life” will enable us to discover a cohesive vision of our spirituality which will otherwise remain rather vague and intangible.

* + 1. In the light of this basic choice and of our tradition which has developed from it, we can single out some constituent elements among which we must always distinguish what is essential from that which is peripheral. We draw these to your attention without claiming to have the final word or to follow a strict methodology:

y We are Redemptorists: our spirituality is rooted in the theology of the Incarnation.

y We are missionaries and therefore essentially proclaimers of the Gospel, the heart of which is mercy.

y The Redemptorist is “popular” in that he has an easy way with people and uses simple language.

y Redemptorist spirituality is at once the source and the fruit of Mission (*Final Message,* n. 6).

y The Redemptorist has compassion for the poor.

y Our pastoral involvement, especially with the poor and abandoned people, is a constitutive element of our spiri- tuality (*Final Message*, n. 8).

* + 1. We believe likewise that our devotion to the Mother of Perpetual Help should be greater and more apparent in our spirituality. The zeal and creativity of Redemptorists have made this icon the most widely known in the world; it can help to make our charism better understood. Furthermore, the title of “Perpetual Help” is completely in line with the meaning of “*Copiosa Redemptio.*”

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* + 1. Our spirituality has a communitarian dimension. It is

in community that we absorb it. It needs to be evident in certain community structures, especially in the common celebration of the Word of God, the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist (cf. *Const*. 27). As we recall the story of our own vocation, we will admit that we did not learn spirituality from books, but rather from our confrères: from their life-style, from their particular way of carrying out their apostolate, which we observed and gradually assimilated.

From its very beginning, our Congregation was characterised by the way it made certain pastoral decisions. For example, Christ’s preference for the poor was represented in the founding of our houses in more remote places, inhabited by the most abandoned people. This should lead us to ask ourselves if today we are really seen by others to be giving concrete witness to this preference in the places where we minister, and if our community and apostolic structures are consonant with this witness.

* + 1. The choice which the Chapter has made in favour of Redemptorist spirituality is therefore of vital importance for us, at least for three basic reasons:

y *a psychological reason*, meaning that in our spirituality our very identity is at stake. It is on the Redemptorist charism that we have wagered our lives. It is through this intuition of the Spirit that we first discovered the person we should be. The particular difficulties of our times or the inadequa- cy of our structures are of course problems, but they can be overcome if we all have at heart a similar objective;

y *a theological reason*, recalling the words of our Founder: “God wishes all of us to be saints, each one according to his state; the religious as religious, the secular as a secular,

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the priest as a priest, the married as married, the merchant as merchant, the soldier as a soldier and so on of any other state” (Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, Opere Asceti- che, 1, p. 79). If each one is called to be a saint according to their state in life, we also are called to embrace our si- tuation and to search as Redemptorists for the will of God today;

y *an apostolic reason*, reminding us that to go to the poor without bringing God with us runs the risk of merely ex- ploiting them. It was from his experience of the love of God that Alphonsus better understood the needs of the poor. If we devalue our spiritual life and still claim to be credible in the eyes of the poor, we are deluding ourselves and deceiving the poor. Our apostolic work itself is open to failure.

##### Some reflections on our life

* + 1. “We believe that the Congregation is being offered today a great grace of conversion to the Redeemer.” This phrase from the Final Message of the Chapter (n. 5) risks being taken for just another of the many recommendations for the renewal of our life which often go unobserved. In certain cases it has become difficult to face up to the problem of conversion, for fear of challenging what have come to be regarded as acquired rights or sacrosanct life- styles. The Chapter’s emphasis on spirituality is not meant to foster in us a sense of guilt or failure, but rather to open us here and now, if we so desire, to the newness of God. “Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Is 43: 19).

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* + 1. Every conversion is for *today*. “O that *today* you would

hear his voice! Harden not your hearts” (Ps 95: 8). Given our present situation, to defer this conversion could be fatal for the future of the Congregation and for the very purpose of our mission. *Today* we must understand more clearly what it means to continue the work of the Redeemer among the abandoned. *Today* we discover how the world is suffering from a spiritual hunger and thirst. *Today* we perceive that this hunger and this thirst are more acute because of the lengths to which these needs are masked or exploited. *Today* we still have at our disposition sufficient personal and moral energy to make concrete and courageous decisions.

* + 1. The choice of spirituality implies that we urgently recover a fundamental conviction, whose genuineness will be gauged by the extent to which it sustains our apostolic mission. We are called to develop “a contemplative outlook on life” (*Orientations*, Introduction) in such a way that we rediscover the richness of our interior life (cf. Const. 24). Exploring this life more deeply, we can speak with God as sons and recall the steps which He has taken in the story of each one of us as he drew us to Himself. In order to be credible Redemptorists, each one of us must really believe that he himself is redeemed. Obviously a style of life which is perpetually superficial, incapable of meditation or concentration on the Word of God or even to observe silence, is not a sound foundation for any form of spirituality. The problem becomes all the more crucial when this state of affairs has become the life-style of the community. It is understandable that there are times when it is not easy to preserve a climate of silence and prayer, either in community or on mission. Nevertheless, each community should address this problem and seek the most appropriate way to correct the imbalance between the felt need for spirituality on the one hand, and on the other, the times and methods of prayer which ought to be in place to satisfy this need both at the personal and community level.

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* + 1. If conversion causes us to look *within (ad intra)*, it should invite us simultaneously to look *outwards (ad extra)* to the Church and the Kingdom of God, within which our charism has its meaning. In practice, this requires that we establish right relations with the local ecclesial structures, that we come to know better the charisms of others and that we be ever more generous in our service. It also requires us to commit ourselves to know more about how the Congregation lives and carries out its charism today, often heroically and creatively, in the different Regions of the world. We ought to strive to have a far greater appreciation of the real value of the service the Congregation offers to the Church and to the world.
    2. This turning outwards requires us above all to approach the subject of spirituality having as a criterion our service to the mission. “Our spirituality is also shaped by the challenge to enter into the struggles of the poor, where Jesus is revealed as a suffering servant” (*Final Message*, n. 6). Hence in common with the Capitulars, all of us must ask ourselves “in what practical ways our commitment to the poor is an expression of our spirituality, and in what ways it helps us to develop a more authentic spirituality” (*Final Message*, n. 8).
    3. It is important that we keep these questions in mind when considering spirituality and in deciding on our style of personal and community prayer. It usually happens that our spirituality is shaped by events which affect us personally and cause us to ask ourselves serious questions: by news which upsets us, by moments of conflict within ourselves and with others, at certain stages of our life when we are particularly tormented. We believe that a Redemptorist, in both personal and community prayer, always must have at heart the cry of the poor, their insecurity and problems of daily life, and the unjust and oppressive situations in which they find themselves.

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This will enable him not only to contribute his share to the *Copiosa Redemptio*, but to purify still more his vision in the service of a generous and effective apostolate.

* + 1. Spirituality challenges each one of us to identify ourselves with the poor. It was when face to face with the poor that many Redemptorists, beginning with St. Alphonsus, experienced a decisive conversion. Has this challenge had any concrete repercussions on our life-style, making us more satisfied with what is simple and essential? Are we sufficiently on our guard against the risk of consumerism ? How can our ears remain sympathetic to the poor, when the noise of the world deafens us to their voice and our way of life is so different from theirs?
    2. Likewise this spirituality inspired by our concern for the poor should lead us to serious reflection on the society in which we live. All of us should strive to understand the theological and apostolic reasons for our desire to serve the poor at this time in our history, when the collapse of great ideologies has resulted in those who were already abandoned becoming more marginalised. We must have the courage to make a new start from questions like the following: In what way is our spirituality a sign of contradiction for the society in which we live? Does our being in the world make us resigned in an uncritical and passive way to the logic of the world (Jn 17: 11, 14)? Are we conforming ourselves to society or are we a sign for it? Is our proclamation of the Gospel and our living out of the Redemptorist charism prophetic? Is our charism sufficiently clear and credible so as to attract young people? Where do we stand in the dialogue with other Churches, religions and cultures?
    3. These questions may appear demanding to the point of discouragement and may give the impression that the General

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Government regards the present and future of the Congregation with a certain pessimism. On the contrary, we want to say categorically that we have great confidence in the role that history is calling us to play in our present service of the Church. Spirituality, moreover, offers us the occasion to be more credible in this role and more effective in our service. Our history gives us confidence because in it we can find roots sufficiently deep to still produce sap today. Even today our Redemptorist tradition presents the extraordinary witness of holy and happy confrères, who, while certainly not free from problems, even humanly speaking find fulfilment in their Redemptorist vocation. Their enthusiastic communion with Christ, the Redeemer, and their readiness to recognise him in the poor tell us that the “challenge” continues, because Christ (Mt 28:

20) and the poor (Mk 14: 7) are always with us. We shall never lack the “prime matter” for our generous dedication! And the spirituality with which the Redemptorists have always carried out this dedication will not cease to be sufficient for our times.

* + 1. All Superiors are called to grapple with the many problems characteristic of our era. Faced with the manifold demands made on them, and especially without those helps which were once in place, such as the Rule, the fixed time-table, absolute obedience, etc, they can feel unprepared and discouraged. Spirituality challenges them to examine the profound reasons for their service: fraternal love and attention to the well-being of the confreres. It asks them to be pastors before administrators. This spirituality, which should be the source and inspiration of their service to the community, will doubtlessly serve to bring to Superiors a renewed sense of purpose and the confidence to generously continue their ministry.

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##### Conclusion

* + 1. We feel that this Communicanda should help in the process of discernment already set in motion by the General Chapter, particularly where it is just getting under way. It is a process from which no one, beginning with the members of the General Government itself, should feel dispensed. The choice of the General Chapter will become effective if it finds a response in initiatives and projects promoted at local level. Even if it be necessary to attend programmes organised at (V)Provincial level, (formation courses, days of reflection, assemblies or Chapters), it is also true that each community can and should provide occasions for reflection and decision on the subject of spirituality. These could be revision of life or days devoted to the study and practice of prayer. These occasions would provide an opportunity to produce together that “plan of community life” requested by the General Chapter *(Postulata* 3.1).
    2. The Orientations on the Subject of Spirituality, taken together with this Communicanda, should be of great help in the implementation of the Chapter’s choice of spirituality. In entrusting these Orientations to the different Units, the Chapter has provided them with substantial material for possible initiatives and projects at local level. In them, each Unit should discern what is necessary and suitable for its own situation. It would be well to keep in mind in this context the help which we can receive from the Redemptoristines, from our collaborators and from the Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer.

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* + 1. For its part, the General Government proposes to develop “a renewal programme for the confrères, based on Alphonsian and Redemptorist sources, if possible at the historic Alphonsian sites”(*Postulata*, 4.1) and to “pursue the idea of providing more courses in spirituality in a form which is appropriate” (*Postulata* 4.2). We recall that “meetings of major superiors and regional superiors in the Regions are planned for the mid-point of the sexennium to evaluate the response of the Units to the XXII General Chapter” (*Orientations on Spirituality*, 10.1). In addition, the meetings of newly elected Major Superiors, already experienced as positive in the last sexennium, are to continue. Furthermore we believe that this Communicanda can and ought to be of help during the visits of the General Government to the (V)Provinces, as it provides ample material for discussion and for its application in real situations. However, we consider the collaboration of the (V)Provinces to be indispensable in carrying out these programmes and, even more important, we need to have a response from the various (V)Provinces which answers at least these questions: What points of the Communicanda most closely reflect the problems at local level? What concrete decisions are to be taken? What help is expected from the General Government?
    2. We entrust, dear confrères, this series of reflections to the fruitful and creative action of the Holy Spirit in this year which the Church wishes to dedicate in a particular way to the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. May He “make us savour his friendship, fill us with His joy and consolation, help us to overcome moments of difficulty and to rise up with trust after we have fallen; may he make us mirrors of the divine beauty. May he give us the courage to face the challenges of our time and the grace to bring all mankind the goodness and loving kindness of our Saviour Jesus Christ” (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 111) .

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To all of you our most cordial and fraternal greetings, which we

ask you to convey to our Sisters, the Redemptoristines, to the other women religious of the Alphonsian family, to our Co-operators and to the Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer.

On behalf of the General Council,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.,

Superior General

*(The original text is Italian)*

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

#### COMMUNICANDA N. 2

**I AM RUINED**

**IF I DO NOT PREACH THE GOSPEL (1 Cor 9: 16)**

###### *COMMUNICANDA N. 2*

Prot. N° 0000 0200/98

Rome, January 14, 1999

Feast of Blessed Peter Donders

My dear Confreres,

1. It gives me great pleasure to greet you in the name of all the members of General Council. This second Communicanda of the present sexennium is published on the feast of Blessed Peter Donders, Redemptorist missionary to Surinam, whose life was not distinguished by extraordinary talents but by limitless generosity. It is very appropriate to offer you this reflection, which concerns the nature of a missionary spirituality, on the day when we celebrate the life of a confrere who found holiness in a life dedicated to preaching the Gospel among the most abandoned poor.

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1. The preparation of this *Communicanda* has involved

Redemptorists beyond the members of the General Council. During the first week of May 1998, letters were sent to thirty- two confreres across the world. Each recipient was asked to give his own understanding of a portion of the last General Chapter’s *Final Message*: “Spirituality is at once the source and fruit of Mission. Mission that is not undertaken as an expression of a deep commitment to Jesus is doomed to failure…” (n. 6).

1. Nearly three-quarters of those invited had answered by September. The depth of their reflection, as well as their evident love of the Congregation, have greatly encouraged the Council. If the content of this *Communicanda* is useful to the Congregation, then credit must be given to the wisdom of my brothers on the General Council and to the insight of these confreres who contributed their experience, strength and hope from distant lands.
2. On the other hand, I accept responsibility for the shortcomings of this letter, in which I wish to offer a few simple observations about “missionary spirituality.” My own limitations and the culture that has formed me leave a certain imprint on these words. Nevertheless, my hope is that they will contribute to a dialogue through which we will arrive at some common vision that will enable us to inspire each other, and give us the courage necessary to embrace our particular vocation in the Church and world of the twenty-first century.

**Three preliminary observations**

1. There are three observations that I would make at the beginning of this letter. First, it is evident to the General Council that the theme proposed by the last Chapter has struck a chord in

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the experience of most confreres. The visitations we have made, our participation in provincial assemblies and the correspondence we have received from the different units convince us that there is a lively interest in spirituality in most parts of the Congregation. Why is this so?

1. I will not attempt to repeat or amplify the arguments we proposed in the first *Communicanda*, except to say that the appeal of spirituality may reflect our need to go beyond a paradigm of the consecrated life that is proposed only in theological, pastoral, moral or liturgical language, valid as these models may be. We also seek an ideal that is rooted in authentic and lived experience, both personal and communal.
2. Secondly, while taking note of the generally positive response to the proposals of the General Chapter, the members of the Council are also aware of the difficulties connected with a deeper reflection on spirituality. It is a constant challenge to discover some degree of precision in the language we use when we want to speak about the subject. For example, it seems helpful to distinguish between spirituality and ascetical practices. Of course, the two are not unrelated; the spirituality of an individual or a group seems to require some concrete expression, if it is not to remain simply a collection of ideas.
3. Thirdly, beyond a technique for prayer or a cherished devotion, spirituality is connected with basic and often unsettling questions: Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live? These are spiritual questions and, as such, touch upon the realities that define human existence. Humility and a listening heart are indispensable prerequisites for this reflection. When we attempt to define spirituality, we discover not its limitations, but our own.

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##### Towards a missionary spirituality

1. It is not advantageous, in my judgement, to speak about

spirituality and mission. The use of the conjunction is infelicitous, for it can suggest that there could be mission without spirituality or that spirituality, at least as we understand it, could exist in some way divorced from mission. In their responses, several confreres observed that spirituality touches on our self-understanding as Redemptorists: what Alphonsus sometimes calls the “spirit of our Institute.” Considered in this way, the spirituality of our Congregation ought to address fundamental questions, such as those suggested in the previous paragraph. More that a set of doctrinal principles or ascetical practices, our spirituality should serve as a sort of vital connective tissue that harmoniously joins all aspects of our life.

1. I find a very succinct statement of our missionary spirituality in the cry of Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: *I am ruined if I do not preach the Gospel!* (1 Cor 9: 16). “Preach the Gospel” means more than giving a mission sermon, a retreat conference or a Sunday homily, more than denouncing injustice or teaching people to pray. In fact, the reality goes beyond any single form of pastoral activity. What does it mean and why is its meaning so fundamental to us that, if I am right, we are “ruined” if we do not “preach the Gospel”?
2. Do you recall which was the only one of our constitutions that found its way into the Final Message of the last General Chapter? The capitulars took pains to insert a goodly portion of Constitution 5 into their communication to the Congregation (cf. *Final Message*, n. 8). This constitution uses unequivocal language to demonstrate how important it is for Redemptorists to “preach

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the Gospel”: *Preference for situations where there is pastoral need, that is, for evangelization in the strict sense together with the choice in favor of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church and is the badge of its fidelity to the vocation it has received*.

1. I will argue that two clear and connected criteria in fact respond to the spiritual questions: *Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live?* These criteria are preference for evangelization in the strict sense ***together with*** the choice in favor of the poor. Here evangelization is understood to include not only the explicit proclamation of the Word, but also the witness of life by individual Redemptorists and communities. To the extent that we do not accept evangelization and the choice for the poor as elements constitutive of our identity and act in consonance with them, we become unfaithful or, at least, we become something other than that which we are called to be. Paraphrasing the words of St. Paul, we are “ruined” as Redemptorists.
2. We must always keep in mind that our spirituality is intimately related to mission, but not in the sense that the demands of spirituality prod us towards pastoral work or that we “become spiritual” because of our service to the People of God. The genius of Alphonsus, an intuition that has been recovered in our renewed Constitutions, is his belief that mission gives unity to our whole life as Redemptorists. This unifying force is called the “vita apostolica”: our way of understanding what it means to be a Redemptorist, comprising “at one and the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work” (*Constitution* 1). Spirituality is vitally connected to our “preference for situations of pastoral need, that is, for evangelization in the strict sense, together with our choice for the poor.” Therefore, strictly speaking, the origin

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and source of our spirituality is found precisely in our Mission, defining it consequently as truly Missionary spirituality (cf. *Ad Gentes,* 23-27).

1. The principal aim of this letter is thus to consider with you what might be some attributes of our missionary spirituality. My sincere hope is that what follows does not sound like simple moralizing. It is rather an effort to explore with you what I believe to be some important dimensions of the *vita apostolica*.

##### Mission as vocation

1. Our Mission is not solely a personal or communal option but, first and foremost, a vocation to which we have been called. The General Chapter underlined the hope our particular vocation should afford us: “Our confidence in the future is rooted in our vocation to continue the mystery of Christ. We believe that there is no limit to His abundant redemption and hence we are impelled to share our faith and hope with everyone” (*Final Message*, 12). This affirmation of the Chapter suggests that our vocation derives not only from the Lord’s mandate to preach, teach and baptize, but also from the profound demands of God’s life within us (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 11). That is, to the degree that we open ourselves to the abundant redemption given in Christ Jesus, to that extent are we compelled to “share our faith and hope with everyone.” Hence, we might ask ourselves: how is mission an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our belief that Jesus Christ has called us to be sent as His “helpers, companions and ministers in the great work of Redemption…[to preach] the Word of God to the poor” (*Constitution,* 2)?

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1. Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit (*Ad Gentes*, 24; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75). The same Spirit which descends upon Jesus at the moment of his baptism, rests upon Him, anoints Him and sends Him forth to “proclaim glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4: 18). We Redemptorists are accustomed to repeating this text from the Gospel of Luke. We are well aware that Alphonsus makes frequent reference to this same passage, declaring that the mission of Christ is also the mission of the Congregation. Do we accept, however, the first consequence of our self-identification with the mission of Christ: that we welcome a life of complete docility to the Spirit, which “conforms us to Christ, so that we learn to view all things as Christ does” (Constitution 25)? This docility makes it possible for us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are “essential elements of missionary spirituality” (cf. *Redemptoris Missio,* 87).

##### The person of Christ at the center of our missionary life

1. Constitution 23 notes a condition for realizing our particular vocation in the Church: “Since the members are called to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of redemption in the world, they choose the person of Christ as the center of their life, and strive day by day to enter ever more intimately into personal union with him.” The Chapter echoed this requirement, giving it universal significance as well as a certain urgency: “Whatever the context, we believe that all Redemptorists are being called at this time to focus on a central aspect of our spirituality, i.e., on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus” (*Final Message*, 3). There can be no doubt that for Redemptorists, an essential characteristic of our

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Missionary spirituality is an intimate communion with Christ, the first Missionary.

1. My brothers, let us allow ourselves to be infected with the great passion of Alphonsus, for whom salvation was more than a theory or dogma but rather a Name, a Face. Our type of evangelization depends on how God’s People come to recognize Jesus in a way that they can respond to Him. Alphonsus employed all of his formidable gifts in the effort to help the poor come to know Jesus. We recall how he carried his portrait of the Crucified to the places where he would preach, how his music helped his people experience Christ’s saving love, how his words, written and spoken, pointed to the abundant redemption to be found in Christ. With Alphonsus, we must “emphasize in all our pastoral action the centrality of Christ as the mystery of the Father’s mercy” (John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter for the Tercentenary of the Birth of Saint Alphonsus*, 4).
2. Is it possible to make Christ the center of our pastoral activity, if He is not at the “center of our lives” and “at the heart of our community”? How can we judge whether in fact we make these choices? The same *Constitution* 23 gives us one criterion by which the question may be determined: “the closer their union with Christ, the stronger will become their union with each other.”
3. I would offer another standard that seems to be consonant with our practical experience. The more we choose Christ as the center of our lives and strive to enter more intimately into personal communion with him, the less absorbed we are with our own doubt, insecurity and self-obsession. We become more willing to empty ourselves, pick up our cross and follow the Redeemer. Our greatest concern becomes that Jesus is not loved as He should be.

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##### Missionary conversion

*We believe that the Congregation is being offered a great grace of conversion to the Redeemer (Final Message, 5*)

1. Recent papal doctrine on missiology and our own Constitutions concur in that the proclamation of the Word of God has conversion as its end (compare *Redemptoris Missio*, 46 and *Constitutions* 11-12). The same sources agree that we cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted every day (*Redemptoris Missio*, 47; *Constitutions* 40-42). We do not have to think too hard to discover why conversion is an essential element in a missionary spirituality. It springs from the very offer to enter into relationship with the Divine. Such an invitation first tells me: “There is a God and he is not you.” The Kingdom too is something other than me, something that must be discovered - sometimes at great sacrifice (Mt 13: 44-46); that there are choices to be made (Jn 6: 67); that one can always “turn away sad” (Mt 20: 16-22).
2. Proclamation of the Word of God has conversion as its end: the preaching of Jesus, that of His Church and, in a vivid way, the content and methods of evangelization peculiar to our Congregation, all attest to this truth. However, it is a distressing fact that more than one confrere and more than one community live in a way that proclaims “Conversion is meant for somebody else, perhaps everyone else. Don’t disturb me/us!” Could the General Chapter have been mistaken in its belief that “the Congregation is being offered a great grace of conversion to the Redeemer” (*Final Message,* 5)?

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1. Many of the confreres who helped us prepare this

*Communicanda* spoke of their ongoing transformation. Allow me to highlight three such responses. One confrere writes, “Redemptorist spirituality is by no means a ‘God-and-me’ business but rather a ‘Spirit-leading-me-to-the-poor’ enterprise.” Another, speaking of his intense experience of conversion, remarks “From that time on, I no longer speak simply because the Scriptures say so or theological or pastoral principles are in agreement; I also speak from the perspective of my own experience and thus proclaim before the people: ‘Jesus loved me and gave himself up for my sake’.” How important is conversion for our apostolic life? We will profit by considering this assertion by a confrere: “In its most basic sense, spirituality is a way of relating to God which transforms at the same time both the existence of missionaries and that of those to whom they are sent. It is the capacity of welcoming and then transmitting an experience of God (Jn 15: 4-5).”

1. How can we deepen a spirit of conversion in each of us? What value does the Sacrament of Penance and spiritual direction now hold in our lives? Are we willing and able to give conversion some sort of expression in our communities?

##### The first means of evangelization is witness

*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41)

1. Over the last years and in many parts of the Congregation there has been a growing awareness that even before activity, Mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others. The

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members of the 1991 General Chapter captured this conviction very well: “The Redemptorist community must constitute the first sign of our being preachers of the Gospel. It is not only the place from which we are sent but it is also, and above all, an effective presence of the Reign of God in the midst of men and women, our brothers and sisters…” (*Final Document*, 5.2). The Redemptorist community is a statement of faith: “we stay together in community not because we have chosen one another, but because we have been chosen by the Lord” (*Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*, 41).

1. Do you believe that our missionary spirituality calls for a particular type of witness? One confrere observes that prayer and poverty are the two outstanding features of radical spirituality in world religions. The testimony of our life of prayer should give to our proclamation the same force as the opening verse of the First Letter of John: “This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched-we speak of the word of life.”
2. Witness of a poor or, at the very least, a simple lifestyle is never an easy question for us to face. But the point is that people notice the way we live. This is the one area where we cannot help but give some kind of witness. I suspect that as we allow our “needs” to multiply, we become less mobile, more reluctant to take risks and finally, more distant from the abandoned poor. Is it too pious too observe that, if our hands are busy grasping or already full, they can never be filled by God nor reach out towards others in disinterested love?

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##### “Carthusians at home and Apostles abroad”?

1. I confess to having had problems with the traditional

formula that calls for us to be “Carthusians at home and apostles abroad.” I would say that we should be Redemptorists in both places and in between, as well. There is no doubt that our communities should be places where we can pray, together as well as individually, where we are able to study and reflect. But those aspects of our life are part of the *vita apostolica* that should be characteristic of our Congregation. Our home is not simply a place to “charge our batteries” in order to discharge them in pastoral activity, much less a place to hide from others or from our responsibilities. Our community life itself is mission and witness. It should also be the place where we encourage each other as brothers called to continue the presence and mission of Christ in the world. Our *vita apostolica*, lived both in the community and in our pastoral activity, is where we are missionaries and where we will become saints.

1. While we know that evangelization demands that we are skilled in both sacred and profane sciences, we must also admit that academic and pastoral renewal is not enough. “A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 90). But we do not become holy and then become missionaries. Nor does our weakness disqualify us. Most of us, I suspect, have echoed the desperate words of Peter, “Leave me, Lord! I am a sinful man.” Let us also hear the invitation to mission: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.” (Luke 5: 8-10). What we should claim is progress in the missionary life, not perfection. Commenting on the dramatic meeting between Jesus and Peter along the shores of the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 21: 15-17), Alphonsus allies himself with the exegesis

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of John Chrysostom, calling attention to the fact that Jesus does not ask penance or prayers of the repentant apostle but rather pastoral service: “Feed my lambs.”

##### Missionary Courage

*We asked ourselves in what practical ways our commitment to the poor is an expression of our spirituality, and in what ways it helps us to develop a more authentic spirituality (Final Message*, 8).

1. When I think of how essential is our choice for the poor in order to develop a more authentic spirituality, the great formula proposed by the General Chapter of 1985 comes to mind: *Evangelizare pauperibus et a pauperibus evangelizari*. I recall that while the theme was not easily understood in all Regions of the Congregation, it was certainly discussed! Some confreres found particular difficulty in comprehending the second half of the formula: *a pauperibus evangelizari*. Missionaries were traditionally those who conferred spiritual goods. The process of evangelization was a one-way street. What could we expect to receive, especially if these gifts were to come from the poor? Any Redemptorist missionary who has proclaimed the Good News to the poor should be able to make an ample reply to the question.
2. The theme of the 1985 General Chapter did have some practical consequences. More than one province re-examined its apostolic priorities in the light of the theme and then made some painful decisions. In some instances, provinces turned over to the care of the local Church their most attractive parishes in order to accept new commitments among the abandoned poor. Other provinces accepted new missions *ad gentes*, even though this decision exacted a heavy cost. These examples should encourage

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the whole Congregation, since they demonstrate that it is possible for provinces to change direction, when the change means greater fidelity to “the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church” (*Constitution* 5).

1. From the first encounters of Redemptorists with the poor of the Kingdom of Naples, the history of our Congregation has been marked by the valor of so many of its members. My hope is that the example of our commitment to the poor in the past and in the present will give the Congregation courage to face the future. Will the Congregation have the courage to expand its proclamation of the Gospel among the abandoned poor in the teeming slums of the mega-cities of the South, places like Mexico City, Bogotá, Lagos, São Paulo, Manila, Johannesburg, Calcutta, Lima, etc.? Can Redemptorists be more present among the new poor of Europe: the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers? What sort of witness does the Congregation offer in the rapidly changing landscape of Eastern Europe? What does it mean to proclaim the Gospel in the affluent West, where spirituality increasingly is judged to be incompatible with religion and where the poor find themselves ever more on the margin of society and Church? Can Redemptorists continue to be ambassadors for Christ and proclaim a credible message of reconciliation in regions of Africa that are torn by civil conflict? What is the future for our evangelization in Asia, where the Christian message confronts the other great world religions? What does the Congregation have to say in the face of a global culture that pays less and less attention to the saving love of God and, consequently, is less interested in solidarity among God’s daughters and sons?
2. The common denominator among these situations is that they all demand of Redemptorists a courageous faith. Often, this

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courageous faith is the willingness to leave what is known: my culture, my language, and my accustomed lifestyle in order to meet situations of real pastoral urgency. At times the Spirit may be calling a province to hand over to others its most successful and attractive pastoral commitments in order to go where the Church cannot go. My point is that this courage is not only the source for future missionary initiatives, it is also the fruit offered to us by the “cloud of witnesses” that surrounds the Congregation: all the Redemptorists of the past and present who have “emptied themselves”, as well as those provinces who have made heroic sacrifices for the sake of the Person and Mission of Christ.

##### Missionary contemplation

1. A source for and fruit of our evangelizing activity is the spirit of contemplation. “Unless the missionary is a contemplative, he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 91). How do we Redemptorists understand the spirit of contemplation? It is a spiritual disposition that makes it possible for us to love as Jesus does “so as to share truly in the love of the Son for his Father and for all people” (*Constitution* 24).
2. Trying to evangelize without a contemplative spirit is like trying to read this letter with the paper pressed against the end of your nose. It may be that your eyesight requires you to hold the paper close but, for most people, such exaggerated proximity blurs the words and makes it difficult, even painful to read the message. It is necessary to put some distance between the paper and us in order to read it. In contemplation we step back from the immediacy of our world, our life and our activity. We look for God in the people and in the events of everyday life. We try to “see God’s plan of salvation in its true light and be able to distinguish between what

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is real and what is illusory.” These words of Constitution 24 could provide substance for yet another *Communicanda*! But, can you see how a spirit of contemplation is more necessary today than ever, especially when we recognize such phenomena as the rapidity of social change, the daily and deep incursions of a global culture and the ephemeral nature of many popular movements?

1. There is another reason for us to cultivate a spirit of contemplation. It has to do with a particular claim of Christianity, first pronounced by the Second Vatican Council and echoed in our Constitutions: that in the encounter with Christ, human beings discover the meaning of the mystery of their own life (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Constitution* 19). The assertion was reiterated most recently in the papal bull that announced the Great Jubilee of the year 2000: “…God’s friendship and grace, the supernatural life which alone can bring fulfillment to the deepest aspirations of the human heart” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 2). A counterclaim is made by the global phenomenon of consumerism, namely, that what we have or consume will make us happy and fulfilled. This declaration is radically opposed to the claims of the Gospel, yet the message is very successful. There is a temptation to denounce the different “ism’s” of our day - secularism, materialism, individualism, consumerism, etc. - without understanding the reasons for their popularity. Contemplation should cultivate in us a “spirit of brotherly concern” that would have us listen to men and women as we attempt to “understand people’s anxious questionings and try to discover in these how God is truly revealing himself and making his plan known” (*Constitution* 19).

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##### Missionary patience

1. At the same time as the final preparation of this *Communicanda*, I was also a member of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Oceania. One of the more memorable interventions during those three weeks of meetings was made by a bishop from Mauritius, a special delegate to the Synod. He referred to the scene in the Gospel when the disciples were admiring the grandeur of the Temple and its precious ornaments (Lk 21: 5ss). You remember that Jesus prophesized how quickly and completely the great building would be destroyed. The bishop asked the Synod to think of problems faced by the Church in many regions of the world; we might think of our Congregation. He observed if things come tumbling down around me, maybe the Temple was not as strongly built as it looked. Perhaps we should examine our conscience about the way we build community (cf. 1 Cor 3: 10-15).
2. While building a structure is one biblical image for the work of evangelization, perhaps a more eloquent one for our times is that of the sower and the seed. The seed sown is the Word of God. It is prior to doctrine, moral teaching, law and discipline. It is prior because the “Word of God is so great that it remains the support and the energy of the Church” (*Dei Verbum*, 21). The image of the sower and the seed seems to be particularly compelling in an age that values instant success. The Word which we carry counsels us to be patient, even if we do not see immediate results (Jam 5: 7). It is God who gives the growth (1 Cor 3: 6; *Ad Gentes*, 24-25).

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##### Missionary optimism: the promotion of vocations

1. Yet another way in which our spirituality is transformed

by Mission is the desire to invite others to share completely our way of life. Can we all agree with the assertion of Constitution 79, that “the vitality with which the Congregation pursues its apostolic mission depends on the number and quality of the candidates who seek admission to the Redemptorist community”? If we agree, then we should also accept that each of us bears a responsibility in promoting vocations, especially through our own apostolic zeal, the example of our life and constant prayer (*Constitution* 80).

1. I maintain that whether or not we promote vocations is a spiritual question, for it touches on the depth of our belief in God’s purpose for the Congregation and its place in the Church. There are confreres of good will who have concluded that the consecrated life, including the Congregation, is rapidly becoming extinct. An analysis of why the Congregation fails to attract candidates in some parts of the world is complex and is certainly beyond the scope of this letter. What is more, the Congregation will not retreat from our growing collaboration with the laity. However, since the Chapter was so insistent on our focusing on a “central aspect of our spirituality, i.e., on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus” (*Final Message*,

n. 3), there may be benefit in meditating on how the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* presents the challenge of vocation promotion: “Following the example of founders and foundresses, this [vocation promotion] aims at presenting *the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus* and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel” (n. 64).

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##### All are missionaries

1. The Congregation is facing a reality heretofore unknown in its history. I refer to the great number of senior confreres of the so-called “third age.” Any reflection on our Missionary spirituality must include this group. While it is my intention to dedicate a future letter solely to the question of the spiritual demands particular to the “third age”, we can begin now by recalling the teaching of Constitution 55: that by our profession we all are missionaries. This character, which is based on our share in the mission of Christ, continues throughout our life, whether we are able to participate in pastoral activity or not. And, as that particular Constitution reminds us, we do not reach the fullness of our Missionary identity until that time when we “are suffering and dying for the salvation of the world.”

##### Question of restructuring

1. An understanding and acceptance of “the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church” will provoke other questions. Some of these will touch on our decisions to remain in a place or move on. When do Redemptorists say, “there are other towns and villages” (Mk 1: 38)? At what point do we “shake the dust from our feet” (Lk 9: 5)? When does “new wine” demand “new wineskins” (Lk 5: 38)? The last question touches not only our missionary methods but also the way we structure ourselves. We must continue to ensure that our structures of government and administration are always at the service of the mission. Where this is no longer the case, the structure must change in order that the mission continue.

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##### A “barren bush”… a “noisy gong”

*Mission that is not undertaken as an expression of a deep*

*commitment to Jesus is doomed to failure (Final Message*, 7)

1. A Redemptorist for whom the Mission is not undertaken as an expression of a deep commitment to Jesus - what would he look like? What would he sound like? He might resemble a “barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth” (Jer 17: 5-6). As one confrere writes to us: “burnout is not due to overwork alone, but more to an emptiness or a lack of conviction in one’s life, a lack of the spiritual.” Could “burn-out” be essentially a spiritual problem? Might not its painful symptoms mask a thirst for “living waters” (Jn 7: 37-38)?
2. If we dare to speak about Him whom we do not know, we will eventually sound vacant and superficial: a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13: 1). Being “missionary” does not simply mean being close to the people or opting for the poor; we ought to have an experience to share with them: “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched-we speak of the word of life” (1 Jn 1: 1).

##### Questions with no answer or “hearts that burn”?

1. Disconnected from the Lord, we face many questions with little hope of an answer. “How could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” (Mt 15: 33). “Here we have put aside everything to follow you: what can we expect from it?” (Mt 19: 27). “Truth! What does that mean?” (Jn 18: 38).

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1. It should be obvious that our choice of the person of Christ as the center of our lives and at the heart of communities does not insulate us from doubt or anxiety. But, after we pour out our hearts to each other and to Him, we listen. Then our hearts may begin to burn and we have to carry the message to others: how He met us along the road and how we recognized Him.

##### Conclusion

1. Let me try to summarize the essential points of this letter. Spirituality is directed towards basic and often troubling questions about our identity and purpose in life. For Redemptorists, spirituality must be intimately connected with Mission: the “very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church.” This intimate connection means that we choose Christ as the center of everything, that witnessing is critical and contemplation is a sine qua non for the missionary life. It means that we strive to be courageous, patient and hopeful to the point of inviting others to share fully in our life. In the final analysis, our spirituality cannot remain a theory: we must live it. It must have some practical consequences in our life.

##### The Congregation and the Great Jubilee

1. It is practically a cliché to say that we are standing on the threshold of a new millennium. As tiresome as this countdown to the new century may be, I do not believe we should dismiss the extraordinary “sign of the times” that is the Great Jubilee. Have you noticed the different themes proposed by the Holy Father for this celebration? They have a familiar ring: conversion, transformation, penance, reconciliation, redemption, the paschal mystery. These same themes are at the very heart of our mission.

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1. Is it reasonable to expect that all the provinces and

vice-provinces undertake a special missionary project as part of the celebration of the Great Jubilee? I am aware that some projects have already been planned, like urban missions or special pilgrimages. It is also true that the members of some units - especially those in leadership - are tired, discouraged and doubtful of the cooperation of their confreres. But I would ask each unit to inaugurate the third Christian millennium with a special project that is consonant with “the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church, and the badge of its fidelity to the vocation it has received” (*Constitution* 5).

1. May the Immaculate Virgin Mary who, after Jesus Christ, is the principle protector of our holy Institute because, in a special way, it was born under her patronage, help us to love her Son and make Him to be loved.

On behalf of the General Council,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original text is English)*

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

#### COMMUNICANDA N. 3

**DISCOVERING THE BEST WINE AT THE END**

**Reflections on the Third Age**

###### *COMMUNICANDA N. 3*

Prot. N° 0000 0265/99

December 8, 2000

Dear Confreres:

* 1. I greet each of you fraternally in Christ Jesus. The members of the General Council join me in extending best wishes for abundant blessings in the New Year. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

In the second *Communicanda* of this General Council, “*I am ruined if I do not preach the Gospel*” (January 14, 1999), I expressed my intention to dedicate a future letter to the question of *the spiritual demands particular to the “third age*” (n. 41). This reflection is an attempt to fulfill that pledge.

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* 1. Let me explain how I understand the term *third age*. If

it is true that the *first age* of a person’s life is that of education and the *second* is marked by production and one’s life work, the *third age* is often used to refer to that time in life when a person’s primary work has ended. Although I am thinking of you who have already begun to live the third age, I write this message to every confrere in the Congregation. Regardless of age, as Constitution 55 reminds us, we are all brothers in the same family and share the same vocation: each of us is a missionary and we remain missionaries for our entire lifetime. At each stage of our lives and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we ought to seek to live our religious consecration more intensely. Furthermore, *to live in community and carry our pastoral work through the community is an essential law for us* (Constitution 21). This same Constitution tells us that *community does not exist simply where members merely cohabit but requires as well genuine sharing on the human and spiritual level*. We are meant to bring together in community our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts and limitations for the sake of the Mission or Charism that gives meaning to our lives. Each community, then, should face the question of aging and its consequences for Redemptorist missionaries.

**Why should we think about this question?**

* 1. Along with entire societies, the Congregation is facing a new reality: the number of elderly confreres is increasing significantly. As I write to you, among the 5,569 professed members in the Congregation, 520 are eighty years old or older, while 948 are in their seventies. This means that 26% of the Congregation is aged seventy or older. Even though we are still blessed with many young members -- there are more professed Redemptorists in their 20’s than in those aged 80 or more years, and more in the 30’s than

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in their 70’s - the Congregation has never had such a large group of elderly among its members. This is a fact that none of us can ignore, for it presents us with challenges that must be faced in order to mature together faithfully as a community sent to preach and witness to the Good News of the Kingdom.

* 1. Redemptorists are not only living longer but many confreres reach the seventh or eighth decades of life in much better health and vigor than in the past. At the same time, there is also an increasing need to provide medical care for Redemptorists who are seriously ill. Yet 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.
  2. Cultures have different attitudes towards the aging and elderly. Some revere their eldest members; the very fact of reaching a certain age endows a person with a dignity that demands respect in the community. What concerns me is an emerging world culture that idolizes youth, energy and flexibility while neglecting or attempting to “hide” the elderly. This cultural perspective causes so much anxiety that many people will do all in their power to “remain” young. The aging and the elderly are encouraged to leave the marketplace and the political forum and ought to be pacified or humored, but certainly not taken seriously or challenged to continue to contribute to their society. For men, especially, one’s work and one’s worth are so closely related that when one is incapable of working, life seems to lose all meaning. And, finally, the fact of death has become a taboo, never to be discussed in polite company and certainly not a passage for which one should consciously prepare.

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##### The circumstances of the Congregation

* 1. We should recognize that the Congregation is certainly

influenced by this ambivalence towards aging. In some areas of the world the secular notion of “retirement” strongly affects the lives of Redemptorists. It is taken for granted that the duties of a confrere should be eased as he reaches a certain age. In some cases, the elderly Redemptorist is not expected to carry out serious responsibilities in the community, no matter what the actual state of his physical and mental health. Some Redemptorists come to view retirement as an acquired right and therefore, upon reaching a certain age, they expect to be freed of duties in the community in order to pursue their own interests. There are provinces in the developed world where the receipt of pensions becomes a thorny problem when the confrere considers this income as his personal property. At times the care for aged confreres focuses almost entirely on health problems, neglecting the spiritual needs specific to this stage of life.

* 1. As we visit the provinces, the other members of the General Council and I are often edified by older confreres, who intensify their missionary identity as the years pass, and who have the ability of sharing with others, especially the young, the wisdom that they have acquired. Every year I receive letters from our jubilarians: brother and priests who are celebrating fifty or more years of life in the Congregation. These letters glow with gratitude, humility and zeal. I am often moved to share their testimony with the members of the General Government.
  2. Unfortunately old age alone is not a guarantee of these sentiments. During the visitations we also meet Redemptorists who are disappointed, disillusioned, even bitter. More poignant still are

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the confreres who are anguished because of the rapid changes they have experienced in the Church and in our Institute. Some of these judge that the Congregation has been unfaithful to its charism and mission in the Church and conclude that God has withdrawn his favor from the Congregation.

* 1. These are some of the situations and concerns that lead me to write this letter. I would like to offer some reflections from the perspective of the last General Chapter, which urged us to consider spirituality as the lens through which we view all aspects of our lives (*Final Message*, n. 5). My purpose is to invite each of you to reflect as well on how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus (*Final Message*, n.

3) as a community in our later years and on the challenge of conversion in order to follow Jesus more closely at any stage of our missionary life.

* 1. There are also personal reasons that motivate this letter. I had the privilege and grace to have spent my first years in the Congregation with a number of wonderful confreres in their third age. Their words and example continue to influence me today. These Redemptorists shared with me their secrets in preaching the Word, connected me with the history of my Province and taught me to love the Congregation and to hope in its future. Most of these have died and, I pray, are now savoring fully the sweetness of God. With much gratitude, I dedicate this letter to all of those faithful witnesses, hoping that these reflections will help me prepare to be a good Redemptorist in my later years, when I too might help a young confrere at the beginning of his own pilgrimage.

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##### Life as pilgrimage

* 1. Pilgrimage is a sacred experience that is found in most

great religions and in many cultures. Interestingly, the notion of pilgrimage persists in some societies where the rest of traditional religiousexpressionshavebeensweptawaybysecularizinginfluences. Perhaps this is so because the pilgrimage is a sort of paradigm for how human beings experience life itself. We sense or, at least, we hope that our lives are not to be understood simply as products of a random collision of atoms, blind destiny or biological urges. We sense that our lives began in a place and are going somewhere. Just as pilgrims keep moving in the direction of an unseen sanctuary, so we choose to find meaning in our life’s journey by “walking” towards a place or a Person that we often glimpse only “*as reflections in a mirror, mere riddles*” (1 Cor 13: 11).

* 1. The holiness of the pilgrimage is to be experienced not simply in arriving at the desired goal. The vocation of a pilgrim is also lived each day, each hour and each minute of the journey: in every step taken in faith. As we walk the journey of life we are aware of a paradox: that we change radically along the journey while we remain the same. That is, we can trace important stages or identifiable segments through which we pass while the core of our identity mysteriously remains unvarying. A common metaphor for this paradox is that of a day, which has a morning, noon and an evening, all of which are perceived distinctly yet fused in a single unit. Although united, each phase of life has an autonomous value that should be appreciated as such and not simply as the preparation for the next stage.
  2. It sometimes happens that circumstances compel a person to proceed to the next segment of life prematurely. Consider the

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heartbreak of children who are obliged by poverty to assume adult responsibilities, such as the burden of feeding their family or caring for a sick parent. We consider it a tragedy when a human life ends prematurely, before a person has had the chance to develop and truly “live.” And it is possible to resist passage from one stage to another in the journey, like the adult who wishes to remain forever the adolescent. But such struggle is futile and frustrating, since we are constantly confronted by evidence that, whether we like it or not, we are in fact passing through different stages of life’s journey. In other words, we are reminded that we are aging.

* 1. An awareness of aging has influenced spiritual writers as diverse as Paul the apostle and Pope John Paul II. Paul used the metaphor of human growth or aging to describe progress in discipleship (e.g. 1 Cor 3: 1-2; 13: 11;). In his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996), John Paul II encourages religious to recognize the different stages of life and to never cease struggling to grow humanly and as consecrated persons, since *at no stage of life can people feel so secure and committed that they do not need to give careful attention to ensuring perseverance in faithfulness; just as there is no age at which a person has completely achieved maturity* (n. 69).
  2. What does it mean to be a Redemptorist when one no longer exercises the kind of apostolate or the responsibilities held in younger days? Thanks be to God, the response of the Congregation to this new situation does not begin with the present letter. Many (vice-)provinces already have special policies designed to meet the physical and emotional requirements of aging confreres. It is possible to offer an extensive bibliography of contemporary spiritual writers, including Redemptorists, who ponder the special

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challenges of discipleship in the third age. I hope that individual confreres and (vice-)provincial governments are aware of such resources and make use of them. Perhaps this letter will serve to stimulate us to think about the growing number of aged confreres in the Congregation, recognizing that their needs go beyond health care and hobbies, since one does not retire from our religious profession, the *definitive act of the whole missionary life of Redemptorists* (*Constitution* 54).

* 1. I would like to limit the range of these reflections and not pretend to address thoroughly what it means to grow old. First, I will pay some attention to one feature of aging, that of loss, then see whether this experience might also be an occasion for spiritual growth. What follows can be expanded and enriched by you, especially the older confreres who are able to contemplate the experiences of life with the sort of wisdom that is only available in the third age. May the Congregation continue to learn how we can help Redemptorists in the third age to deepen their commitment to the Redeemer while appreciating the special way in which these confreres live our charism.

##### Being led where one does not want to go

* 1. Among the encounters between the disciples and their Risen Lord, one of the most moving is that contained in the epilogue of the Gospel of John. The narrative speaks about the appearance of Jesus on the shore of Tiberias and contains captivating details: the mistaken identity, a miraculous catch, an impetuous swim and a home-cooked meal. The account continues with the triple profession of love by Peter and his commission by the Lord for a life of apostolic charity.

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Then Jesus speaks of how that life will end up giving glory to God:

*In all truth I tell you, When you were young You put on your own belt*

*And walked where you liked; But when you grow old*

*You will stretch out your hands,*

*And somebody else will put a belt round you*

*And take you where you would rather not go.* (Jn 21: 18)

When I meditate on this scene, I try to imagine how Jesus conveyed these last words to Peter. I imagine the Lord looking his friend in the eyes while speaking to him with tenderness and calm assurance. The Father has a plan for Peter: it will not be easy but his life will have meaning and value. Peter is commissioned for a life of pastoral charity, but what will “glorify God”, in fact, will be his death. And the final words of Jesus to Peter (Jn 21: 19, repeated in verse 22) are the same as the first words spoken to him in the Gospels (i.e. Mk 1: 17): *Follow me*.

* 1. There are many qualities unique to the stage of life we are considering in this reflection. I wonder whether the prophetic description of the old age of Peter, *but when you grow old you will*

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*stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go*, might not speak eloquently to us of an essential characteristic of this stage of life’s journey? The metaphor of *being bound and led where one would not choose to go* seems a most apt description of the unavoidable experience of loss that accompanies people into the third age.

##### Loss in the Third Age

* 1. It is easy to recognize the reality of loss in the particular suffering that is endured by some confreres, for whom aging has meant the onset of debilitating illness, confinement to bed and utter dependence on others. But isn’t it true that for every man, whatever the stage of his health, aging brings a procession of losses? Even in the case of the most vigorous elderly, there is a deepening awareness of the transitory nature of things. Time appears to speed up and days, weeks and years seem to fly by, practically without one being aware of their swift passage. There is the haunting sensation that something is ending and we speak of the “evening” or “autumn” of life. The journey is taking us to where we would rather not go. For, before we face the final dissolution that is death itself, there are many lesser deaths that mark our pilgrim way.
  2. Life in the third age means confronting loss, which comes in many shades and forms. There is the physical diminishment caused by aging, which brings discomfort, even dreadful suffering. There can be a deterioration of our mental capabilities and dementia. The death of our closest friends in the Congregation and relatives may leave us feeling more and more alone. The loss experienced in aging is not limited to body, mind or human relationships. It also touches our self-understanding as Redemptorist missionaries, inviting us forcefully to rethink what our religious profession means in the latter stages of life. Our Founder surely struggled with this reality.

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##### The experience of Alphonsus

* 1. If you have ever visited the town of Scala, the birthplace of our Congregation, you have probably paused to pray in the chapel that now shelters the grotto of Alphonsus. Here was an oasis for our Father during the tumultuous weeks and months that followed the momentous event of November 9, 1732. Alphonsus would come to this little cave and spend hours in prayer: pondering the first, tenuous steps of his Congregation, mourning the departure of practically all his companions, seeking strength from God and His Blessed Mother. Today the visitor sees a simple wooden plaque nestling in a corner of the grotto itself. On it are inscribed words credited to Alphonsus by Tannoia, his first biographer: “O my grotto, O my grotto: O that I might (again) delight in this my grotto” (II, 97). These words are attributed to an elderly Alphonsus, who dreams of returning to that “mystical cell, from which he emerged inebriated by the love of God and by an unreserved passion for the salvation of Souls” (Tannoia).
  2. I suggest that Alphonsus is not simply longing for a particular place to pray. He is mourning the passing of the thirty- eight year old man who prayed in that cave. Perhaps, to the mind’s eye of the elderly Alphonsus, everything seemed much clearer in his little grotto. Back then, he had a better idea of who he was and what he was meant to do. Forty years later, after stepping down from his diocese and returning to Pagani, Alphonsus must rediscover what it means to be a Redemptorist. He could not anchor his identity in preaching missions - he hadn’t preached one in more than twenty years. Nor could he expect to regain the final word among his brethren. Andrea Villani, the vicar general, had been governing the Congregation during the long absence of its Founder and did not relinquish this task when Alphonsus returned from Sant’Agata dei Goti. It is true that Alphonsus would continue to write and,

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certainly, would have his way in some matters, such as his categorical rejection of the ornate bedchamber that had been prepared for him, taking instead one of the unadorned rooms at Pagani. But, having a room like everyone else would not be enough: Alphonsus would have to rediscover what it means for him to be a Redemptorist in his own third age, especially, what it means to be a brother among his brothers in community.

* 1. Most of us have found - or will discover - our own “grotto.” More than a place, this “grotto” is the memory of one’s own self at a time of life when one felt most alive, most missionary, most engaged with the projects of life. Seeing that stage of our life recede irretrievably into the past and knowing that it can never be recreated can cause the sort of bittersweet emotion that Alphonsus felt for his own “grotto.” This loss is part of being human and needs to be mourned. What seems to be an obstacle to growth in the spiritual life, however, is the inability or the unwillingness to accept the losses that accompany aging, especially the diminishment that is felt when one no longer does the same apostolic work or carries the same responsibilities within the province.
  2. All masters of spirituality insist that self-knowledge is an indispensable foundation on which a life with God is built and grows. The great enemy of spirituality, then, is denial, that is, a self-deluding refusal to accept myself and my circumstances. In the case of the aging Redemptorist, denial might tempt him to try to regain his “grotto” or cling stubbornly to what he believes were his halcyon days. Such denial is difficult or impossible to sustain, but there are confreres who resist all attempts to reduce their apostolic activity, even when it is clear that they no longer have the energy or the formation to continue it. At times a superior must take the difficult decision of removing a confrere

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from a ministry that exceeds his capabilities. Or, it may happen that, after leaving apostolates that have occupied them for most of their lives, confreres become obsessive about their own physical health, appointments with their doctors, television or any number of distractions. Unconsciously they may develop a real envy of young people, often manifested by a malignant joy in pointing out the defects and defeats of younger confreres. The fact that some confreres of advanced age become tyrants in the community is less a result of the aging process itself and more attributable to their failure to accept this new stage of the pilgrimage and find a healthy spirituality as elderly Redemptorists.

* 1. As the pilgrimage of life progresses, we are increasingly aware of being led where we would not choose to go. Diminished physical and mental health, the death of friends and family and the end of involvement in apostolates that have occupied a Redemptorist for many years are spiritual challenges particular to the latter stage of life. How might confreres at this stage of the pilgrimage find serenity and joy in the face of these losses?

##### “Counting everything else as loss”… not simply losing

* 1. There is a life-giving paradox in the third age. It is this: at the very time when a Redemptorist *is bound and led where he would rather not go*, instead of plunging down a steep and ever more slippery slope that ends in death, he is invited to pursue a greater freedom. It seems to be the experience of people who are serious about their pilgrimage towards God that one eventually has to face up to the possessive power of attachment to things that are in fact passing away. Alphonsus proposed that greater spiritual freedom could be achieved by reducing the extravagant control the circumstances of

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life might exercise over a person in order to become progressively more free to love God. This dual movement - away from a clinging attachment and towards the loving God - Alphonsus calls distacco. It is a central value in the spiritual path Alphonsus proposes in the *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*. Chapter 17 of that work offers a crisp summary of this Alphonsian doctrine:

*Attachment to our own inordinate inclinations is the greatest obstacle to true union with God. Therefore, when God intends to draw a soul to his perfect love, he tries to detach her from all affection for created things. Thus he may deprive her of temporal goods, of worldly pleasures, of property, honor, friends, relations or bodily health. By means of these losses, troubles, neglect, bereavements and infirmities he wipes out, by degrees, all earthly attachments so that all the affections may be centered on him alone*.

* 1. Perhaps the mention of *distacco* makes you wince, reminding you of too many conferences on the subject when you were a novice? It may be that not all of the concrete obstacles to greater union with God faced by Alphonsus and his Neapolitan contemporaries - the tentacles of a domineering family, the lure of worldly honor and the siren song of riches - are, in fact, our problems. The point Alphonsus is trying to make is that we need to examine our lives honestly and see who or what has the ultimate claim on our heart. For it is within our hearts that God so greatly wishes to dwell. In Chapter 11 of the *Practice*, Alphonsus asks, *Do you have a heart that is empty enough for the Holy Spirit to fill?*
  2. There is no escaping the fact that trying to achieve greater union with God is not easy. Many of us are afraid of pursuing this path because we sense that it entails some suffering. But what is the alternative? We could try to anaesthetize ourselves: using work,

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prestige, relationships, alcohol, fear or resentment to distract ourselves from the passage of time and its consequences. But, in our sober moments, we would have to watch with terror as life slips through our fingers and time, no longer a *kairos* in which God reveals himself, becomes our enemy.

* 1. Try as we may, we cannot change most things that happen to us. This truth, valid at any moment in life, seems to gain more clarity the older we become. What is in our power to determine is how people, places and things will affect us. Alphonsus helps us how see the losses that accompany the third age can be invitations to abandon ourselves to the care of God, discovering and rediscovering the depth of His faithful love for us.

**A Path of *Distacco***

* 1. Paul proposes the path of distacco in his Letter to the Philippians. The third chapter might be an excellent source of meditation for the third age. How does Paul describe his pilgrimage towards God? He begins with a practice common to older people: he takes stock of his life (Phil 3: 4-6). He makes no excuses for his past but he has a new way of looking at it: *What were once my assets I now through Christ Jesus count as losses* (v. 7). Far from taking the safe path, Paul intends to risk everything:

Y*es, I will go further: because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I count everything else as loss. For him I have accepted the loss of all other things, and look on them all as filth if only I can gain Christ and be given a place in him, with the uprightness I have gained not from the Law, but through faith in Christ, an uprightness from God, based on faith, that I may come to know him and the power of his resurrection, and partake of his*

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*sufferings by being molded to the pattern of his death, striving towards the goal of resurrection from the dead* (Phil 3: 8-12).

* 1. Paul is aware that he has not achieved his goal but that he is being led in the right direction. He chooses to accept what happens to him, including the loss of all that he thought was precious in his life, as a price in order to gain Christ Jesus. He does not despise in principle what he loses; he simply cannot compare anything to the inestimable value of his relationship with Christ Jesus.

##### Freedom to love

* 1. Paul and Alphonsus teach that loss may bring greater spiritual freedom, that is, the liberation of oneself to love more and more unreservedly. A peculiarly Redemptorist way of loving is called by our Constitutions *apostolic charity*; this is our share in the mission of Christ and the unifying principle of our lives (cf. Const. 52). Apostolic charity presumes that “the glory of God and the salvation of the world are one” and that “love of God and love for people are the same” (Const. 53). Therefore, at each and every stage of our pilgrimage, Redemptorists are called to “live their union with God in the form of apostolic charity and, through missionary charity, seek his glory.” The XXII General Chapter recognized the life-long call to apostolic charity when it recommended:

*That every member of the Congregation, regardless of age, search for ways to be faithful to the most abandoned, and especially the poor in favor of whom we have made an option on the day of our profession* (*Orientations*, 2.4).

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* 1. Certainly, there are ministries that elderly Redemptorists can offer to the most abandoned, especially the poor. For example, I think older Redemptorists are very effective in bringing compassion, comfort and hope to other elderly and sick persons. But the place where many Redemptorists of the third age are called to practice apostolic charity is within the local community, whose life is itself the primary form of the proclamation of the Gospel (XXII General Chapter, Orientations, 3). I believe that there are two unique services that elderly Redemptorists can provide in our communities.

The first type of assistance is one that Alphonsus himself sought to render. In November of 1774, as he was preparing to return from Sant’Agata, he wrote, “When I have returned to one of our houses, I may be useful to the subjects, particularly the young men.” Perhaps Alphonsus was thinking of himself as a tutor for the students in homiletics or moral theology. His biographers suggest that the example of his life in the third age left its impact on his young confreres. An elderly Redemptorist who does not allow himself to be overcome by the suffering or limitations of age, but keeps alive joy, love and hope, is an invaluable mentor for the young confreres.

* 1. The second type of service has to do with the mundane details of our common life. It has been observed that often in the search to do something dramatic we miss the opportunity to do something important because the action itself does not seem worth our attention. The elderly in our communities can make great contributions to the quality of our common life by performing very ordinary tasks. I recall how the generosity of an elderly priest helped the work of all the members in a busy community. Although a stroke had left him semi-paralyzed, each evening he would answer the telephone while the rest of confreres were occupied with the

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pastoral activity of a difficult parish. I also recall my first visit to Rome and seeing an elderly Bernhard Häring caring for the flowers in the community’s garden. I imagine that most of you have been touched by the generosity of an elderly confrere.

##### Discovering the best wine at the end (Jn 2: 10)

* 1. John of the Cross reminds us that in the evening of our life we shall be judged on love. Perhaps that is why, in the dusk of life’s pilgrimage, we are presented with losses so that we might be more free to love. It behooves us as missionaries not to carry excessive baggage. At the end of the pilgrimage, all that we really will need is love: to love God as He deserves to be loved and to love each other as brothers. The love of an elderly Redemptorist, expressed in very ordinary ways, can leave a lasting impact on his confreres, especially the young.
  2. It is love that “ages” our spirit like the action of time on fine wine. At the end of life, love will give us mellowness and flavor, not the smarting sting of vinegar. This type of love is never totally within our grasp but must be the object of lifelong conversion of heart and continual renewal of mind (*Constitution* 41). On November 24, 2000, Father Josef Pfab, Superior General emeritus, finished his pilgrimage. At his funeral, a young priest told me of his last meeting with Father Josef. It was a day or two before he died and they were about to celebrate the Eucharist in his hospital room. The younger priest asked him for what should they pray? Father Josef replied, “Pray that I am converted at the hour of my death.” Paul had the same desire:

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*I can only say that forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing towards the finishing point to win the prize of God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3: 13-14).

* 1. May our Mother Mary, whose prayerful presence accompanied the first apostolic community and who did not hesitate to give herself in service of others, help us to be faithful each day but especially when we “are suffering and dying for the salvation of the world” (Const. 55).

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original text is English)*

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

#### COMMUNICANDA N. 4

**OF ONE HEART AND ONE MIND (Acts 4: 32)**

###### *A reflection on solidarity in the Congregation*

***COMMUNICANDA N. 4***

Prot. N° 0000 0023/2000

March 31, 2002 Resurrection of the Lord

My dear confreres:

1. I am happy to offer to the Congregation this first Communicanda of the new millennium and ask you to join me in considering a sign of hope that I perceive in the Congregation. While there are surely a number of reasons to face the future confidently, in this letter I am going to suggest only one for your reflection: I see an increasing spirit of solidarity in the Congregation, that is, a growing singleness of heart and mind and a strengthening of bonds that unite the global Redemptorist family, leading us to more effective missionary action.

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**Why am I writing this letter?**

1. This solidarity is both a result of the renewal in the Congregation that has taken place over the last forty years and a product of the globalizing forces that are shaping our world. I think we need to recognize the positive developments now present in the life of our Congregation and look together into the future in an effort to discern God’s will for our Institute.
2. What is more, a reflection on solidarity should interest us as we continue working on the theme of this sexennium. Our spirituality helps us to answer “basic and often unsettling questions: *Who are we? Why are we? How are we to live?”* (*Communicanda* 2, January 1999, n. 8). So, I think that a consideration of solidarity will lead us to think about how we relate to each other within the Congregation as well as how we interact with the circumstances of our world. Questions like “are we called to be an international congregation or a federation of (Vice-)Provinces?” or “do we feel ill at ease in a model of global economy that is divisive and promotes discrimination in our world?” are both spiritual questions. They invite us to reflect on who we are, what we value and how we should live.
3. Finally, I see this letter connected with a crucial project already begun in the Congregation, the preparation of the next General Chapter. I hope that this Communicanda will contribute to the reflection that is preparing the Congregation for an exceptional moment of solidarity: the XXIII General Chapter, which will be celebrated in 2003.

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##### The preparation of this text

**The regional meetings at mid-sexennium**

1. Let me tell you a little bit about how this letter came about. In 1999 the General Council prepared the agenda for the six regional meetings of the Congregation that would take place at the midpoint of this sexennium. Over a twelve-month period, from January 2000 to January 2001, the major superiors of each region met with members of the General Council, first in Madagascar, then in the United States, Brazil, the Philippines, Italy and Poland.

The General Council asked the major superiors to consider the same issues in each regional meeting, following the recommendation of the last General Chapter. These topics included the sexennial theme of spirituality, the vocation of Brothers in the Congregation and questions linked to the preparation of the next General Chapter. There was also time dedicated to matters of particular interest in each Region.

1. In addition to these themes, I presented solidarity as a particular sign of hope that I see in the Congregation and discussed this “sign of the times” with the major superiors. Even then, I hoped eventually to publish the message in the form of a *Communicanda* in order to include all the confreres in this reflection. The same draft text was presented at each of the six regional meetings and the superiors offered very helpful suggestions. They enthusiastically endorsed further consideration on the matter of solidarity and encouraged the publication of a *Communicanda* about it.

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##### The reflection of the Union of Superiors General

1. Near the end of the year 2000, together with other superiors general of religious men, I participated in a reflection on the future of the consecrated life in a globalized world. The occasion was the semiannual meeting of the *Union of Superiors General* (November 22-25, 2000) at which we considered a working paper that had been prepared by the international theological commission of the Union. While at first glance one may feel the need for a dictionary of theological terms to understand it, the document, entitled “Inside Globalization: toward a multi-centered and intercultrual communion. Ecclesiological implications for the administration of our Institutes” (published December 8, 2000), represents the fruit of a three-year dialogue between theologians and superiors general about the rapidly changing horizons in which the consecrated life finds itself today. The text offers a valuable perspective that seeks to situate questions like the inculturation of the charism and decentralization against the background of new sociological, cultural and economic phenomena. At the very least, the debate convinced me that most leaders of international orders and congregations are trying to grapple with similar questions of how to “think globally and act locally.”

##### The world in 2002

1. The news reports from around the globe lead many of us to think about how closely the peoples of the earth are linked in totally new relationships. No matter how wealthy or powerful, no state can pretend to live peacefully in splendid isolation. The prosperity of one country can be constructed on the misery of many others. Decisions taken or ignored in one nation have a serious impact on distant lands. The consequences can be terrifying, if we are not successful in globalizing solidarity among the world’s citizens.

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##### A reason for hope

1. Two years have passed since the earliest draft of this letter was shared at the first Regional meeting in January 2000. Many events have occurred since, and some of these could engender within us real doubt and foreboding about our future as missionaries and, indeed, as world citizens. Yet the central concern of this message remains that of hope and the struggle to explain the hope we have within us - not an easy task, as we noted in the first *Communicanda* of this sexennium (*Communicanda* 1, February 25, 1998, n. 17). How dare we hope today? Together with the Apostle to the nations, Redemptorist missionaries continue to work and struggle because our hopes are fixed on the living God who is the savior of all people, but especially of those who believe (1 Tim 4: 10). The reason why we do not shrink before the difficult or the disappointing is because we are rooted firmly in the conviction that we have been given a mission and that the Giver is worthy of trust. God, who in Jesus Christ, has united himself to us for all time. Can there be a more dramatic act of solidarity than our redemption?
2. As we grow in a deepening appreciation for the particular mission that has been given to our Congregation, there is an increasing willingness on the part of many confreres to work together. This willingness translates into a way of living that can be called solidarity: a union of purpose and sympathies among the global Redemptorist family, which is leading to more effective missionary action. How do I perceive this spirit at work among us?

##### Signs of solidarity

1. Most Redemptorists want to know what is happening in our Congregation in the different countries in which we live and

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work. The members of the General Council agree that a highlight of every visitation is the moment in each local community when we discuss the current situation of our global mission. Almost without exception, the confreres are eager to hear detailed accounts of the lights and shadows on the Congregation today. The sharing of this information is accomplished in other ways as well: international meetings, the newsletters published by the Office of Communications, increased travel between (vice-) provinces and communication through the Internet. All this serves to increase the understanding of the struggles lived by confreres in vastly different situations and to reduce the apparent indifference or lack of sympathy that sometimes existed between provinces and regions primarily because we Redemptorists simply knew less about each other.

1. Solidarity is more than simple interest or knowledge of the situation of others. Understanding should translate into concrete action. I am happy to point to some of the “facts” of our brotherhood at an international level. It is worth noting that many of the newest missions ad gentes are projects supported by the mutual aid of several units of the Congregation. Our missionary presence in Nigeria, Siberia, Korea and Bolivia are examples of such cooperation. When I visited Korea in 1999, the Archbishop of Seoul observed that the success that the Redemptorists are having in attracting new members is due to the fact that we offer young people the image of a community with an “international face”, that is, a community of brothers who come from different nations and cultures yet are bound together by mutual love and missionary zeal. The Korean mission began as an expression of solidarity among the units of Asia and Oceania, many of whom contributed funds and personnel to bring our charism to that nation. I am happy to see how this founding spirit continues. Today Korean, Thai and

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Filipino Redemptorists live and work together, offering a powerful message of brotherhood to the Korean people.

1. Of course, in many other units there is a long tradition of Redemptorists of different nationalities who witness to a sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures, a testimony which is even more significant in an age characterized by the globalization of problems and the return of the idols of exaggerated nationalism, racism and xenophobia (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 51). Among the many religious families in the Church, this sort of witness is a contribution that can best be made by international congregations like our own.
2. Recent years have seen new experiences of solidarity in the formation of Redemptorist missionaries. This cooperation can be found at the level of initial formation as well as a shared responsibility for programs of continuing or permanent formation. Some units work together at a particular stage of formation, such as sharing a novitiate, while others welcome to their own program the candidates from other (vice-)provinces. Some regions sponsor programs for the continuing formation of Redemptorists.
3. Some units are willing to share an abundance of young members, thus supporting the ministry of aging (Vice-)Provinces and making possible entirely new initiatives. There is also greater sharing of financial support among Redemptorists.

While there is no doubt that dramatic differences in lifestyle and living standards still persist in the Congregation, we cannot ignore the praiseworthy generosity that is practiced by a good number of the units with greater financial resources. Some of these units make regular contributions to the Solidarity Fund and also

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quietly assist brother Redemptorists in distant lands. Whenever the General Council has asked these units to help a province or vice-province in economic distress, the response has been almost always positive and magnanimous. Many (Vice-)Provinces have made helpful contributions to projects such as the restructuring of the general house, the Alphonsian Academy and, most recently, the effort to increase the patrimony of the General Government (cf. XXII General Chapter, Postulatum 9.5). We still need, however, to discover effective ways to implement the so-called “solidarity through development assistance” that was called for by the last General Chapter (Postulatum 9.7).

##### A triptych from the Acts of the Apostles

1. The Word of God shows us that solidarity is an essential quality of the apostolic life. We can discover a rich source for reflection in the Acts of the Apostles, especially in its description of the apostolic community. Let me propose three scenes from Acts as a sort of triptych for our meditation. On the left side we see the apostles and Mary at prayer (Acts 1: 12-14), the central panel portrays the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (2, 1ff) and finally, the right panel depicts the common life of the first Christians (4: 32-35). What can we glimpse in these three icons?

##### Solidarity in prayer

1. The first panel reveals the importance of prayer in the apostolic community. The mission the apostles will undertake is not their own creation; hence Jesus tells them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). From the very beginning

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the mission of the apostles is international and cross-cultural. The mission is bigger than they, so they must wait expectantly for the arrival of the Spirit, the gift of their Risen Lord, who will give them power and “guide them to all truth” (cf. Jn 16: 13). Together with the Mother of the Lord and other women, the apostles gather “in constant prayer” (Acts 1: 14).

1. The initial experience of solidarity among the disciples is prayer. Is it possible to imagine a truly apostolic community in which prayer is absent or simply routine? Without constant prayer, we risk reducing the mission to bite-size portions that correspond exclusively to what we want to do or think that we can do. How much do we depend on the gift of the Spirit to instruct us where we are to witness to the Risen Lord and for the power to accomplish our mission? Does Mary accompany us in our prayer? Does our community prayer open itself to include other disciples, our coworkers?

##### Solidarity in mission

1. The central panel of the triptych reveals the day of Pentecost, when the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit propel the fearful disciples from the security of the cenacle to embrace a worldwide mission. The apostles speak a language that can be understood by everyone and, from the very beginning, it is clear that the Church is not the private property of any single race or nation. Rather, the Holy Spirit “globalizes” the Gospel and, through the apostles, makes salvation available to all.
2. A vast array of social, economic, political and ecclesial situations constitutes the reality of the Congregation today. Is it reasonable to promote a sort of Redemptorist “culture” amid such

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diversity? I believe that it is possible and that, in fact, common characteristics can be discovered in the life of Redemptorists across the world. In the previous sexennium Father Lasso noted some of these qualities in his second *Communicanda, Unity in Diversity* (14 January 1994; confer especially nn. 32-36). The source of this unity is the Spirit. It is the Spirit that unites the many peoples who hear the Gospel preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 7-12). The text, however, does not suggest that all these people sacrificed their culture at the moment of baptism. Rather, the different races and tongues of the first Christian communities discover a force for unity that connects and enriches them: the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit helps the members of our Congregation be “of one mind and one heart.”

##### Solidarity in all they possess

1. The third and final panel in the triptych displays the idyllic description of the early Christian community, where all members share their possessions and remain united in prayer, in faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching and to the breaking of the bread (Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35). We should admit that the depiction of the unity enjoyed by the Jerusalem community might also be a bit romantic and the book of Acts is honest enough to recall more painful moments when the community is divided along ethnic lines (cf. Acts 6: 1ff) or when Peter and Paul square off, first at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:

1) then later at Antioch (Gal 2: 11-14). Such misunderstanding does not contradict the truth that community enjoyed a remarkable unity, clearly attributable to the action of the Holy Spirit).

1. The primitive community could share what they had because they were “of one heart and one mind” (Acts 4: 32). The members were not coerced to be generous but did so freely because

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of a union of purpose (“one mind”) and a union of sympathies (“one heart”). This unity, brought about by the Holy Spirit, produced a charity that was sufficient to meet the needs of the community (Acts 4: 34). This effective solidarity is not simply a moral imperative. The apostles have prayed expectantly (the cenacle) and the Spirit has been poured out and leads them forth for their mission (Pentecost). The sharing of their goods and their very lives is a necessary response to the gifts of the Spirit and intimately connected with the apostolic mission.

1. Isn’t it true that the more we allow the Spirit to produce in us “one heart and one mind,” the more willing we will be to share what we have? Notwithstanding the vastly different cultural situations in which the Congregation finds itself today, the Spirit offers us a stimulus for unity. It is the common vocation all of us share: to follow the example of Christ in the apostolic life, which comprises at one and the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work (Constitution 1). Acceptance of this basic principle of unity, whose values will be made manifest and nuanced throughout the rest of the Constitutions and Statutes, makes true solidarity possible among Redemptorists.

##### Directions for the future

1. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles provoke a question among the crowds on the streets of Jerusalem: “What are we to do, brothers?” (Acts 2: 37). The rapidly changing face of our world, the same world where we are to proclaim the Gospel, should lead us to ask each other the same question: “Brothers, what are we to do?” If the answer is: “we will do what we always have done,” we are tragically mistaken.

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##### Solidarity within the (Vice-)Province

1. The challenge is to globalize solidarity within the Congregation for our worldwide mission. When I shared the first draft of this text at the regional meetings of 2000-2001, however, a good number of the major superiors asked me not to think of solidarity in worldwide terms only; a singleness of heart and mind should characterize the life of Redemptorists within each province and vice-province. Sadly, there are units where dialogue and discernment are not part of the life of the Congregation. In these cases, a shared vision for the future and a sense of corresponsibility, itself an essential principle of our government (*Constitution* 92), are usually missing. The result is the fragmentation of the (Vice-)Province, together with a stagnation of missionary zeal. Is it consistent to expect to have a sense of solidarity with Redemptorists working in other units, if we feel little real responsibility for the future of our own?

##### Solidarity in formation

1. There is an increasing need for greater collaboration in the initial formation of Redemptorist missionaries. I have already noted that cooperation in this area has grown among some (Vice-) Provinces, evidenced by a sharing of responsibilities among different units for the same formation house or program. I think we need to go even further. The last General Chapter recognized the need to provide an adequate preparation for directors of formation (Orientations, 5.2), to offer programs in our history and spirituality (Ibid., 5.3) and to give special attention to the transition from initial formation to other apostolic communities (5.6) as well as encouraging interprovincial meetings of formators and the exchange of professors (5.5). These expectations call

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for a greater collaboration among the (Vice-)Provinces and the assistance of the General Government.

1. The first formation of Redemptorists offers other challenges that are best addressed through some form of solidarity. For example, a few units struggle with the burden of a great number of future Redemptorists while many other (Vice-) Provinces have only a handful of candidates. I am concerned about both situations, but particularly the latter. Is it fair to continue a formation program in which the students have very limited contact with other Redemptorists of their own age? And, let us not ignore the phenomenon of immigrants and refugees that are creating multicultural societies, frequently situations of great pastoral urgency. In a world where one out of every forty-five people is a refugee or immigrant, there is a critical need for missionaries who can function in cultural circumstances different than the one of their birth. The program of initial formation should prepare our young men for these changed conditions. I believe that the future of the Congregation will be better served if we are able to discover new ways to collaborate in the first formation of Redemptorist missionaries.

##### The structures of the Congregation

1. It is my belief that the mission of the Congregation will eventually require that we discover new internal structures. While the present system of provinces, vice-provinces and regions has served us very well for approximately a century and a half, I wonder if these structures will be adequate for the future? Will we not have to discover new paradigms for government that will enhance our mobility and flexibility? There are certainly cases in the Congregation today where the maintenance of an existing

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structure, such as a province or (Vice-)Province, exacts a terrible cost in human and material resources. Can we imagine a different way to organize the General Government so that it will better serve the unity and plurality of the Congregation? Beyond the system of provinces, do we need some sort of intermediate structure that will coordinate the missionary work of Redemptorists in the same geographical area? A unity of purpose with and sympathy for Redemptorists beyond the boundaries of one’s particular unit will help us discover new structures that will support our mission in the twenty-first century.

##### Regional priorities

1. The units of some regions have begun to look beyond their own individual boundaries to recognize the value of a particular apostolate that is responding to a situation of pastoral urgency and which will continue only if several (Vice-)Provinces work together. These units are beginning to develop regional priorities, which are commitments of the confreres of a region to a work that originally had been the project of a single unit or to collaborate in an entirely new initiative. The leadership of the (Vice-)Provinces in North America and Europe-North has already begun a conversation about the feasibility of shared priorities in their respective Regions.

##### International communities

1. The last General Chapter expressed support for the establishment of international communities of Redemptorists in service of our mission (XXII General Chapter, Postulatum 3.2). Though not a panacea or universal solution to problems like aging provinces with few new members, I firmly believe that international communities is a powerful expression of our charism

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in a globalized world. Should we not be searching for new forms of solidarity, including international communities, aimed at preaching the Gospel to Hispanic and Asian communities in North America? Can we ensure that our charism will contribute to the new evangelization of Europe? Life in an international community is not always uncomplicated but it can be tremendously enriching. I know. I am privileged to live in one.

##### Conclusion

1. The changed situation of the world and of our Church invites every Redemptorist to look beyond the frontiers of individual units and to consider the wider needs of our mission. I believe that promising examples of solidarity now exist in the Congregation and that these provide a foundation for future efforts. Our trust is in the Spirit of Christ who makes it possible for us to cry out Abba, who continues to send us forth to preach the Good News and who makes us aware of our need for one another in accomplishing the mission he entrusts to us.
2. With the icon of Mary and the apostles in the cenacle before our eyes, I invite you to deepen our solidarity in prayer, trusting that the Lord will open us even more to the work of the Spirit, so that we may be of “one mind and one heart”, in name and in fact, for the sake of our mission.

In the name of the General Council,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original text is English)*

# XXIII GENERAL CHAPTER

### ROME ITALY - 2003

#### Message Orientations Decisions

**PART I**

**MESSAGE TO THE CONFRERES 1**

Dear Confreres,

1. We, members of the XXIII General Chapter, greet you in Jesus our Redeemer. We want to share with you the joy we have experienced of being an international community formed and sustained by the Redeemer himself and his Spirit of love. As Capitulars we have been deeply concerned about our God-given mission in the new millennium. We have tried to analyse the

1. The official text is English.

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world in which we live, the mission of the Church, the state of our Congregation, our weaknesses and our strengths. Our work as a Chapter has been greatly enhanced by the wide consultations which took place before the Chapter began, in questionnaires. pre-Chapter meetings and the reports on the various aspects of Redemptorist life. We now want to offer you a message which we hope is not only realistic and evangelical but in the spirit of St. Alphonsus.

1. Thethemeforthewhole Congregationforthenewsexennium is ***GIVING OUR LIVES FOR PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION***.
2. The overriding reason for our choice of this theme is faith in Jesus our Redeemer. We have been so captivated by the call of God that only by giving our lives for plentiful redemption can we respond to God’s love for us. We see this theme in continuity with the theme of Spirituality adopted by the last General Chapter. We rejoice that the theme of Spirituality has been deepened, strengthened and more fully integrated into the Apostolic Life of the Congregation over the last six years. We believe that there is no Redemptorist Spirituality which is not missionary and no Redemptorist mission which is not rooted in the ‘depths of God.’2
3. Like the Apostles we have been called “to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message and have authority to cast out demons.” Giving our lives for plentiful redemption expresses our delight in being with Jesus as a community and of being sent out as a community to preach to the most abandoned.3 Hence we feel called in this new sexennium to pay particular attention to the quality of our apostolic dedication to the Redeemer. Recognising
4. 1 Cor 2: 10 NRSV. 3. Mk 3: 14-15.

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what Father General in his report called the temptation to mediocrity”4 we feel that the Congregation is being offered the grace to renew its living of the evangelical vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Hence we call on all confreres and all communities to examine afresh the consequence of the “definitive act of our whole missionary life as Redemptorists,” that is, our religious profession.5

* 1. The plentiful redemption we experience is rooted in the mystery of God becoming one with us. Such a solidarity transforms our relationship with God, and it gives meaning to our mission. We see the current focus on solidarity with one another in community, on solidarity in formation and in the work of re-structuring the Congregation for the sake of our mission as aspects of that plentiful redemption to which we have given our lives.
  2. Just as St. Paul noted that “(nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,”6 so nothing can take away our joy at being called to give our lives to the Redeemer and to share in his work of redemption. We know from experience that if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus then, whatever the storms around us, we will not sink.7
  3. We would like to draw attention to some of the implications and challenges which giving our lives for plentiful Redemption raises.

1. Father General’s report to the Chapter, (paragraph n° 21).
2. Constitution 54 as quoted in Father General’s report, paragraph n° 18.

6. Rom 8: 39.

7. Cf. Mt 14: 22-33.

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* 1. The reports of all the regions of the Congregation painted a picture with much light and shade. It is clear that huge efforts have been made to take the theme of the last Chapter seriously. The work of renewal has continued apace. The dialogue with world religions, with culture and with the new poor is very much alive in the Congregation. It is also clear that many confreres and communities and even whole units feel trapped by the limitations which they experience. While there is evidence of abundant new life in the Congregation in some units, others are struggling with aging and lack of vocations. Many capitulars spoke about the danger of being seduced by the pervasiveness of consumerism and individualism. Our counter-cultural witness struggles to survive in the face of dominating life-styles alien to the Gospel. Our community life and decentralized structures are deeply affected by the process of globalization, challenging us to rethink how they serve our mission.
  2. The Congregation is called to witness in a world marked in some places by post-modernity, in others by religious and political fundamentalism and everywhere by a hunger for “something more.” Precisely because of this, we must radiate a hope anchored in our trust and love of Jesus. It is this hope that allows us to take risks. “Without hope one can scarcely take risks and thus one prefers to stick to the beaten path even though it be a wrong one.”8 Some risks have been taken, some new apostolic initiatives have been begun in every region, a few international communities and missions have been established and there is much co-operation in formation. We are impelled to keep looking out anxiously for all who are distanced from Christ and his Church, for the new poor whose struggle for justice and dignity we must make our own.
  3. Cf. Father Juan Lasso de la Vega’s homily during the Chapter.

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* + 1. The Chapter itself experienced the value of collaboration in the contributions of our guest speakers and our four lay partners who came from different regions of the Congregation. Our attention was strongly focused on the question of others sharing our charism. “Share your charism with the laity because they are also ready ‘to give their lives for plentiful redemption.”9 What emerged clearly from our lay partners and from Chapter members themselves was the importance of formation for partnership.
    2. As the Chapter progressed it became clear to all that the Congregation should take up the challenge of restructuring for the sake of our mission. Solidarity may provoke many imaginative new structures at every level in the life of the Congregation, especially in the field of formation and pastoral initiatives. Father General challenged us to think along the lines of new international communities and news forms of regional government. Giving our lives for plentiful redemption will make unexpected demands of us all.
    3. We believe that our Congregation will continue to follow “the example of Christ in the apostolic life, which comprises at one and the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work.”10 In the power of the Spirit we will face the challenges of giving our lives for plentiful redemption, we will renew our dedication and our missionary zeal while we face the demands of our world; we will share our charism with the laity and we will be open to whatever serves our mission to the poor.
    4. The Congregation ministers in 77 countries and so Chapter members came from all over the world, with many languages and many ideas. We found solidarity in prayer, in our day of retreat, in our Eucharistic celebrations, in our pilgrimage to the tomb of
  1. Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Capitulars*, n° 5.
  2. Constitution n° 1.

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St. Alphonsus and in our recreations. Even in our disagreements, in our moments of confusion or in our mistakes, we found a binding power in that sense of being Redemptorists. We were like a miniature reflection of the whole Congregation and we were able to recognize in one another the badge of our fidelity in our shared commitment to the abandoned poor and the marginalized.

1. A special moment for us was the audience with the Pope. His indomitable will, touched by grace, reminded us not only of the symbol of our unity as Church but also of the fortitude to live life even in the midst of great physical suffering. Warning us of the risk of weakening our religious spirit and our evangelizing zeal if we conformed to a life-style which dominates contemporary culture, he also prayed that each Redemptorist would have that “wisdom of heart and prophetic zeal” which are indispensable if we are to pursue with still great vigour our missionary thrust.

##### Conclusion

1. It is against the background of all these experiences of the Chapter and in the light of the theme of Giving our lives for plentiful redemption that we propose the Orientations contained in the second part of this document, and the Decisions of the Chapter contained in the third.
2. Some of us may feel like a voice crying in the wilderness, unheard or unheeded. Some may feel that the Congregation is going through a long, slow autumn or even enduring a bleak winter. But with the Redeemer we can always expect and experience a Spring time. The story of the journey of the disciples on the road to Emmaus11 finds its echo in us. But just as important is the road back to Jerusalem.

11. Lk 24: 13-35.

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We carry within us the pain and the grief of the situations we are grappling with. Like the disciples, we know what it feels like to be disconsolate with no hope on the horizon. But the Risen Jesus of plentiful redemption keeps meeting us in the reality of the poor of our time; he reminds us in the reality of our Redemptorist dedication and he empowers us in the reality of our mission. Is it not amazing that those who invited the Risen Redeemer into the comfort and safety of the indoors because it was already late, did not hesitate to lay their fears aside and set out on their journey back to Jerusalem to share with the others the news of hope and life?

That was plentiful redemption in action: always there for us and never for ourselves alone. Let us hasten together for tomorrow may be too late.

1. We are united in giving our lives for plentiful redemption. The perpetual help of Mary, the mother of Jesus was frequently invoked in the prayer of the Chapter. May we follow her example in our apostolic mission; and in the spirit of St. Alphonsus may we be faithful to our charism.

*Your confreres of the XXIII General Chapter*

#### PART II

**ORIENTATIONS**

**OF THE XXIII GENERAL CHAPTER12**

##### Introduction

1. The XXIII General Chapter believes that Redemptorists at the beginning of the XXI century are, as Constitution 20 states, apostolic men, “strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal”13 and, following the example of Christ the Redeemer, who give their lives for the poor and abandoned.
2. In communion with Saint Alphonsus, our Saints, the Blessed and the many other Redemptorists who have devoted their lives so that plentiful Redemption, offered in Christ, be accessible to men and women, we wish to become in our days “helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of Redemption.”14
3. The previous General Chapter stated that “Spirituality is our most important challenge.”15 Today, six years later, we continue to believe in the relevance of this theme, while at the same time we propose that it be taken up from the perspective of generous self-giving in order that we become collaborators with Christ in his plentiful Redemption.
4. The official text is Spanish.
5. Constitution 20.
6. Constitution 2.
7. XXII General Chapter Message, n. 3.

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* 1. This Chapter reaffirms that our witness to “plentiful Redemption, [that is,] the love of God ‘who first loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins’,”16 is an element which permeates all our apostolic life.
  2. Conscious of all this and of our missionary commitment, the members of the General Chapter, in the name of the whole Congregation, offer all our confreres the following orientations, based on the structure of our Constitutions.

##### Missionary Work of the Congregation

* 1. Situations of personal poverty and unjust structures in many of the countries where we carry out our missionary work, as well as the emergence of new types of poverty and of the new poor (immigrants, the ignored, linguistic minorities both ethnic and cultural, etc.) and also those who do not receive adequate pastoral attention,”17 should be for us Redemptorists a constant stimulus in our mission in the Church, since “Redemptorists can never be deaf to the cry of the poor and the oppressed....”18
  2. We feel equally impelled to live in constant dialogue with the various religions and cultures where the Congregation carries out its pastoral ministry. Therefore, the Chapter requests:
     1. That pastoral priorities be constantly reviewed in the light of Constitution 5, focusing on situations of social and ecclesial marginalization which continue to challenge us. These needs must lead us, in faithful creativity, to search for new forms of pastoral activities which better respond to the needs of the men and women in our world.

1. 1 John 4: 10, Constitution 6.
2. Cf. Constitution 3.
3. General Statute 09.

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* + 1. That special emphasis be given in all the units of the Congregation to Redemptorist youth and Vocational Ministry.
    2. That the General Government publish a *Communicanda* on the theme of redemption, given that new anthropological findings and new understandings of the world and of our faith demand clarification of the concept and its content. This Communicanda should offer to Redemptorists the necessary elements to discern its meaning and to revitalize the apostolic life.
    3. The General Chapter recommends that all units value the presence of lay people as an element which enriches and gives new dimensions to our task of proclaiming plentiful Redemption to the most abandoned. We see this presence as a sign of our times that opens us up more and more to experience the Church as People of God and a mystery of communion. It is from this positive perspective that the Chapter asks that steps continue to be taken in the formation and cooperation with lay people until we reach true co-responsibility in the proclamation of plentiful Redemption.
    4. That the General Government study the possibility of creating an Institute for Evangelization, integrating the theological, pastoral, spiritual and missionary formation aspects.
    5. To promote international communities as a response to urgent pastoral needs and as a witness of fraternity and communion within the Congregation.

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##### The Apostolic Community

* 1. The General Chapter acknowledges that we are living in an agee of particular difficulties in religious life. Conscious that community life is the first form of evangelization and an “essential law of life for the members.”19 The General Chapter requests:
     1. To stimulate at all levels of the Congregation a reflection on the causes of the crisis in our community life in order to promote conditions in which the members can strengthen the bonds that bind them to the community by using the *Community Life Project*, as recommended by the XXII General Chapter.
     2. That the necessary structures be put in place throughout the Congregation so that leadership in community life may be exercised courageously and decisively, exercising co-responsibility with confreres. In this process of renewing community life, the local and (Vice-) Provincial superiors have a fundamental role. *The Pastoral Guide for Superiors* offers a model for the Redemptorist superior and leader.

##### The Apostolic Community Dedicated to Christ the Redeemer

* 1. The General Chapter also recognizes the need to clarify the meaning of our vows and the necessary witness of our lives. Therefore, we ask the Congregation:
     1. To recognize, in continuity with the XXII General Chapter, the need to “renew our living out of the evangelical

1. Constitution 21.

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counsels in the light of community and mission”, according to our Constitutions and Statutes. In this reflection on the evangelical counsels special attention must be given to the demands of inculturation.

* + 1. That in order to better carry out the theme of plentiful Redemption, our communities continue the reflection, already begun, on spirituality and on the consequences of religious profession as a definitive act of the whole of missionary life by which all (Brothers, professed students, deacons and presbyters) are truly missionaries.20
    2. That special attention be given in all units to confreres facing difficulties because of age, infirmity or personal crisis and, if necessary, seeking inter-provincial cooperation.

##### Formation of the Apostolic Community

* 1. The initial and ongoing formation of all members constitutes one of the greatest challenges for the Congregation today. In order to meet this challenge we need to make the maximum effort both with regard to personnel and various types of resources. The *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation that was recently published must be studied and implemented in all Units. Therefore, the XXIII General Chapter requests:
     1. That the new General Government and all units give priority to greater collaboration between the units in the field of formation. For this purpose the General Council should create an instrument to evaluate and improve the quality of formation in the Congregation and, as far as possible, promote a better distribution

1. Cf. Const. 54 and 55..

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of personnel and financial resources. In this process the General Council should seek the help of experts in Formation and of representatives from the (Vice-)provincial governments.

* + 1. That the General Council should guarantee that Units and Regions have an adequate program for initial Formation both for the candidates to the priesthood and for Brothers, in line with the Ratio Formationis. The General Government will promote greater collaboration between the units and/or regions, including an exchange of both those in initial formation and formators, as well as programs and useful material to help train the latter.
    2. That the units pay special attention to the human and religious quality of the candidates for Redemptorist apostolic life. It is recommended that they seek the help of experts in order to develop clearer criteria for accepting the candidates. This professional help must be required for the entire formation process.
    3. That the various units of the Congregation foster in a special way the formation of confreres in moral and pastoral theology and show a preference for the Alphonsian Academy when choosing a specialized centre for formation.21
    4. That all units of the Congregation, particularly those in which students are educated in ecclesiastical institutions outside the Congregation, pay special attention to formation in our history, pastoral practice, and missionary spirituality.
    5. That the units be encouraged to provide periodic sabbaticals or similar opportunities for ongoing theological and pastoral renewal, since permanent formation is a vital component

1. Cf. Statute 023..

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of our missionary commitment. Confreres should take advantage of the opportunities offered within the (Vice-)province and in inter- provincial programs.

* + 1. That the General Government ask the next General Secretariat for Formation to study the feasibility of establishing (and if feasible, establish) an Institute of Redemptorist Life to respond to the concrete needs of each Unit of the Congregation with regard to the preparation of formators and related issues. This Institute should incorporate the fields of human and religious formation and evangelization, as well as our spirituality, history and traditions.

##### Government of the Apostolic Community Restructuring of the Congregation22

* 1. The government structures of the Congregation are not an end in themselves but rather a support for the mission. There is at present a general agreement among Redemptorists that the structures of the Congregation at times prevent a creative and effective response to present-day pastoral needs. Therefore:
     1. The XXIII General Chapter mandates the General Council to continue the restructuring of the Congregation. This Chapter recognizes that this process was first authorized by the XXI General Chapter in 1991 and then confirmed six years later by the XXII General Chapter. However, our consideration of the *Instrumentum Loboris* and the report of the Superior General as well as numerous postulata lead us to call for a more comprehensive effort.
     2. The broad objective for such restructuring is to positively direct, in a spirit of solidarity, the apostolic dynamism

22. The official text of section 11 is in English.

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of the Congregation in fulfilling its mission in the Church. The Congregation exists for the mission and it should adapt its structures accordingly. Specific objectives for the restructuring process include, but are not limited to:

y a more effective functioning of general, (Vice-)Provincial, and regional structures:

y greater solidarity in initial and ongoing formation;

y more effective exchange of personnel between units of the Congregation in order to address new challenges which present themselves to our mission, e.g. the migration of peoples;

y greater coordination of financial resources;

y greater ease to respond to provinces faced with specific crises or aging of membership or possible extinction, and

y the need to address the question of representation at the next General Chapter.

* + 1. To facilitate this process, the General Council will set up a commission that will offer models and strategies to enhance or realign present congregational structures:

y This commission, established by the General Council for this sexennium, will consist of broad congregational representation. It shall be established by and remain in close collaboration with the General Council. It will actively consult with each region of the Congregation and will take into account the experiences of restructuring already begun in the Congregation. It will also look at the experience of other Institutes of Religious Life.

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y The commission will issue regular progress reports to the General Council. The members of the Congregation will also be kept informed. A comprehensive presentation on congregational restructuring will be made by the commission at the 2006 regional mid-sexennial meetings of major superiors, including the question of representation at the 2009 General Chapter.

y It is envisioned that its work will be completed in adequate time for presentation and discussion at the regional Pre- Chapter meetings and the 2009 General Chapter.

* + 1. During this time of structural evaluation the General Council shall implement, after due consultation with the (Vice-) Provinces and regions, various structures *ad experimentum* that will serve the mission of the Congregation such as regional or sub-regional delegates in anticipation of a more complete restructuring. The 2009 General Chapter will evaluate all the elements mentioned above.
    2. The six regions of the Congregation, as well as individual Units, will attend to ongoing restructuring, always in consultation with the confreres. This work does not necessarily have to wait for the conclusions of this commission but should be accomplished in harmony and communication with it.

##### Building Community

* 1. That the General Government, in union with (Vice-) Provincial councils, draw up an instrument which will serve as a guide for the visitations of the units and for the follow up and evaluation after the visitation.

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1. That the General Government, having taken into account the experiences of some units of the Congregation, draw up a protocol to assist the units in the procedure to be followed in specific cases such as sexual abuse, bad financial transactions, etc.
2. Thateach Unitdrawupadequateguidelinesandorientations which foster the co-responsibility of the laity in the mission of the Congregation. These guidelines and practical orientations should guarantee that those who collaborate with us will take part in the decisions which directly affect them and their ministry.

#### PART III

**DECISIONS**

**OF THE XXIII GENERAL CHAPTER**

That General Statute 05 be completed by adding the phrases included here in bold letters:

“The members honour the Most Holy Redeemer as the titular patron of the Congregation. They honour the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception, under which title she has been officially designated patroness of the Congregation. They honour her also under the title of Mother of Perpetual Help, and the Congregation has been commissioned by the Holy See to spread devotion to her under this title. They honour Saint Joseph; the holy Apostles; Saint Alphonsus, their founder, their father and model; Saint Clement, renowned for his part in spreading the Congregation; Saint Gerard, who is especially the model of the brothers’ life; Saint John Nepomucene Neumann and Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, outstanding for their pastoral zeal; and Blessed Peter Donders, distinguished for his missionary service directed to the salvation of the whole human person; Blessed Kaspar Stanggassinger, tirelessly devoted to the promotion of priestly and religious vocations; Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli, faithful companion of Saint Alphonsus; and the Blessed Martyrs Mykola Czarneckyj, Vasyl Welyczkowskyj, Zenon Kowalyk, Ivan Ziatyk and Methodius Dominic Trcka, who gave their lives for the faith in Christ the Redeemer**.23**

1. The original language is Spanish.

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* 1. That the norm N° 708 of the Directory of Chapters C.Ss.R. “Representation”, be changed in order to give Regional Superiors full representation (with the possibility of voting) at Regional Meetings and the General Chapter.24
  2. That the text of n° 980.5-d in the Norms and Procedures read:

“After the election of the Superior General the regions meet to finally decide on their candidates for the General Council. The region determines the names of two or more candidates and presents them in order of preference. The regions will inform the Chapter members about their decision once they are sure that the candidates would accept if elected.”25

* 1. The General Council ensure that (Vice-)provinces develop appropriate structures and formation programs that facilitate a more effective partnership by Redemptorists and laity in the mission.26
  2. That there be two (and only two) official languages of communication in the Congregation - English and Spanish. All candidates entering the Congregation (i.e. each novice) are obliged to learn one or the other: those candidates for whom English or Spanish is their native language are obliged to learn the other. All professed confreres are strongly encouraged to adopt a similar practice.27

1. The original language is Polish.
2. The original language is Spanish.

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6. Where deficits in expenses for first formation are not met from the Solidarity Fund, the units of the Congregation will attempt to reimburse these, through groupings formed on the lines of FICOMNE (Financial Committee of Northern Europe).

The General Finance Secretariat will develop models for implementation by January 2005. The Chapter of 2009 will evaluate the results.28

That the General Government petition the Congregation for Divine Worship that a Eucharist in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help be included in a new edition of the Sacramentary of Mary.29

#### PART IV

**MESSAGE**

**OF POPE JOHN PAUL II**

**TO THE XXIII GENERAL CHAPTER**

##### Friday, 3 October 2003

**To Reverend Fr. Joseph Tobin Superior General of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer:**

1. The General Chapter that your Institute is celebrating gives me the welcome opportunity to extend my cordial greeting to you, your delegates and to all of the brothers. I also join in congratulating you, dear Father, on your re-election as Superior General, and offer my best wishes for your and the new General Council’s effectual work. In these days of intense prayer and community reflection, you intend to gather energy to give a renewed impulse to the central core of the charism of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: the proclamation of the *copiosa redemptio* to the poor. In fact, the General Chapter is focusing its reflection on the theme: “to give one’s life for abundant redemption.” May the Holy Spirit grant to each one that wisdom of heart and prophetic zeal which are so necessary for guaranteeing your religious Family a more energetic missionary trust.

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On this important occasion, I am pleased to continue a dialogue with your Congregation that, in the years gone by, has known particularly intense moments. In the Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the death of St. Alphonsus (in 1987), I had the opportunity to stress once more the actuality of the moral and pastoral message of the Patron Saint of Confessors and of Moralists, a “master of wisdom for his time,” who “continues to enlighten the path of the People of God with the example of his life and teaching, as a light reflecting Christ, the light of the nations” (cf. *L’Osservatore Romano English edition*, [ORE], 17 August 1987, p. 4).

Ten years later, on the anniversary of the third centenary of his birth, I wrote: “It is necessary forcefully to proclaim the fullness of meaning which Christ reveals to human life, the unshakable foundations he offers to values, the new hope he brings to our history. This preaching must be incarnated in the concrete challenges facing humanity today and on which its future depends. Only in this way will the civilization of love awaited by all take shape” (ORE, 9 October 1996, p. 9).

1. The General Chapter now brings you to examine the realities of your Institute that, like others, is going through a phase of encouraging growth in certain parts of the world, whereas in others it is showing signs of crisis and fatigue. If, for example, in some countries vocations are flourishing, in others they are so scarce as to be worrisome even to the point of threatening your presence in these areas in the future. If the temptation of conforming to certain lifestyles, which are culturally dominant today, were to contaminate your communities, your religious spirit and evangelizing impetus would run the risk of being weakened. Equally, resigning yourselves to static pastoral methods

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that no longer provide adequate answers to the redemptive need of the men and women of today, could prevent the hoped-for missionary revival of your entire religious family.

How necessary, then, is that discernment which prophetically seeks to analyse the signs of the times in the light of the Word of God! I am certain that the General Chapter will imbue with a more decisive impulse the work of renewal that you have undertaken, singling out priorities and courageous apostolic choices, that will involve every Brother in their application with generous commitment. Without the contribution of all, it is difficult to arrive at the new spiritual thrust so hoped for.

Dear Redemptorists, allow yourselves to be led by the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Lord. Here, I repeat to you what I wrote to the entire People of God in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: “Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work” (n. 58).

1. Go forward in hope! Like your Founder, strive to keep your gaze fixed on the Redeemer and let yourselves be guided by Mary, his and our Mother. Only in this way can you be “collaborators, members and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of Redemption” (cf. *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, Rome, 2001, n. 2).

You are called to participate “in the Church’s mission,” combining the life of special dedication to God with missionary activity, following the example of our Saviour Jesus Christ in

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preaching the divine word to the poor, as he said of himself: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (ibid., n. 1). To carry out this special missionary service an intense personal and community prayer life is to be fostered above all.

The people that meet you must regard you as “men of God” and, in their contact with you, experience the love of the merciful heavenly Father, who did not hesitate to give his Only-begotten Son (cf. I Jn 4: 9-10) for the salvation of humanity. The interior disposition of Jesus the Good Shepherd must be seen in you, always in search of the lost sheep and ready to rejoice when it is found (cf. Lk 15: 3-7).

1. The Constitutions of your Institute invite you to recognize current pastoral needs, keeping in mind that your apostolate is characterized, more than by specific types of activity, by a loving service that is offered to those people and groups who are the most spiritually and socially abandoned and poor.

Carry out this apostolate with a “creative fidelity”, which maintains the original inspiration, re-proposing the initiative, inventiveness and holiness of your Founder as a response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata,* n. 37).

For numerous reasons, still in our day, many are far from Christ and the Church and many are still awaiting a first proclamation of the Gospel. Encouraged by the example of St Alphonsus and the other Saints and Blesseds of your Institute, do not hesitate to go towards these people, to present them with the Gospel in a language that is adapted to the various personal and local situations.

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1. At the school of your Founder, be teachers of evangelical life, remind all the baptized of their call to holiness, the “”high standard’ of ordinary Christian living” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*,

n. 31), adopting the popular style which distinguishes your pastoral methodologies.

St Alphonsus Maria de’ Liguori devoted his energies to educating Christian men and women in this awareness. “It is a great error”, he wrote, “when some say that God does not want everyone to be saints. Rather, St Paul says: “This is the will of God, your sanctification’ (I Thes 4: 3). God wants everyone to be holy, each one according to his state of life” (cf. *Pratica di Amar Gesù Cristo* in *Opere Ascetiche* [The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, in Ascetic Works], vol. 1, Rome, 1933, 79).

The search for holiness should be the foundation of every pastoral programme and your communities seen as an “oasis” of mercy and of welcome, schools of intense prayer that do not, however, distract us from our commitment to history (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 33).

The paths to holiness are personal and require a true and proper training in holiness, easily adaptable to each person’s needs (cf. ibid., n. 31). In today’s complex society, the importance of such apostolic service becomes all the more urgent, beginning with the young people who are often faced with conflicting choices in life. Share your charism with the laity, so that they too are able to “give their life for abundant redemption.” In this way, your missionary service becomes a “service to culture, politics, the economy and the family” (ibid., n. 51).

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1. If you announce with joy and a consistent life the *copiosa redemptio*, you will bring about or strengthen the evangelical hope in the heart of many people, especially those most in need of it because they have been wounded by sin and its harmful consequences. I sincerely hope that from this Chapter assembly useful guidelines will emerge, directed towards an incisive apostolic programme which responds to the expectations and challenges of our times.

May Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, together with your holy Founder and all of the Saints and Blesseds of your spiritual family, sustain you in this mission.

As I assure you of my constant remembrance at the altar, I extend to you, Reverend Father, to the Chapter Fathers and to the entire Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, a special blessing.

At the Vatican, 3 October 2003

Joannes Paulus II

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

**COMMUNICANDA N. 1, 2004**

**CALLED TO GIVE OUR LIVES FOR PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION**

###### *COMMUNICANDA N. 1*

Prot. N° 0000 110/04

Rome, April 8, 2004

Holy Thursday In Coena Domini

**Introduction**

* 1. Dear Confreres,

Our most cordial greetings to you who are called together with us to give our lives for plentiful redemption!

* 1. Over five months have elapsed since the conclusion of the XXIII General Chapter. With this Communicanda we want to focus on two important concerns that the Chapter defined in broad terms, while entrusting their implementation to the General Council and the other structures of government in the Congregation. These subjects are the theme for the sexennium and the process of

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restructuring in the Congregation. It is our intention that other issues raised by the Chapter, for example, redemption,1 will be addressed during the sexennium by means of other *Communicanda*.

* 1. A circular letter sent to the Congregation on February 2, 2004 reminded us that “the theme, *Giving our lives for plentiful redemption*, is a call to conversion, a summons for each of us to change our minds about God and our lives while, at the same time, considering how the structures of our Congregation need to be transformed in order that Redemptorists might be more faithful, creative and audacious in carrying out the mission that has been entrusted to us.”2
  2. The relationship between “giving our lives” and the transformation of structures3 may appear to many as forced, perhaps illogical. In the portion of the circular letter cited above, what unites the two ideas is precisely an urgency to change: our ideas about God and about our life on the one hand, and our structures on the other. For its part, the General Chapter did not say much with regard to this connection. However, in our opinion, there are two solid motives which justify this link:

y first, we find that the journey of the Congregation since

Vatican II has finally challenged the Redemptorists to

1. XXIII General Chapter 2003, Orientations, 7.3
2. Tobin, Joseph W., Superior General, Letter to the Congregation (prot. 0000 010/04), February 2, 2004.
3. By the term ”structures” we mean the general organization that the Congregation employs for carrying out its mission and for the best coordination of its resources, principally, the grouping into Provinces, Vice-Provinces, Regions, Missions, etc. In a broader sense, we also are thinking of the greater or lesser degree of centralization of such elements. For example, it seems undisputable that our Congregation is among the most decentralized in the Church today, having favored during its history – but especially since Vatican Council II – an ever greater autonomy for local situations.

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honestly explore the place Christ has in our life. So the call to give our lives may be a further development of the theme of spirituality, calling into question every aspect of our commitment to the mission that includes the structures in and through which we must realize the mission;

y second, we are aware of the tremendous speed with which the world changes, and of the fact that our structures find it hard to keep pace with such transformation. If the present structures in the Congregation have served our mission in earlier chapters of our history, today, in the face of a changing world, we have to question to what extent they still have a reason to exist. “To give our lives for Redemption” cannot be reduced to the domain of a “private” spirituality, rather, it must take into account the challenges that today’s world sets before us.

* 1. In the light of these reasons, we wish to make two further clarifications:

y in connecting “giving our lives” to a change of structures, we do not start from scratch. Already the last several General Chapters have addressed in some way the issues mentioned in this Communicanda by calling into question the usefulness of our structures. The experience of the Congregation in recent years gives further impetus to change:

y the intention of this Communicanda is, above all, to stimulate a reflection. Hence, in the first and second part of this document, the theme of spirituality and mission are not developed systematically or exhaustively. Our hope is rather to prepare for the subsequent consideration of our

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structuresandtobeginanongoingprocessoftransformation in the Congregation. With that purpose in mind, the third part receives greater development and should be seen as the central message of this Communicanda.

1. **GIVING OUR LIVES TODAY A courageous theme**
   1. The General Chapter has not entrusted to us an easy theme for the next six years. Giving our lives for plentiful redemption is an ambitious and, perhaps, unfashionable program, since it runs counter to a contemporary suspicion of anyone who gives himself unreservedly to anything.
   2. At a time when it is so difficult to commit oneself fully and definitively to any vocation, the Chapter urges us to the apparently impossible project of giving our lives for ever. At a time when many see unshackled personal freedom as a criterion for a successful life, the Chapter invites us to make our life a gift. At a time when salvation risks passing from being a *locus theologicus* to simply a manifestation in economic or political spheres, the Chapter proposes anew that the promise of plentiful redemption is something worth giving our lives for.
   3. If “giving our lives” calls into play the very structures with which we realize our mission, then the choice of the Chapter appears to us as a daring response to the challenges of our time. We are increasingly aware that ours is a globalized world, where the problems of one region have immediate repercussions in others, and where one culture risks dominating others; one has only to

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think about the influence of the Internet. In this world, where communications and the speed of change form the foundation of a new anthropology, where the massive migrations of whole peoples allow us to glimpse a mosaic of different groups living and relating side by side, the Chapter takes up the challenge to consider our structures and to revise them to face the new demands of mission. At a time when the collapse of ideologies has left the oppressed with even less hope for a better future and increasingly creates an unmistakable chasm between the poor and the rich, an epoch in which the exploitation of the labor of the poor nations by multinational corporations reaches scandalous dimensions, the Chapter pushes us to take a stand and to give our lives – not just a part of us – to the most abandoned.

##### What mission justifies new structures?

* 1. In the midst of a world that changes so quickly, many of us might wonder if our Redemptorist mission still has some relevance that really justifies it. Is it in fact at the service of the true redemption of humanity and, above all, does it have prospects for the future? At times we can be doubtful whether the spiritual, missionary and theological intuition of St. Alphonsus, together with the whole tradition that has followed, still has a place in the world today. We know well that much depends on the answer to these questions: our fostering of vocations, our formation of young people; our missionary preaching, our projects for social development, our involvement in movements for justice and peace and finally, the service we render to our elderly confreres. Only a convincing and positive answer to these questions can justify the serious work that is involved in a change of our structures.

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* 1. Many readers might expect this document to propose a comprehensive solution, which is not the principal aim of this Communicanda. Others would prefer a naively optimistic declaration. We are well aware that we are still in a time of searching, trudging through a difficult and often sterile exodus as we struggle to mark out a credible future for our mission, even for religious life in general and for the Church itself. Nevertheless, we should call to mind in these pages, however briefly, some features of an investigation that is being carried out by our theologians as well as by our confreres working on the front lines of the apostolate. In reality, more than a superficial overview, this examination allows us to glimpse some of the essential elements which have to be considered. These form the void created by the contradictions of the world and are quite often our own contradictions that however cry out for salvation, which is an appeal to which we must respond.
  2. Forexample, howdoweassesstheeverincreasingdominance of the rights of the individual? What kind of world is being created by this movement? In what measure do these individual rights risk a progressive erosion of a foundation for solidarity, a unique reason for hope in the future?

If, especially in the wealthier nations, consumption and pleasure dictate the real reason for living, one must wonder: is there still room for compassion in the hearts of the people of our time?

Furthermore, we consider the field of morality, where today a sense of guilt is rendered practically meaningless by a false understanding of personal freedom, yet in public life there is a forceful call for ethics, political correctness and transparency in political morality. How does one reconcile personal freedom while safeguarding the common good? And in the face of the revelation

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of past offenses, to what extent is one capable of compassion and forgiveness for the offender? If pardon and rehabilitation are provided for, are not these seen somehow as a shortcut to impunity?

* 1. If we look at the organization of the world today together with the fact that we are faced with the constant fear of terrorism, we must ask whether this is really an invitation to address the prevailing need for peace on the one hand as well as the right to justice.

If we move to the field of communications, we can see an abundance of contradictions. To the extent that mass media proliferates, isn’t there frequently a lack of a meaningful sharing, which produces an impoverished and distant communication? What is more, how many lonely and troubled lives hide behind the incessant chatter of the internet and cellular phones? Can’t we glimpse behind the cult of communication the need for a greater love that is capable of giving meaning to life? And doesn’t this invite us to announce afresh God’s love in a way that overcomes the fears and false images people have in approaching God?

##### Christ the Redeemer, the only response to many questions

* 1. We are aware that we have simply posed some questions because we know that an answer is available only in the person of Christ. Frequently we do not succeed in deciphering either the questions, because of the rapidity of change, or the answers, because of our lack of faith. Yet we believe that only Christ fully reveals the mystery of man and makes his supreme calling clear.4

1. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

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1. Christ does not cease being the path on which we walk in carrying out our mission today and tomorrow. Rather, he is the one and only way; to do without him, to give less of our lives at the service of redemption, is a betrayal of humanity today. We admit that what is threatened today is the vocation of human beings, their very nature, the image and likeness in which they have been made. It is in the face of this threat that our mission finds its raison d’être for the present and its prospects for the future. It is against this scenario that we discover an even stronger exigency for our mission, together with the prerogative of inviting young people and laity to share our own vocation.

##### ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE SEDUCED BY GOD’S LOVE IN CHRIST

**An appreciation of the journey of the last years**

1. The last decades have been a great occasion for the Congregation to review and reflect more deeply on our own charism. Much has been said about the biblical foundation and the theological riches of *copiosa redemptio*. Voluminous texts, articles in historical and theological journals as well as masters and doctoral dissertations have addressed the proper nature of our mission.
2. We consider this search as a foundation for our identity. This document does not intend to summarize or discuss such research, especially when we take into account the divergent interpretations that still exist among our scholars. Perhaps in the future it may be necessary to offer an evaluation or a synthesis, but at this time we prefer not to dwell on this issue.

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1. However, the latest stages of the journey call our attention to an essential point, one which we have already noted at the beginning of this Communicanda and which should inspire any restructuring in the Congregation. The 1997 General Chapter had already called us to evaluate “….how we nourish and express our relationship in faith with Jesus.”5 The circular letter sent to the Congregation at the beginning of this new sexennium emphasized the “…need to allow ourselves to be seduced again and again by the utter bounty of God’s saving love that is given in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.”6
2. In other words, if “Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13: 8), what really changes is our relationship with him, the ‘idea’ we have of God and therefore our very life itself.7 The examination of this relationship is at the basis of any transformation, even that of our own structures.

Therefore, the crucial question is: where do we find ourselves in the search for the face of Christ? How do we think about him? Have we given up trying to understand him? Do we coexist with him as with an illustrious stranger or, in the best of cases, according to the images fashioned by others?

##### Our pilgrimage to discover the face of Christ

1. Even Alphonsus de Liguori frequently had to correct his own ideas about Christ and, as a consequence, change his relationship with him. His childhood and adolescence were shaped by the religious ideas of his time: on the one hand was a God who
2. XXII General Chapter 1997, *Message,* 3.
3. Tobin, Joseph W., Superior General, *Letter to the Congregation* (prot. 0000 010/04), February 2, 2004.
4. Ibid.

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was a severe judge and on the other, a Christ who was closer to humankind than to the Father. It was Christ who established peace between humankind and God and calmed the divine wrath, thanks to his expiatory suffering. This is the lacerated Christ whom we see painted by Alphonsus in 1719.

Beginning in 1723, the year of his conversion, Alphonsus comes to realize that his life is a call to love, and therefore, a call to self-giving. He begins to discover the importance of the heart in his relationship with Jesus Christ and then, especially as a result of his first missionary experiences, he discovers room for hope and joy. When, after much consultation and searing doubts, he finally decides to found our Institute, one thing becomes clear to him: “to make of the city of Naples a total sacrifice to Jesus Christ.”8 But his spiritual journey does not end on the hills of Scala.

There followed the missions, teaching moral theology to his students, the writings of works like the ‘Visits to the Blessed Sacrament’ (1745) and ‘The Practice of the Love of Jesus’ (1768), all of which would lead him into a more mature and biblically founded Christological synthesis. It was a synthesis that can be defined as follows: the love of the Father finds its maximum expression in giving us his Son, who in turn is the faithful image of a loving God. Therefore, the mysteries of the Incarnation, the birth, the passion and death, and the Eucharist are necessary passages to understand the infinitely loving tenderness of God, even though other aspects of the image of Christ, dear to the theology of his time, are not totally obscured, such as the idea of the sacrificial victim.

1. Tannoia, Antonio Maria, *Della vita ed istituto del venerabile servo di Dio, Alfonso Maria Liguori*, Napoli 1798, I, 66.

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1. All this could be considered undisputable and accepted on a theological level. In any case, it is part of how we understand our founder. Yet, what is difficult to imagine is the historical, existential and spiritual journey that Alphonsus accomplished over the course of his long life. In the presence of Christ, whom he discovers in ever- new ways, he does not adopt the attitude of a speculative theologian. His objective is above all pastoral. He listens, reads, gathers texts, reflects and above all preaches that which he discovers. Everything is aimed at carrying this Christ, discovered by him, to those who need him, that is, to the abandoned, who are excluded from the theological and intellectual circles, deprived of the normal pastoral care of the Church and impervious to sophisticated preaching. Before all else, he shares the image of Jesus that he has discovered with his own Redemptorist community, since the community is the first sign of plentiful redemption and the place to which the poor can freely hasten to experience this discovery.
2. It is not by chance that the General Chapter has decided that the Congregation should live the theme *Giving our lives for plentiful redemption* first and foremost in continuity with the theme of spirituality, chosen for the last sexennium.9 And it is not by chance that – in addition to restructuring – religious profession and our proper way of living it today10 were among the great concerns of the Chapter. Although some would want to add solidarity as a central concern, after studying the documents of the General Chapter, we have come to believe that solidarity represents one of the dimensions and part of the rationale that should guide the Congregation towards a process of restructuring, rather than an end in itself.

Religious profession is another theme that we hope to reflect upon during this sexennium with the cooperation of the Center

1. XXIII General Chapter 2003, *Message*, 3.
2. XXIII General Chapter 2003, *Message*, 4.

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for Redemptorist Spirituality. Right now, we want to develop the theme of restructuring, a process in which every confrere is called to participate and anchor it on a constantly renewed relationship with Christ, which provokes the question: *how to give our lives for plentiful redemption today?*

##### RESTRUCTURING AT THE SERVICE OF OUR MISSION

**Called to Conversion**

1. We are called to conversion. We are called to examine anew the journey that we have made until now and to review our response to the present demands of our Redemptorist mission, calling into question our lifestyle, our mentality and our organization. We are invited to respond with creative fidelity to the challenges of mission in today’s world. We are called to be faithful to the charism of the Congregation in the spirit of our founder. We are invited to deepen the search for new ways of responding to the demands of proclaiming the Gospel and the witness of the “plentiful redemption” that we find in Jesus Christ. This is not done by means of a new vocabulary but rather through the witness of a renewed life.
2. Since Vatican Council II, our own Congregation and religious life itself has embarked on a process of conversion. We revised our Constitutions and Statutes, made efforts to establish priorities and, with the grace of God, have tried to seek coherence between our profession of faith and our life, between religious profession and a community life dedicated to apostolic charity. We have tried to respond with apostolic charity to the demands of our shared vocation.

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##### An impetus which began long ago

1. Already in 1965, the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* stated clearly that “the adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”11 But the Council also issued a stark warning that “… the best adjustments made in accordance with the needs of our age will be ineffectual unless they are animated by a renewal of spirit. This must take precedence over even the active ministry.”12 It confirmed that, “an effective renewal and adaptation demands the co-operation of all the members of the institute.”13 And that “the manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances. According to the same criteria let the manner of governing the institutes also be examined.”14
2. Many years have passed since Vatican Council II. Circumstances, culture, mentality and human self-understanding have changed tremendously and continue ceaselessly to change. This means that we cannot simply tread the beaten path. The following of Jesus Christ and fidelity to the charism of the Congregation demand of us a new evaluation of our lifestyle, our missionary response and the way in which we organize ourselves. The structures that we have, the ones from the beginning and those of today, are only instruments that help us to better fulfill the goals of our mission.
3. Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, 4.
6. Ibid, 3.

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##### The path proposed by previous General Chapters

1. Since 1979, General Chapters have insistently called us to conversion, always linking successive themes and the need for coherence to a review of the structures through which we fulfill our mission. We could say that these Chapters have represented for the Congregation a persistent search for identity and a way of accentuating a principle already codified in our Constitutions, that “…[Redemptorists] cannot allow themselves to settle down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary.”15
2. If we were to take into account only the last decade, it is sufficient to recall the General Chapter of 1991, which asked the General Government to start a process of restructuring, so as: a) to help units that have fallen below the personnel requirements of General Statute 088, as well as groups of units that are showing serious signs of decline in personnel; b) to stimulate renewed pastoral initiatives not easily managed by single Units alone.”16
3. The XXII General Chapter (1997) affirmed: “We, the members of the XXII General Chapter, affirm our commitment as a Congregation to the themes of recent chapters. This is a gradual development still in process for all Redemptorists. […] We believe that the living out of this theme demands a contemplative outlook on life, which helps us to read the signs of the times. This is not easy, and requires a conversion which is a gift of the Spirit. For this reason, we ask that Redemptorists concentrate on our Spirituality as foundational so that the work of the new Evangelization may be

.built on rock and not on sand.” 17 To explain the sense of this option,

1. Cfr. Constitutions C.Ss.R., 15; e.g., XXI General Chapter 15; e.g., XXI General Chapter 1991, Final Document, 11.

16. *Ibid.,* 62.

1. XXII General Chapter 1997, *Orientations on the Subject of Spirituality*; Introduction.

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the Final Document recommended that “…the Congregation take Spirituality as the theme of the next Sexennium. […] That attentive to the spiritual hunger of so many in our society, we seek new and creative ways to share our spiritual heritage with others.”18 Even this Chapter insistently asked the General Government to continue the restructuring process which was initiated in 1991.19

29. The XXIII General Chapter chose as its sexennial theme Giving our lives for plentiful redemption.20 The Final Message says: “We see this theme in continuity with the theme of Spirituality adopted by the last General Chapter. […] We believe that there is no Redemptorist Spirituality which is not missionary and no Redemptorist mission which is not rooted in the ‘depths of God’.”21 It insists: “We would like to draw attention to some of the implications and challenges which Giving our lives for plentiful Redemption raises.”22 It also confirms the need to examine our lifestyle, our community life as well as the witness that we give and to review our structures, ascertaining whether they serve our mission: “As the Chapter progressed it became clear to all that the Congregation should take up the challenge of restructuring for the sake of our mission. Solidarity may provoke many imaginative new structures at every level in the life of the Congregation, especially in the field of formation and pastoral initiatives. Fr. General challenged us to think along the lines of new international communities and new forms of Regional government. Giving our lives for plentiful redemption will make unexpected demands of us all.”23

18. *Ibid.,* 1.1; 1.2 and 1.3.

* 1. XXII General Chapter 1997, *Postulata* 9.1.
  2. XXIII General Chapter 2003, *Final Message*, 2.
  3. *Ibid.,* 3.
  4. *Ibid.,* 7.

23. *Ibid.,*11.

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##### The need to review our present structures

* + 1. Historically the structures of the Congregation were created in order to respond to a concrete expression of the Redemptorist mission. By their nature our structures are different and more dynamic than the structures of monasticism. Hence, they should be periodically reviewed and changed, when necessary. We are all aware that the demands of the mission today are unprecedented and therefore we must ask ourselves whether the present structures respond to the needs of the mission. This important question was raised during the last General Chapter and the capitulars detected a number of new challenges and wanted to respond. In the decision regarding restructuring, the Chapter said: “The government structures of the Congregation are not an end in themselves but rather a support for the mission. There is at present a general agreement among Redemptorists that the structures of the Congregation at times prevent a creative and effective response to present-day pastoral needs.”24 The Chapter asks “the General Council to continue the restructuring of the Congregation.”25 At the moment we are in the phase of reflection, analysis, openness and research with a view to the decisions we must take.

##### What do we mean by “restructuring”?

* + 1. It is not our intention to give an exhaustive definition of restructuring; what we propose here is only a description, the way we comprehend it. We see restructuring as a process, a dynamic of personal and corporate transformation, which examines our present situation, evaluates the structures we have and is ready to change, if necessary, for the sake of faithfulness to the charism and at the service of our mission. Restructuring fundamentally consists

1. XXIII General Chapter 2003, *Orientations*, 11. 25. Ibid., 11.1.

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in finding new ways of organizing ourselves through new structures in order to respond with greater fidelity to the charism of the Congregation. It demands a new sensitivity to the present challenges. It calls for a new mentality, a way of proclaiming the Gospel afresh and a new way of giving witness to *copiosa redemptio*. Obviously, in this process we need to consider the spirit of brotherhood that must characterize our structures, the fact that our structures must be places of fraternal living rather than simply a boarding house. We should evaluate our interpersonal relationships and the method of leadership in communities. We need to reexamine the anthropological foundation for our structures, which are meant to be at the service of the person and his vocation. In any case, we cannot conceive restructuring except as a serious process of discernment that signifies an attitude of conversion and a profound search for the will of God.

* 1. Restructuring cannot be simply a reaction to the situations we face, especially since some situations tempt us to provide an immediate solution or a knee-jerk response. The process of restructuring requires a proactive attitude. It does not make sense to consider restructuring as merely an administrative procedure. Its urgency is not linked to the reduced number of vocations or the uncertainty of the future. Nor is it motivated by the fact that there are diminishing numbers of Redemptorists in some Regions and an increase in others. Restructuring is not a solution for units who judge themselves to be near extinction or a decision to allow existing structures simply to subsist without any reference to the mission of the Congregation. Restructuring is not meant to save a house or a ministry to which we are particularly attached by asking another Unit to send confreres to shore it up. Restructuring is not an antidote to our fears or a way of adapting in order to make us feel more comfortable. It is not simply a redistribution of personnel.

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* 1. Restructuring is a process that permits the Congregation to better respond to the challenges of today’s world. To enter into this process, we need to ask ourselves seriously whether our present structures are effective and efficient means to serve our Redemptorist mission. How do these structures function? Do they really help us fulfill our charism and to respond to the urgent pastoral needs of today’s world? What are those urgent pastoral needs to which we are called to respond as a Congregation? What sort of structures would serve better to answer these urgent needs? What criteria do we employ to evaluate our commitment to the poor and most abandoned? What helps us discern the true pastoral urgencies?
  2. If these questions seem to be abstract and far removed from real life, we offer some examples to help us understand the urgency of the restructuring process. Let us consider initial formation, which is one of the main priorities of the General Government and the entire Congregation. The latest *Ratio Formationis CSSR* properly applies a principle, already written in our Constitutions, and underscores the value of collaboration among (Vice-) Provinces26 in order to ensure the requisite quality in formation: “….if a unit lacks the necessary personnel to build communities of formation, or the appropriate structures needed to guarantee the adequacy of a formation process with all its essential elements, it should seek the help of other units in the region.”27 How can we address this urgent need in the restructuring process?
  3. Let us also think of the new scenarios represented by the migration of peoples. More and more ethnic groups from the South or East of the world are coming to the countries of the North and West. These peoples find themselves in the need of pastoral assistance. Let us also think of the present situation of Africa, which

1. Constitutions C.Ss.R., 141.
2. *Ratio Formationis* C.Ss.R, Rome 2003, 53.

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is abandoned not only from a socio-economic point of view but also by the Church and Redemptorists. Some of our units, which in the past have worked generously in Africa, now see themselves to be limited or needing to withdraw from their earlier commitments. Do these situations represent a cry for salvation that calls out to us? How do we show ourselves to be heirs to the generosity and creativity of the Redemptorists of past centuries?

* 1. What is more, in the northern hemisphere there are Redemptorist units which for years have not received or accepted any new candidates; even in (Vice-)provinces which have received new confreres, the overall number of confreres continues to decline. Some of these units have resigned themselves to fading away. Others interpret their own situation as sign of the death of the Congregation or religious life in their region. Is there a danger of adapting ourselves to this feeling of defeat and to judge that the Redemptorist mission in affluent countries is impossible? Doesn’t all this provoke us to search for new ways of presence and proclamation?
  2. A final example is the economic disparity that we find in the 77 countries where the Congregation carries out its mission today. There are some units which have no economic problems while others are forced to refuse new candidates because they do not have the necessary resources. Is this situation an appeal to create new structures for sharing and for fostering a more effective and permanent solidarity among us?

##### Some criteria for restructuring

* 1. It seems decisive to determine, with as much clarity as possible, criteria for evaluating our fidelity to the charism. This fidelity is not measured by our talents, our personal interests or our

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ability for this or that type of ministry. It is not personal or corporate success or the brilliance of what we do. It is even less our personal tastes or doing that which is most convenient for the community that defines us as faithful. The criterion of fidelity in the Congregation is the following of Christ in the evangelization of the poor and most abandoned. Therefore, we ask ourselves: are we where we should be? Are we where there are most urgent pastoral needs?

* 1. Furthermore, it is vital to ask ourselves: what does the restructuring process concretely mean for each unit and region of the Congregation? What types of structures favor a better relationship between the General Government and the units of the Congregation? Is it necessary to create new intermediate structures between the (Vice-)Provinces and the General Government?
  2. We are aware that we are posing a good number of questions but we also are convinced that the reflection on the steps of this process should involve all Redemptorists: each unit, every Region and the whole Congregation. Restructuring is a result of a process of conversion and a concrete expression of the conversion of the community but it is also a journey towards conversion. And this process cannot be imposed from outside. It must be born out of a missionary mysticism, a new way of witnessing to the love of Christ.
  3. The last General Chapter said: “The broad objective for such restructuring is to positively direct in a spirit of solidarity the apostolic dynamism of the Congregation in fulfilling its mission in the Church. The Congregation exists for the mission and it should adapt its structures accordingly.”28 With this restructuring, we look for “a more effective functioning of General, (Vice-) Provincial, and regional structures; greater solidarity in initial and

28. Ibid., 11.2.

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ongoing formation; a more effective exchange of personnel between units of the Congregation in order to address new challenges which present themselves to our mission; greater coordination of financial resources; and greater ease to respond to provinces faced with specific crises of whatever kind.”29 Other proposals that emerged before and during the Chapter will be taken into consideration at the opportune time; for instance, new criteria for representation at the General Chapter, the number of the General Consultors and the kind of their relationship with the regions, a new division of the regions, etc.

##### A deeper change

* 1. Restructuring clearly demands a change of mentality, attitudes and our own standards. We cannot stay forever attached to present structures. The Congregation existed for many years without provincial structures. In the first century of our history great efforts were made to form international communities. At a later date the structure of provinces was implemented and enjoyed rapid growth. (Vice-)Provinces and missions were born as expressions of the missionary spirit of provinces. In the past few years, we have been working with continental regions as a sort of intermediate structure between the General Governments and the (Vice-)Provinces. Certainly, we should not fall into the trap of narrow provincialism. We cannot consider the Congregation as a simple confederation of provinces. Redemptorists constitute a great international community of missionaries, whose purpose is to “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’” […], a community which “does so by responding with missionary thrust to the pressing pastoral needs of the most abandoned, especially the poor.”30

1. *Ibid.*
2. Constitutions C.Ss.R., 1.

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* 1. It is obvious that anything new, any invitation to change, produces a certain fear and insecurity within us. It is certainly much easier to live with timeworn habits. We have a natural inclination to avoid questioning a mentality or way of life in which we have grown very comfortable over the years. We should not deny our fears nor should we allow them to paralyze us. We are called to dialogue with trust and hope. The invitation to think about restructuring is really a call to conversion to plentiful redemption. It is a means to grow in solidarity within the Congregation in order to show an outward- looking solidarity in apostolic charity and thus give witness to the love of God and plentiful redemption.

##### A process that involves all of us

* 1. We believe that the entire Congregation, that is to say, every region, every province and (Vice-)Province and every community should begin this process of restructuring. In many cases, it is a question of appreciating the structures that still remain valid and put into practice those decision making processes that the Constitutions and Statutes already provide, but which often are not used (e.g. the principle of subsidiarity, a review of life that is more than simply a planning exercise, etc). Furthermore, we need to discover ways to identify the new challenges and then determine the steps which we must take in this process of personal and corporate conversion. Each of the regions should determine a process to identify the most urgent pastoral needs and the obstacles, which impede us from giving a prompt and generous response to such challenges.
  2. The process of restructuring is meant to be, at the same time, global and local. During the process of discernment we should be very attentive to global criteria, taking into account the great changes that the world is going through so as to design a worldwide

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response for the future. But the Redemptorist mission must always be inculturated, recognizing and consciously responding to the local situation in accord with Constitutions 8-9; 17; 19. In the same way, the search for the situations of great need on the global stage cannot lead us to forget the obligation to look for the most urgent pastoral needs at the level of each region.

* 1. A change of mentality requires time, yet we believe that some attempts have already begun. We ask everyone to follow the steps indicated by the XXIII General Chapter. We are invited to rethink the structures of initial formation and community life. We need to become willing to learn the languages that are most used in the Congregation. We are urged to grow in solidarity and to make serious efforts in the creation of international communities; every region should attempt to start at least one such community during this sexennium. There is some way to go in developing economic solidarity. Redemptorists should be available to respond to the pastoral needs at the international level without necessarily resorting to bilateral and exclusive agreements between units. There is an urgent challenge to think in more global terms by putting our resources at the service of an international cooperation that springs from a more expansive vision. We are not proposing a new centralization, and we should be very careful to avoid falling into an extreme type of decentralization which leads to dispersion. We propose a path of sharing, dialogue, solidarity, inculturated evangelization and a prophetic and liberating community witness, without forgetting that our present unity within diversity is already an important testimony in the eyes of the world.

##### How do we proceed with the process of restructuring?

* 1. The General Chapter has indicated a path. It says that “the General Council will set up a commission that will offer models and

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strategies to enhance or realign present congregational structures.”31 The Chapter also defined some of the criteria for the work of this Commission: how it is to be formed, the need for constant dialogue and close collaboration with the General Government, the value of consulting the confreres and other Congregations so as to learn from their experience, the reports to be presented and the possibility of creating new structures *ad experimentum* even while the Commission is still working.32

* 1. Many details remain to be clarified, e.g., the precise responsibilities of the Commission and the relationship between it and prospective delegates of the Superior General for the regions and sub-regions.33 The different competencies and specific deadlines in the process of restructuring as well as strategies for involving the different regions are still to be defined. We continue our reflection on these concrete details and we hope to communicate our progress by July 2004.
  2. In the face of such an imminent challenge as restructuring, there is always the risk of discouragement, to say nothing of direct resistance to change. It is good to remember that the first “restructuring” is redemption itself, and that Christ himself participates in our process. It is he who draws us into one family and who gives a salvific meaning to the structures with which we work. Together with him, we shall be able to look more confidently to the new horizons that history throws open before us and be able to determine which road we should follow. With him and through him, we also shall be able to give our lives so that the world may have life in abundance (John 10: 10)

1. XXIII General Chapter 2003, *Orientations,* 11.3.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Father General bout delegates in his Report to XXIII General Chapter.

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##### Conclusion

50. We repeat our most cordial greetings which we extend to our Redemptoristine sisters, to all religious who share our spirituality, to young people who feel called to our Institute, to the laity who are in close partnership with us in our mission, to the people of God, and above all to the poor and the most abandoned.

In the name of the General Council, In Christ the Redeemer,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original text is the Italian)*

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

## COMMUNICANDA N. 2, 2006

**REDEMPTION**

###### *COMMUNICANDA N. 2*

Rome, June 4, 2006 Solemnity of Pentecoste

**Introduction**

My dear Confreres:

*For with the Lord is kindness, with him is full redemption!*

(Ps 130: 7).

1. It is aconsiderablechallengetosharewithyouthesereflections on the theme of redemption. I say this not simply because it is difficult and demanding. The task is daunting because to speak or write about redemption is to touch the very heart of our Christian faith and, clearly, the life-giving center of the Congregation itself. Over the past year, many confreres have shared their thinking on this subject and have offered me a wealth of notes and suggestions.

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The members of the General Council worked very hard and long in composing their own contribution, while asking me to write the final version. To all, my gratitude: to you belongs the credit for the depth and theological wisdom in this document. But, in the end, I assume the responsibility for putting it all together from the pastoral perspective of my office. This means also that I accept liability for any weakening of the original contributions and for any other shortcomings you may find in it.

**Urgency experienced at XXIII General Chapter**

1. The mandate for this Communicanda was given at the XXIII General Chapter in October 2003. At that time, I was struck by the sense of urgency expressed by the capitulars as they considered the challenges Redemptorists face in living our charism across the globe. They underscored the need to reflect on vital dimensions of our missionary vocation in order to respond faithfully to these challenges. As you recall, they urged the Congregation *to pay particular attention to the quality of our apostolic dedication to the Redeemer. Faith in Jesus our Redeemer is the key phrase that becomes the overriding reason for our choice* [of the theme for the sexennium]. Their fundamental conviction was stated forcefully: *We know from experience that if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus then, whatever the storms around us, we will not sink*.1 The theme of the sexennium, *Giving our lives for plentiful Redemption*, acquires from this perspective a serious significance, since the world situation demands from us greater dedication and conviction. The quality of our apostolic dedication to the Redeemer shapes how we will live the charism that has been entrusted to us.
2. XXIII General Chapter of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer,

*Message, Orientations, Decisions, Message of Pope John Paul II*, Rome: General Curia, 2003; cf. Message, 1-6.

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* 1. The Chapter members detected an urgent need for us to deepen our understanding of redemption in order to strengthen the very foundation of our religious commitment as well as the dynamic character of our missionary response to the world’s challenges. I think there was an awareness among the capitulars that Redemptorists may not be aware of how our understanding of redemption has changed. In fact, we may be so busy or otherwise distracted that we do not think deeply – or at all – about how God acts with the world. Without such reflection, the Gospel we preach risks becoming neither “good” nor “news”! So the capitulars requested that a *Communicanda* be written about redemption. This task becomes urgent *given that new anthropological findings and new understandings of the world and of our faith demand clarification of the concept and its content. This Communicanda should offer to Redemptorists the necessary elements to discern its meaning and to revitalize the apostolic life*.2
  2. The revitalization of our apostolic life as a goal of the reflection is a key element of the Chapter’s decision. The capitulars are calling to mind the fundamental understanding of Redemptorist life as *vita apostolica*, a technical term that has a precise meaning in our Constitutions: *our life comprises at one at the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work* (Const. 1). Far from any sort of dualism, the charism of our Congregation calls us to a fundamental unity in all we are and do. Spirituality, community life and pastoral work are not separate components of our vocation. Study and theological reflection as well form part of this dynamic whole. Each dimension of our life is intertwined harmoniously, representing together our unique mission in the Church. Clearly, any reflection on redemption is part of this process and should deepen and strengthen our entire lives.

1. Orientations, 7.3.

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1. It is obvious that a systematic treatment of redemption is beyond the nature and purpose of a *Communicanda*. Hence, this document does not pretend to be a comprehensive presentation. It does not even claim to treat all crucial questions involved. Reflection on such a fundamental theme as redemption ought to be an ongoing process that is shared by the entire Congregation and include other members of the Redemptorist Family. It is a task that we should accept as part of our personal and community life. What is more, it seems to me that each unit and each region are called to contemplate the notion of redemption from its particular historical context and cultural expressions.

The preceding General Chapters have helped us to weave together the themes of identity, spirituality and mission. There is great profit to be found in returning to these proposals. You may also derive some benefit from another look at previous *Communicandas* that treated the themes of our spirituality, the witness of our community life, solidarity and the apostolate. These documents provide a background and context for this reflection on the theme of redemption.3

##### The essential role of metaphor

1. Before entering into a reflection on redemption, we need to consider the type of language we will use. In the Word of God and throughout the history of the Church a number of metaphors are used to talk about redemption. This fact has important implications. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. Metaphors are
2. Thanks to the hard work of the General Secretariat and the Office for Communications, all *Communicanda* of the General Government since 1985 can now be found in seven languages at [www.cssr.com.](http://www.cssr.com/)

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essentially symbols and serious confusion arises when metaphors are understood literally or independently. A metaphor cannot be taken as an exhaustive statement of a given truth. Furthermore, in discourse or reflection, metaphors can give expression to one or various dimensions of a reality and theological truth. However, a metaphor in itself cannot encompass the totality of that reality and truth. The use of many metaphors to talk about redemption illustrates how no single metaphor is totally adequate.

1. What is more, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the way Scripture speaks about redemption is conditioned by different cultural, social and religious contexts. The various expressions used should not be considered in competition or opposition but as efforts to make comprehensible the truth of faith. For example, in St. Paul we find the use of the Hebrew categories of guilt and expiation. Luke and the pastoral letters, on the other hand, appeal to a Hellenistic way of thought. The original purpose of biblical texts was to proclaim the mystery of Jesus the Christ and the mystery of redemption in ways that were comprehensible to specific communities. A respectful approach to the revealed Word of God should encourage us to spare no effort in order to make the message of redemption understandable in the many cultural and historical contexts in which the Congregation evangelizes today.
2. Some ways of speaking about redemption, which are heavily influenced by enthusiastic yet inadequate piety, may mislead or even block us from giving an adequate response to today’s problems. Our own pastoral practice and preaching makes us aware of the shortcomings of some interpretations and approaches. Much of our missionary service may be geared to correcting certain theological perspectives, which have misled or even enslaved the people of God.

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1. This *Communicanda* is not meant to be a theological commentary that will clarify all issues. At the beginning of our conversation, it is enough to remind ourselves that the history of theology as well as that of evangelization is marked by the search for language that will help us speak about redemption. The search has led missionaries to meditate constantly on the mystery of redemption while searching for metaphors that can serve the proclamation of such Good News. It would be wonderful for the Congregation to have a forum in which the members of the Redemptorist family might share this continuing reflection, thus providing for an opportunity to enrich each other with the insights from our diverse regions.

##### Drinking from our own well

1. Redemptorists have an instinctive and pastoral way of understanding and announcing redemption, despite the theological and cultural differences among us. This understanding comes to us from Saint Alphonsus and can be traced within our spiritual and pastoral tradition. We spare no effort in order to help people understand that redemption is always the initiative of God, who loves us in ways the human imagination can scarcely conceive and desires our love in return. In our ministry, redemption is proclaimed both as deliverance from sin and as God’s call to live in a relationship of love with him.

Generally, we are known for being close to the people, particularly the most abandoned poor. Generous mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation are characteristic notes of our ministry. Just as Jesus invited people to change their minds and hearts, our preaching traditionally includes an insistent call to conversion.

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The apostolate of the confessional is appreciated by us because the celebration of this sacrament offers people a tangible experience of redemption. Most Redemptorists make an elemental connection between redemption and the demands for social justice, the respect of human rights and an appreciation for the integrity of creation.

1. Redemptorists understand redemption in line with Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. This proclamation offers salvation to all, with a preferential option for the poor. Among the magisterial pronouncements on redemption, perhaps Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* summarizes the content of Jesus’ proclamation in a way that speaks to the hearts of Redemptorists precisely because of its pastoral perspective, especially its emphasis on the need for conversion:

*Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by Him, of seeing Him, and of being given over to Him. All of this is begun during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of history, in order to be realized fully on the day of the final coming of Christ, whose date is known to no one except the Father.*

*This kingdom and this salvation, which are the key words of Jesus Christ’s evangelization, are available to every human being as grace and mercy, and yet at the same time each individual must gain them by force – they belong to the violent, says the Lord, through toil and suffering, through a life lived according to the Gospel, through abnegation and the cross, through the spirit of the beatitudes. But above all each individual gains them through a total interior renewal which the Gospel calls metanoia; it is a radical conversion, a profound change of mind and heart.* 4

1. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 9-10.

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1. A Redemptorist way of understanding redemption begins with Saint Alphonsus. Not unlike our own era, the society in which God called Alphonsus de Liguori to proclaim plentiful redemption presented enormous challenges. He lived at a momentous change of epoch, the critical point of transition from medieval society into the brave new world of the Enlightenment. Alphonsus became aware of the most abandoned poor, who too often were forgotten in the political, economic and cultural priorities of his age. At the same time, he was conscious of his own need for conversion if he was to respond faithfully to God’s call.

Many of his contemporaries found themselves alienated from God because of the inadequate images of God they were offered and an oppressing legalism in spirituality and morality. Alphonsus combated these distortions of the Gospel with a robust pastoral practice that was imbued with a discerning spirit of prayer and contemplation. His preaching of redemption touched the hearts of people who had come to think of God at best as remote and indifferent; at worst, as a cruel tyrant.

1. For Alphonsus the whole of the Christian life is centered in Jesus and his work of redemption. If we want to understand the spiritual insight of our Founder, then I believe the critical focus is not upon redemption as an abstract category but rather upon the person of the Redeemer. For Alphonsus, a Christological approach is indispensable, for it is the Redeemer who reveals redemption. The Redeemer represents the true character of God in all its fullness. Who is God? What does God think about human beings? Alphonsus joins his voice to Jesus in the Gospel of John: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3: 16-17).

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The Redeemer is love itself, which desires to touch and transform every human being so that all may find true happiness and fulfillment. Jesus has come that all “might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10: 10). However, not sparing any effort to love and be loved, the Redeemer “empties himself”, first in the incarnation and then in death, even “death on a cross.” The choice of the Redeemer for the way of absolute *kenosis* is aimed at dethroning all false images of God while cracking the wall of human pride and suspicion about God and God’s plan for us.

The mystery of redemption is not that we become worthy of God but rather that, in Christ Jesus, God makes us worthy of himself (Col 1: 12-14; Eph 1: 3-14). This understanding of God’s desire to transform human beings in love is an important element of the vision of Alphonsus. Redemption becomes the free surrender of a person in wonder and gratitude to the love of God that is given in Christ Jesus by means of the Spirit.

1. An understanding of the Redeemer as the compassion of God that expresses itself in kenosis colors the promotion by Alphonsus of traditional devotions of his time. Crib, Cross, Eucharist and Mary are together expressions of the depths of the mystery of the Redeemer. The Incarnation demonstrates God’s compassionate commitment to humanity in love that is given freely and unconditionally. On the Cross we contemplate a love that knows no limits in self-giving or in its capacity to forgive. In the Eucharist, humanity receives the ultimate gift of love: the risen Lord who chooses to remain forever among his beloved as a source of transforming grace and the force for communion. Mary is cherished by Alphonsus as the channel through whom flows the river of the grace that is willed by the Father in the Redeemer.

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1. To appreciate his understanding of redemption, the perspective from which we must read Saint Alphonsus is that of the “abandoned”, those who are constrained by society or even by the Church to live on the margin. This is the standpoint that colors the pastoral strategies of Alphonsus and also conditions indelibly his theological reflection. His vision for the Congregation is as big as one could make it, since his point of reference is the entire mission of Jesus. Why did God become man in Jesus Christ? In the answer to this question Alphonsus also finds the *raison d’être* for his Institute. He discovers in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke a sort of “mission statement” of Jesus, a summary of the sense and significance of his whole life. Alphonsus’ theological perspective here is profoundly pastoral and missionary:

*He who is called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer will never be a true follower of Jesus Christ nor will he ever become a saint if he does not tend towards the objective of his vocation and does not have the Spirit of the Institute, which consists in saving souls, the souls most destitute of spiritual assistance, such as the poor in the countryside. This was the very reason for the coming of the Redeemer, who said of himself: The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor.*5

Alphonsus establishes the clear link between the person of Jesus and the Congregation: it is found in the reason for the coming of the Redeemer.

The mission of Redemptorists is to bring people to the crucial point of Christian life: the love of God that is powerfully revealed in Jesus Christ. At the center of the life and ministry of the

1. “Considerazione XII: Del zelo della salute delle anime che debbono avere i reli- giosi,” in *Considerazioni per coloro che son chiamati allo stato religioso*.

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Congregation is the very mystery of redemption. We Redemptorists were born in the heart of an ardent disciple of Jesus, who burned with zeal for the redemption of all with a special preference for the abandoned poor.

1. Through Jesus the redemptive love of the Father reaches each individual person. In Alphonsus’ perspective God’s love is not preached abstractly but through stories that illustrate the personal love of God towards each and invites from each a response of conversion. The transformation of the world is brought about by a personal change of heartand obedience to the plan of God as revealed in Jesus. As human beings we also have a basic need to belong, to be part of a larger project which takes us beyond our personal littleworlds. The redeeming love of God brings about a change in our relationships, uniting us as communities in the Church (Con. 12), which entrusts to us the mission of communicating to others the love we experience in the Redeemer.
2. Alphonsus discerned as his own the vocation to continue the work of Jesus the Redeemer in preaching the Good News to the most abandoned poor. His mission was to remain in permanent solidarity with them. His own experience of God was intimately linked with this understanding. He wrote to the communities in Scifelli and Frosinone in 1774:

*Assist souls, but specially the poor, the peasants and the most abandoned. Remember that God evangelizare pauperibus misit nos in these our days. Engrave this firmly on your hearts and look only for God among the abandoned poor if you wish to please Jesus Christ.6*

1. Tannoia IV, 44: “*Aiutate le anime, ma specialmente i poverelli, i rozzi, ed i più abbandonati. Ricordatevi che Dio evangelizzare pauperibus misit nos in questi tempi. Imprimetevi bene questa massima; e cercate solo Iddio ne’ poveri abbandonati, se volete dar gusto a Gesù-Cristo*.”

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1. Alphonsus did not strive to bring the abandoned back to church. Instead, he brought the Church to those people it had forsaken. St. Alphonsus emphasized repeatedly that his Institute consciously chose to establish its houses in the midst of poor people. I presume that this choice was not simply to make it possible for poor people to avail themselves of our services. Alphonsus knew that being with the poor would change his companions, just as the goatherds and shepherds changed him forever.

##### Grappling with the mystery today

1. In the first part of this letter, I have tried to highlight some elements which I consider significant in a Redemptorist approach to redemption. These points can root us solidly in a tradition that continues to nurture our missionary vocation. But these roots must settle in new soil today. One could say that we find ourselves at the conclusion of the historical period that was just assuming concrete shape during Alphonsus’ life time. The end of one era and the beginning of another presents new problems, new concerns, new questions and new opportunities.
2. If our reflection on redemption is not to finish as merely a theoretical exercise, it is essential to look at the world in which we live and work. Only if we are willing to maintain this attentive stance towards reality will we be able to discern people’s anxious questionings and discover in these how God is truly revealing himself and making his plan known (cf. Con. 19). That same Constitution, drawing on the audacious doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, commits Redemptorists to revealing the “all embracing nature of redemption.”7 For a large part of the world, redemption is a meaningless category. Indeed, the many-faceted crisis of Christianity can – and probably should – be reduced to
3. *Gaudium et Spes,* nn. 11, 22, 41.

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a common denominator of a soteriological nature, the loss of its salvific relevance. Christianity has weakened its potential to signify salvation. And the Church is no longer the Church, if it cannot communicate salvation. One could turn on its head the axiom of St. Cyprian: *extra salutem nullus christianismus.*8

1. So, this reflection is a fundamental task – but never an easy one – because our world is constantly changing. Today there is a perception that cultural change is accelerated and profound, leading some to observe that we live in a change of era, not simply an era of changes. Time-honored categories of thought and interpretation are limited in their capacity to help us understand what is happening. People wonder whether there are in fact fixed points of reference or absolute values. While capitalism retains a powerful attraction, disillusion with present institutions, the collapse of ideologies and a lack of hope in the better future promised by modernity seem to be spreading. Humankind’s capacity to destroy increases, leading many to ask “What is the sense of it all? Who will save us from ourselves?”

##### Search for meaning and hunger for spirituality

1. In some parts of the world today, people, while disavowing allegiance to any denomination, nevertheless use religious language to express a search for meaning in life. A contemporary sociologist describes the situation in Western Europe as “believing without belonging.”9 You can detect a longing for something more in life, a quest for wisdom, an interest in new forms of spirituality, a passion for justice, an appreciation for beauty and the essential value of interpersonal relationships. Confreres who study assiduously
2. Javier Vitoria Cormenzana, “Heartened by the Sounds of a Delicate Silenc*e*”, in Concilium (2005/3), p. 125.
3. Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates,* pp. 3, 12, etc

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contemporary trends in literature, cinema, art and music glimpse in these cultural expressions a persistent search for an experience of something like redemption. Different expressions of popular religiosity manifest a similar longing and search.

1. A hunger for redemption is also expressed in muted cries and unspoken yearning. It is heard in the helplessness and frustration of the marginalized, excluded and the so-called “new poor.” A widespread perception of the fragmentation of modern living, where the various aspects of life seem so disconnected one from the other, also provokes a real malaise and a faltering hope for relief. Anxious, lonely and suffering people of all kinds have the vague sensation that “something is missing”; there ought to be a better way to live.
2. The longings for “something more” can be anesthetized or even suffocated. Some manage to live with a comfortable sense of self-sufficiency, feeling no pressing need to change in any way. One has to wonder how long a sterile, isolated and apparently self-centered existence can satisfy the hungry human heart.
3. While it is true that many people may hunger for some sort of redemption, this need does not necessary lead to the search for a redeemer. Often the answer is sought in a type of self-redemption, as evidenced by the variety of self-help programs that are unconnected to a redeemer. Relief from the anxieties of modern life is also sought through recourse to folklore, magic or superstition.

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##### Reality of sin and evil

1. The experience of evil is very strong in human history. Our confreres in India Sri Lanka, Thailand, New Orleans and, most recently, Indonesia can testify to the dramatic destruction that results from an impersonal evil that can be unleashed by forces of nature and before which humanity cringes helplessly. On the other hand, we are all too familiar with the malice of personal sin, which threatens to separate us from God and others and thus has serious repercussions in our communities and in society. Beyond the flawed choices of individuals, we also recognize the cruelty that is produced by social structures that generate injusticeand death, even when well-intentioned people lead them. The luxury of some nations demands in a very real way the impoverishment of others. War is waged with a new rationale, whether as an instrument of terrorism or as a pre-emptive strike in the name of peace.
2. The consequences of globalization on all levels (economic, social, political, cultural and technological) are ambiguous. On the one hand, there is the promise of a new world with countless opportunities. But the cost is an increasing inequality among nations as well as new categories of poverty. Individuals, communities and entire nations are powerless in the face of global structures of injustice. I recall a Redemptorist bishop telling me that, left to itself, his country had little hope. With its natural resources exhausted by colonialism and mismanagement, the country presently has nothing to produce for the new global market and its very survival depends principally upon a more intense solidarity among nations.

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1. During his recent visit to the extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Pope Benedict XVI struggled to speak coherently about the evil perpetrated at that place and the Holy Father himself wondered about the “silence of God.”10 A thoughtful treatment of the problem of evil and sin certainly surpasses the purposes of this Communicanda. My point is that the mystery of evil must be faced in our reflection as well as in our preaching, if we are to be faithful to revelation and credible to the people. A clear-eyed analysis of ourselves and our world, when coupled with a grateful and faith-filled appreciation of God’s revelation in Jesus leads us to marvel with Saint Paul: “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more!” (Rom 5: 20). Perhaps the most primordial proclamation of the Gospel is to announce convincingly that God is alive, even in a time like ours.

##### Signs and witnesses of the Kingdom

1. This world, divided, broken and wounded, in which millions must endure horrific suffering, is still the world that God loves, the world to which and for which He sends His Son. Two millennia after the death and resurrection of Jesus we may ask: has his mission made a real difference? Faced with the mystery of sin and evil, yet conscious of God’s initiative, we are called to contemplation, an effort that seeks to see as God sees in order to act as God acts.
2. The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the XXIII General Chapter presents a list of challenges, calling them signs of the presence of the Kingdom and signs of the absence of the Kingdom. The document emphasized specifically the challenges for evangelization that are posed by secularism, post-modernity and globalization. It captured
3. Benedict XVI, A*ddress at the Auschwitz Camp*, Auschwitz-Birkenau, 28 May 2006.

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well the situation the Congregation faces across the world and the need to discover the most effective means for becoming witnesses of plentiful redemption.11

1. A contemplative look at our world leads us to glimpse the forces that militate against the Kingdom of God, such as a culture of death that prizes power, pleasure and possessions to the point of the dehumanization, enslavement and wholesale displacement of entire societies. The proclamation of abundant redemption is a call to see this broken world from a contemplative perspective that allows us to discover the ways of the Spirit. We learn to recognize the presence of signs of redemption that allow us to continue with hope and determination. If we have the audacity to ask whether the mission of Jesus makes a difference in our world, then we also need the courage to assume a contemplative stance and permit that the Spirit promised by Jesus will guide us to all truth (Jn 16: 13).

##### “Helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work…”

1. Let me attempt to summarize the reflection to this point. Our discussion began with the assertion that Redemptorists have a particular way of understanding the saving action of God in Jesus Christ. This vision is based on the experience of God that informed the pastoral practice of Alphonsus Liguori. We have not attempted to treat the traditional ways that dogmatic theology has presented redemption, not because that debate is unimportant, but rather because the General Chapter hoped that the present communication might serve as an instrument of discernment and contribute to revitalizing the apostolic life of the Congregation.12 To this end, I have tried to anchor the reflection in the experience of
2. Cf. XXIII General Chapter, *Instrumentum Laboris*, (Rome, 2003), nn. 5-8.
3. Cf. XXIII General Chapter, *Orientations*, 7.3.

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our Founder, which gave energy and urgency to his own preaching, writing and even the decision to found the Congregation. Alphonsus understood the Redeemer as the revelation of God’s limitless compassion for humanity. This compassionate love leads God to kenosis, God’s own self-emptying for the life of the world, with a special preference for the poor. The logic of Alphonsus is the same logic as that of the Letter to the Philippians: God spares no effort to win our hearts (Phil 2: 5-11).

We bring the spiritual insight of Alphonsus to our mission of proclaiming abundant redemption in the world today. This mission demands of us a contemplative gaze as we try to glimpse the forces that militate against the Kingdom of God and discern the signs of redemption that allow us to continue our mission with hope and determination, which includes the struggle against all that would enslave men and women.

Like Alphonsus, we are called to conversion that allows us to participate in the dynamism of the compassion and kenosis of God. To “give our lives for abundant redemption” is to enter intimately and permanently into the mission of Jesus Christ, which is the “great work of redemption” in order to preach the Word of salvation to the poor (cf. Con. 2). In this final section of the *Communicanda*, I would like to suggest some consequences for the Congregation today.

##### Centrality of Jesus Christ:

**with him there is abundant redemption**

1. In order to give witness to abundant redemption within the charismatic inspiration of Alphonsus Liguori, we have no choice but to strengthen our life with the Redeemer. Since our Founder united our own raison d’être fundamentally to the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of Jesus is the standard by which we judge our

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own. We must be convinced that to believe in Jesus Christ is to hope as he hoped; that to follow Jesus Christ is to continue and prolong in history his mission, loving as he did to the point of giving up our lives; that to follow him is to allow ourselves to be grasped by him and by the cause of his life.13 Alphonsus invites us to rediscover the God of Jesus Christ, a God who is passionately in love with humanity; a God who hears the cry of the poor and who does not remain unmoved by injustice. God has revealed himself as Good News for the impoverished, deigning that human beings are filled with the fullness of God (Eph 3: 19) because of Christ’s emptying himself in solidarity (Phil 2: 5-11).

1. Thus, the proclamation of abundant redemption in the Redemptorist tradition is not, first and foremost, the presenta-tion of creedal formulae or moral codes; it is an invitation to a personal relationship with a passionate God, a God of love who needs to be loved in return. For Alphonsus, the stakes are high. A prayer of his laments that the world is “full of preachers who preach themselves [and not Jesus Christ], while hell is full of souls.”14 Yet, with an insistence that calls into question our former reputation as preachers of fire and brimstone, Alphonsus contends that conversions based on fear of divine punishment do not endure. Hence, during the missions the principle task of each and every preacher is to leave his listeners on fire with holy love.15 While we no longer use sulfury language to capture the attention of our audience, we still might ask ourselves whether our preaching has become vapid or superficial in content. Do we use all the creativity and passion at our disposal in order to preach Jesus Christ the Redeemer in a language that people, especially the abandoned poor, are able to understand today?
2. Cf. Domingo Moraleda, CMF, *Symbolic and Messianic Role of Consecrated Lif*e, in SEDOS vol. 37, no. 11/12 (Rome: November-December 2005), 2005/178.
3. *Selva di materie predicabili ed istruttive*, 242.
4. *Foglietto di cinque punti...nelle Missioni*, n. 1.

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1. The mission of the Congregation is not something that we have given ourselves. Nor can it be explained and justified internally, sociologically, psychologically or anthropologically, for its origins lie outside itself. God is the very origin and source of mission and its power. That is its most internal mystery, from which the Congregation draws its life, strength and vision. As soon as mission begins to justify its *raison d’être* differently, i.e.: socio-politically or culturally, it loses its authenticity. If our mission loses its centre in Jesus Christ, its light will be extinguished and it will become insipid; it will be like salt that is good for nothing and has to be thrown out.
2. I believe that recognizing the mission of the Congregation in the mystery of Jesus Christ holds important consequences for us. This identification should provoke a real wonder and respect for our vocation as “helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption” (Con. 2), for we share in an impulse which finds its origin in the mystery of the blessed Trinity. Pastoral planning, which must pay attention to goals, objectives, action plans and evaluation, should also be the fruit of contemplative prayer, meditation and lectio divina, for we are dealing with holy things, not simply employing principles of management.
3. As we seek to make more evident through the gift of our lives the divine impulse towards all humanity, we can never cease to search and question. There is no room for bourgeois self- satisfaction or complacency in our vocation. Do you remember the story Alphonsus tells about a certain hermit who one day met a prince in the forest? The prince asked him what he was doing there. The hermit replied by asking him, “Sir what are you doing

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in this lonely place?” When the prince answered that he was hunting wild animals, the hermit rejoined, “And I am hunting for God,” and went on his way.16 If it is true that many of our contemporaries are searching for the divine or, at least, for some ultimate meaning in their lives, imagine the powerful witness of our pastoral work and community life as places where men are hunting for God!

##### Conversion to compassion that manifests itself in *kenosis*

1. Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga invites us to think also with our feet. That is, eventually our reflection should translate into action that is consistent with our deepest values. If we want to grasp how Alphonsus understands the Redeemer and hissaving work, we must always include the people, especially the abandoned poor. As we have seen, our Founder identifies his Congregation with the mission of Jesus, who comes to announce good news to the poor. Constitution 5 reproduces this rapport, noting that “evangelization in the strict sense together with the choice in favor of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church, and is the badge of its fidelity to the vocation it has received.”
2. Alphonsus did not have simply a theoretical appreciation of the special link between the Redeemer and the abandoned. His first biographer captures in dramatic terms how our Founder “thought with his feet” – even when he was actually riding a mule! In a poignant description of his exodus from Naples in 1732, Alphonsus is depicted as making to Jesus a complete sacrifice of that city and its glory in order to live
3. *Pratica di Amar Gesù Cristo*, II, 8.

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and die in the countryside, surrounded by unlettered peasants and shepherds.17

Commenting on this event, Théodule Rey-Mermet argues that the beginning of our Congregation was first and foremost the death and rebirth of one man: “the distinguished Neapolitan gentleman no longer existed and a poor man among the poor took his place.”18 The paschal language used to interpret the exodus of Alphonsus is instructive, especially when we recall the meeting that provoked the decision of Alphonsus: when, in the early summer of 1730, the sight of the abandoned poor on the heights above Scala changed him forever. Moved by compassion, Alphonsus assumed the same “mind” as Christ Jesus and “emptied himself ” (cf. Phil 2: 5b). Alphonsus recognized hisown vocation in the compassion and kenosis of the Son of God. The story of Jesus becomes the story of Alphonsus.

40. Since 1732, thousands of Redemptorists have entered that same dynamic, allowing that the story of Jesus become theirs as well. Confreres like Blessed Nicholas Mykolay Charnetskyi and Blessed Dominick Methodius Trčka have lived kenosis in its ultimate sense, “accepting even death” for the sake of the mission. Although less dramatic, no less precious are the countless stories of disinterested love that have marked the history of our Congregation: missionaries who, through their religious profession, have spared no effort to arrive at a total gift of themselves (Con. 56).

1. A. M. Tannoia, *Della vita ed Istituto del Ven. S. di D. Alfonso M. de Liguori,* (Napoli 1798), vol. I, p. 66: “*Accertato Alfonso della volontà di Dio, si animò, e prese coraggio; e facendo a Gesù Cristo un sacrificio totale della Città di Napoli, si offerse menar i suoi giorni*

*dentro proquoi, e tugurj, e morire in quelli attorneato da’ Villani, e da’ Pastori.*”

1. *St. Alphonsus Liguori: Tireless Worker for the Most Abandoned,* (New York: New City Press, 1989), p. 259.

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1. I believe that the Congregation is called today to express the charismatic inspiration of Alphonsus in a dynamic process of *solidarity*. Solidarity is compassion, for it commits us to the historical struggle of the poor and weak of this world and links us with those who are abandoned and without hope. Solidarity calls us to give “special attention to the poor, the deprived and the oppressed”, since “the evangelization of these is a sign of messianic activity” (Con. 4). Not only does Jesus choose to identify himself in a special way with the marginalized (Mt 25: 40) but, in his incarnation and paschal mystery, God expresses radical and irrevocable solidarity with human beings.
2. Theevangelicalsolidarity,whichcommitstheCongregation to the poor, deprived and oppressed, finds concrete expression in our community. The last General Chapters have emphasized that the Redemptorist community is itself a proclamation of the Good News. It is the tent which God pitches among the abandoned poor in order to communicate his compassion. But our common life also demands *kenosis*. For “community life does not truly exist when members merely live together; it requires as well genuine sharing on the human and spiritual level” (Con. 21).
3. The invitation of the last General Chapter to think about the restructuring of the Congregation is a call to conversion to plentiful redemption.19 It is not hard to see restructuring as a sort of self-emptying. The reflection on this question is a refusal to cling stubbornly to the glory of the past or to accept complacently the limitations of the present. Instead, we are searching for new forms of solidarity in order to express the compassion of God for the abandoned poor. This journey seems precarious and demands
4. *Communicanda 1: Called to Give Our Lives for Plentiful Redemption* (Roma: 2004), 43.

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the sort of faith and courage that moved Alphonsus to leave behind Naples and set out towards an unknown future, armed only with the confidence that God was leading him.

1. Let us continue this journey in hope, a hope that does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom 5: 5). Many expect from us a sign of hope, as Pope John Paul II reminded the XXIII General Chapter: “If you proclaim plentiful redemption with joy and integrity, you will bring about or strengthen evangelical hope in the hearts of many people, especially those most in need of it, because they have been wounded by sin and its harmful consequences.”20
2. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are pilgrims who share a promise and a dream. The solidarity, which God has established in the Redeemer, is already acting in a sort of eschatological struggle, so our vision is not restricted by the limits of the present moment and we reject cynicism as well as wishful thinking. God is making all things new and we are called to work together while keeping our eyes fixed on a new heaven and a new earth that is promised through Christ.

##### Companions on our journey

1. Mary, the mother of the Redeemer and our Mother of Perpetual Help, walks with us and strengthens our hope. She is a model of compassion and disinterested love. She joined in the anxious prayer of the apostles at the birth of the Church. I think we should depend on her presence today at the heart of our Congregation as we seek to understand and announce the redeeming work of her Son.
2. *Message of Pope John Paul II to the XXIII General Chapter*, 6.

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1. May the example of St. Paul and the apostles and the dedication of Alphonsus and all our Redemptorist saints and beati enkindle our zeal. We pray that the extraordinary faithfulness of the confreres who have gone before us may strengthen our courage as we too struggle to give our lives for plentiful redemption.
2. In the name of the General Council, I reiterate our most cordial and fraternal greetings to all. We have a very special place in our hearts for the Redemptoristine nuns as well as for all religious and lay persons who share our mission, remembering particularly the young people across the world who are ready and willing to follow Jesus in announcing the good news to the poor.

In the Most Holy Redeemer,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original text is the English)*

**CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS SUPERIOR GENERALIS**

**A LETTER TO THE CONFRERES**

***Called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* (1Cor 1: 1)**

September 8, 2009

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Prot. N° 0000 159/2009

Dear Confreres,

1. As we enter the final month of the sexennium, the eyes of the Congregation are fixed on the XXIV General Chapter. While I expect to be able to offer a report to the Chapter on the state of our Institute, I would like to say something directly to all the members of the Congregation, who entrusted the service of Superior General to an unworthy brother. I greet also the Redemptoristine Sisters and other religious and lay missionaries who share our spirit, asking that

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you read this reflection from the standpoint of your own vocation in the Body of Christ. Perhaps the reader may glimpse how much I love our Congregation and the hope I have for our future.

1. Over the last twelve years, I have been asked many times how I came to receive this ministry. I have been tempted to respond with three “c’s” pronounced by our holy Founder: capitolo… cavallo…cieco – the Chapter is a blind horse! However, I suspect that in 1997 God judged that I did not love the Congregation enough, so I have been given twelve years of intense schooling in the magnificence of our vocation.
2. This letter intends to continue an invitation that was formally posed to Redemptorists two years ago: that we look at our commitment as vowed men who intend to follow in the footsteps of the redeeming Christ by preaching the Gospel to the poor. I hope that you will agree that an honest look at the meaning of our religious profession is not only a natural outcome of the work of the last General Chapters but also a particularly pressing task in the light of the present situation of the Congregation.
3. In the first section of this letter, I will highlight some circumstances that urge us to take a fearless and thorough look at our way of following Jesus Christ. You will want to complete this description with experiences from your own social and ecclesial situation. In the second section, I will try to evaluate this reality in the light of the Gospel and our spiritual patrimony. Rather than attempting to propose all the criteria that should guide us today, I hope to point to an element that is particularly critical for creative fidelity to our vocation. Finally, I will propose some common lines of action with the goal of encouraging our unity on essential elements while respecting the existential diversity within the Congregation.

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##### SEE

*But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.* (Jn 16: 13)

1. What might the Holy Spirit teach us about our particular way of discipleship, the vita apostolica, a life that is “at one and the same time specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work” (Con. 1)? What could the Spirit be saying to Redemptorists today? How do we listen to the Spirit of truth, who declares to us the things that are coming (Jn 16: 13)?
2. Where can we begin? Redemptorist apostolic life is, first and foremost, life. So, a useful point of departure for looking at our way of discipleship is to search for signs of vitality among Redemptorist missionaries today. This search is particularly critical for Redemptorists since, from the very beginning, our Congregation has had a particular insight into the abundance of life that is found with Jesus Christ; hence, our motto Copiosa apud Eum Redemptio. The search for vitality in our apostolic life cannot be an exercise in fantasy or wishful thinking. Although we do not yet see clearly what the Spirit is bringing to birth in the world, the Church and therefore, our Congregation, we still can identify signs of new vitality.

##### The fascination exerted over Redemptorists today by the person of Jesus

1. I am convinced that most Redemptorists love Jesus Christ and express that love through generosity, self-sacrifice and perseverance. When Redemptorists preach, they speak about Jesus as a person whom we know intimately, a person who displays the

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fullness of the beauty and love of God from the cross,1 and in whose Gospel we discover the way to true liberation and solidarity.

1. In the visitations of the Units of the Congregation, the members of the General Council have a privileged opportunity to see the sort of power that Redemptorists discover in the Redeemer. These visits demonstrate that the profile of Redemptorists contained in Constitution 20 is not an idyllic fantasy. The general consultors and I have witnessed firsthand the sort of heroism that characterizes the Congregation: confreres who “denying themselves, are always ready to undertake what is demanding,” whether the task at hand is a particularly difficult mission or simply persevering in their vocation when, like Abraham, they must “hope against hope” (Rom 4: 18).
2. The source of this audacious love is the Redeemer, whom Redemptorists continue to “follow with hearts full of joy” (Con. 20). The first and most important sign of vitality in our apostolic life is the constant rediscovery and recommitment of Redemptorists to Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14: 6).

##### The desire to be born anew

1. Far from being some sort of unchanging bastion that pretends to exist outside of history, the Congregation struggles to continue its pilgrimage with creative fidelity to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council challenged religious to begin a process of renewal guided by essential criteria: a return to the Word of God, especially the Gospels, a return to the spirit of the founder and the fundamental values of the origins, and the
2. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata*, (25 March 1996), n. 24.

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need to give a concrete response to the signs of the times.2 The principles of the decree Perfectae Caritatis and the doctrine of the magisterium in the wake of the Council were embraced with enthusiasm by the Congregation and, to date, the renewal has produced concrete results.

* 1. Our Constitutions and Statutes offer norms that are clearly rooted in the spiritual insight of Alphonsus yet flexible enough to permit the necessary inculturation of our apostolic life in the vast panoply of cultures in which the Congregation carries out its mission. Some confreres have dedicated decades of their lives to the painstaking research of our history and spiritual patrimony and have produced a wealth of new resources for understanding our apostolic life. In the last forty years, we have deepened our appreciation for the life and original inspiration of Saint Alphonsus as well as his missionary methods and spirituality. We know much more about the lives of our other saints and beati as well as the adventure of grace that has been the history of the Congregation over the last two hundred and seventy-six years.
  2. The fruit of such research does not gather dust in community libraries. Many confreres participate in courses on our spirituality and history in Roma as well as at the provincial and regional levels. Regular meetings of major superiors work hard to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the efforts of their Units and a number of provincial superiors are willing to take initiatives to respond to new pastoral urgencies. And I thank God for a commendable degree of dissatisfaction within the Congregation! We tell each other that we can be better than the status quo and refuse to be seduced by mediocrity. Many of us hope to be more

1. Cf. Vatican II, *Decree Perfectae Caritati*s, n. 2.

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coherent in our decisions and more prophetic in our lifestyle. Far from useless carping, such discontent can be a sign of vitality and indicate openness to conversion.

##### The fundamental importance of mission

1. The renewed Constitutions insist that apostolic charity, “through which the members share in the mission of Christ the Redeemer” (Con. 52), gives unity to Redemptorist life, a life which finds its full expression in the vita apostolica. Successive General Chapters reminded the Congregation that not every pastoral activity or lifestyle can be justified as a coherent expression of our charism. In 1985, the XX General Chapter challenged the Congregation to an explicit, prophetic and liberating proclamation of the Gospel to the poor while, at the same time, allowing ourselves also to be evangelized by them.3 The XXI General Chapter reminded us that our community life constitutes the first sign of our being preachers of the Gospel; moreover, our community is an effective presence of the Reign of God in the midst of men and women.4
2. On the one hand, the reflection of the last years has led many Redemptorists to glimpse a mission that excites our imagination and invites us to undertake bold and prophetic initiatives, going beyond traditional frontiers to proclaim Jesus Christ through inculturation, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue as well as new forms of communications media, while maintaining a preference for the poor and excluded ones in society. While parish missions and other forms of itinerant preaching still enjoy pride of place among us, we have discovered new possibilities through ministry in shrines, parishes, retreat centers, mission stations, media, spiritual direction and catechesis.
3. *C.Ss.R., Acta Integra Capituli Generalis XX*, Offset, Romae 1985, 217.
4. *C.Ss.R., Acta Integra Capituli Generalis XXI*, Tipografia Poliglotta della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Romae 1992, 313.

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1. On the other hand, the debate on the essential features of our mission – an argument that has grown sharper because of the process of restructuring – reminds us that we are not exempt from making choices and must struggle to anchor our decisions in criteria that are proposed by the Gospel and our understanding of the Redemptorist charism. Like Alphonsus, Clement and all of our fathers in faith, we must decide to whom we are called, how we are to live and what pastoral methods are appropriate in carrying out the mission we have been given. A new appreciation for the fundamental importance of mission naturally challenges any tendency towards passivity or a tendency to “settle down in surroundings and structures in which [our] work would no longer be missionary” (Con. 15). At the same time, by underscoring the importance of community life and spirituality, the reflection of the last General Chapters has cautioned Redemptorists against simply reducing mission to pastoral work.

##### Faithfulness to the abandoned poor

1. The General Council has seen many examples of the fundamental faithfulness of Redemptorists to the abandoned poor. Some of these choices put at risk the very lives of confreres. I am thinking of the Redemptorists who have stayed close to the suffering people of Iraq or the confreres in Côte d’Ivoire, who remained in a region torn by civil war and deserted by most of the clergy, including the diocesan bishop. There are Redemptorists who proclaim the Gospel in a foreign land where the apparent results of their labor are much more modest than could be expected in their Province of origin, like the Brazilian confreres in Surinam or Polish missionaries in Siberia. Some Provinces have opened communities in new cultural situations, like ministry among Afro-Colombians in Buenaventura (Colombia) or the first efforts to establish a missionary presence in Laos. Such commitments demonstrate

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the special attention the Congregation continues to show for the poor, the deprived and the oppressed (Con. 4), reminding us that it is more important to be where there is pastoral neglect than to remain in well established Churches with an impressive number of participants.

##### The search for communion

1. From its very beginning, the Congregation has been very close to the people it serves and has tried in different ways to involve lay people in its missionary efforts. This tradition received fresh impetus in recent decades, beginning with the XXI General Chapter, which recognized a need for openness to cooperation with the laity and expressed support for fresh initiatives, including the establishment of a new figure in the Congregation, the “Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer.”5
2. Although there is still much to be done towards an effective integration of laity in our mission, there appears to be a growing consensus in the Congregation regarding the value of shared initiatives involving Redemptorists and lay people. It is also clear that both lay people and Redemptorists need theological, pastoral and spiritual formation to ensure that this association gives testimony to our essential equality before the Lord, while respecting the particular vocation of everyone. The Congregation will not retreat from the search for the communion that makes possible a shared mission in service of the Church and humanity.

5. *Ibid.,* 339-340.

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##### The need for a renewed spirituality

1. Finally, Redemptorists are striving to apply the spiritual patrimony of the Congregation to the new circumstances in which we live and minister today. There is a sense among us that the spiritual journey of confreres who have gone before us, beginning with Alphonsus but not restricted to him, gives us precious insights into our way of following Christ today. In this search, we need to have clear and trustworthy points of reference that define the orientation of our missionary spirituality. Our vision must be rooted in the Gospels, in the spirit of Alphonsus and in the actual experience of Redemptorists across the centuries. Of course, this spiritual search cannot be mired in the past or, what would be more harmful, seek to transport uncritically the past into the present.6
2. The General Council is encouraged to see the revival of common retreats in many Provinces as well as the interest in publications, workshops and courses on the essential elements of Redemptorist spirituality. A good number of (Vice-)Provinces programmed special events during the year of reflection on Redemptorist apostolic life. Often the attraction of lay people to our spiritual patrimony has goaded Redemptorists to greater study and appreciation for our heritage.
3. While I see many examples of vitality in our apostolic life today our Congregation, like the Church, passes through different stages in the long pilgrimage of history. We are not extraterrestrials who are exempt from the same forces that are profoundly changing individual societies and their institutions as well as the world as a whole. Some of these forces may serve to obscure signs of vitality
4. Cf. Félix Catalá, C.Ss.R., “*Dimensions of Redemptorist Spirituality*”, published at [www.redemptoristspirituality.net.](http://www.redemptoristspirituality.net/)

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in our apostolic life or even lead us to wrench the mission of the Congregation from its divine origin and reduce it simply to statistics, demographics and cultural trends. Let me try to introduce some of the more worrisome features of this problem.

##### The consequences of a precipitous fall in numbers in the West

* 1. There is ample evidence to test the optimism of Redemptorists today. Over the last five decades, like most major Orders and Congregations of male religious, our Congregation has suffered a drastic decline in numbers, especially in Western Europe, North America and Oceania. The reasons behind this phenomenon are many and complex. For the purposes of this reflection, I propose to highlight some of the results of this decline, rather than explore its possible causes.
  2. The Units most affected by this decline have played a long and remarkably fruitful role in the mission of the Congregation. They not only exercised great influence in the history of the local Church of their particular region, but also implanted the Congregation throughout the southern hemisphere. A small number of these Provinces continue to bear the lion’s share of financing common projects of the Congregation, such as the Solidarity Fund, the Alphonsian Academy and the General Government, while discreetly providing direct support to needy units throughout the world. The decreased number of confreres and their elevated age cannot help but reduce the scope of possibilities of these Units and the rising cost of medical care for the elderly has shrunk the amount of financial support these Units can offer to the Congregation. What is more, these Units have gained valuable insights regarding the complicated relationship among faith, religion and a secularized society. The decline of the Congregation in these regions impoverishes the life of the Church.

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* 1. Beyond such immediate consequences, however, the apparent unattractiveness of our way of life among young people in the West has produced serious doubts among some bishops, laity and even Redemptorists regarding the future of both the Congregation and consecrated life itself. In their day-to-day governance as well as planning for the future, many Units feel obliged to favor maintenance over mission and a vocabulary of retrenchment and diminishment has replaced a language of abundance that traditionally was associated with the consecrated life.7
  2. Coming to terms with a much narrower horizon of possibilities, confreres often express a wistful resignation, even sadness, as they recall the “golden age” of their Unit. It is not an exaggeration to observe that the Congregation in the West may be a victim of our past success, as confreres recall a historical period when an unusually high number of candidates presented themselves, thereby unleashing the energy that made possible a dramatic expansion of ministry.

##### Passage from legalism to ???

* 1. The Congregation is still living the consequences of the passage from the Rule to the revised Constitutions and Statutes. From the beginning, Redemptorists have codified certain norms aimed at safeguarding the most cherished values of our way of following Christ. These norms served to guide the Congregation in its most important decisions, while transmitting to successive generations the spiritual experience of the apostolic life. For the major part of our history, the goal of Redemptorists was to live the prescriptions of the Rule as a way to holiness and so carry out the work of the Congregation. Observance was the key value. The Rule

1. David Couturier, OFM Cap., “*Religious Life at a Crossroads*”, in Origins 36, n. 12 (2006) 181-188.

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governed our ministry and community life to such a degree that it is said that one could go to any house we had throughout the world and find great similarities in the style of life, down to the furnishing of each confrere’s room.

1. In the light of the renewal begun by the decree Perfectae Caritatis, observance of the prescriptions of the Rule was seen as an exaggerated emphasis on law and timeworn ascetical practices, even a preference for the letter of the law over its spirit.
2. In contrast, the revised Constitutions and Statutes offer rich theological content as well as a real flexibility that permits their “adjustment to the different character of each particular mission, always, of course, in fidelity to the charism of the Congregation” (Con. 96). If one examines the Constitutions and Statutes in the light of the criteria mandated by n. 2 of the decree Perfectae Caritatis, there is little doubt that they “connect us with the original spirit of the Institute” and provide for “the adaptation of that spirit to the changed conditions of our time.” However, it must be asked whether in reality the Constitutions are proving capable of passing on Redemptorist life? I refer, of course, to the apparently minor role the Constitutions play in the reflection, decisions and daily life of many Units of the Congregation.
3. Over the last decades, as traditions and norms have lost their significance, a critical value has been assigned to personal experience and the capacity of each individual to encounter God. When filtered by subjective criteria, older practices and formulas no longer mediate a personally valid experience of God.8 This may help to explain the struggle local communities have in establishing a regular life of common prayer. Eighteen years ago the XXI General Chapter noted a challenge that continues even today: “when we
4. Cf. Catalá, op. cit.

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left behind the practices considered unauthentic or unsuited to the present day, there did not arise new ones capable of filling the vacuum produced.”9

1. The unfamiliarity of the Constitutions and their apparently inconsequential role in much of the life of the Congregation deprives Redemptorists of a common language as well as principles with which we can measure our lives and base our decisions.
2. When a Province has to make choices regarding pastoral methods, develop expectations for community life or consider establishing or abandoning foundations, the debate is governed by beliefs, attitudes or opinions that may or may not have much of a connectionwiththevaluesexpressedinthe Constitutions. Unhelpful dichotomies continue to appear, albeit in new forms. One hears less about “Carthusians at home and apostles abroad” and more about “being” versus “doing”, “activism” versus “contemplation”, “missions” versus “parishes.” It seems to me that these and similar examples of juxtaposition reflect a fundamental disconnection with the spirituality of the Constitutions and Statutes.

##### Clericalism

1. We should ask ourselves whether or not there is a rise in the Congregation of a type of clericalism that distances us from the truth of Constitution 54, which reminds us that religious profession (and not ordination) is the definitive act of the whole missionary life of Redemptorists. Clericalism is rooted in the idea that in whatever pertains to religion, it is the right and the responsibility of clerics to make the decisions and give the orders, and the job of lay people to carry them out. This sort of clericalism is not growing in the Congregation. However, there may be a subtle but real
2. *Acta Integra Capituli Generalis XXI*, 327.

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increase of a clericalist culture, that is, an environment in which the Redemptorist vocation is reduced to the ordained priesthood and our mission is thought of in terms of cultic ministries that are reserved to priests. Two phenomena point to this deeper possibility.

1. First, the number of Redemptorist Brothers continues to diminish in practically every Unit of the Congregation. There are many reasons behind this fact, but what concerns me are the Units that no longer promote the vocation of Brothers. This is particularly worrisome in Provinces or (Vice-)Provinces that have a healthy number of clerical students, but argue that cultural reasons account for the absence of Brothers. It is said that people consider a Brother to be “less” than a priest – a sort of incomplete cleric! If people really believe this, then the Congregation has an opportunity to challenge such a serious misconception with an example of brotherhood in which all are missionaries by virtue of their profession (Con. 55) and all the members are equal, each in his own way playing his part in living the life and carrying out the mission to which they have dedicated themselves (Con. 35).
2. Another worrisome sign is the apparent ease with which ordained members abandon the Congregation to be incardinated in a diocese. This passage often occurs early in the life of a Redemptorist priest, who sees incardination as an attractive solution to a personal crisis. Sadly, there are bishops who seem eager to welcome a religious priest, especially if the cleric is young or has specialized formation. The diocesan priesthood is a worthy vocation but one that is fundamentally distinct from our way of discipleship. When a confrere is incardinated into a diocese, I have often heard it said “At least his priesthood is saved!” What is meant by prizing priesthood and making less important the life in which it is exercised, that is, the Congregation or a diocese?

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1. Beyond clericalism, there may be other castes that divide the Congregation. An exaggerated value of “professionalism,” with an accompanying dress code and manner of speaking, or a partition along ideological lines that features a confrontation between opposing opinions on a theological or political question, weaken the corporate witness of a Province. Ethnic, national or regional differences create troublesome barriers among confreres. Like clericalism, these sources of fragmentation suggest that for a number of confreres, there are more powerful points of identification than our common profession as Redemptorists.

##### The question of the prophectic dimension

1. Today many confreres speak about the diminished testimony of our way of life – that the prophetic dimension of our vocation is weak, even absent. This concern emerged strongly this year in several regional meetings, especially in Latin America. Although confreres in other regions may not express the concern as emphatically, I wonder if there is not a widespread unease among Redemptorists, an anxious feeling that we have allowed the radical nature of our vocation to be compromised by a more bourgeois lifestyle in which corporate witness is neutered by personal preference. We sense that Redemptorist life was never meant to be a well-balanced career with regular hours, clear job descriptions and all sorts of guarantees. Yet, often we are uncertain what sort of witness to offer: what do we proclaim…what do we denounce?
2. In the first section of this letter, I invited you to think about what the Holy Spirit might be saying to us about our particular way of discipleship, the vita apostolica. By examining some features of the Congregation today, I tried to indicate both signs of vitality as well as reasons for us to be concerned for our way of discipleship. From your own experience, you have probably thought of other

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examples of vigor and decline. I would like to illuminate the reality of Congregation by turning to what I consider to be the vow that can make a crucial contribution to the apostolic life of Redemptorists today: the vow of obedience. Before anyone gets too nervous and begins to see specters of authoritarianism and centralization, let me try to explain.

##### JUDGE

*Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus…*

(Phil 2: 5)

##### The vows today

1. Religious profession is the definitive act of the missionary life of a Redemptorist (Con. 54). The force of this profession is not simply a pledge to live the consequences of the three vows, together with the vow and oath of perseverance. More than the assumption of obligations, religious profession represents a movement of the Holy Spirit, which leads Redemptorists to spare no effort to arrive at the total gift of themselves as a response to the Lord who first loved them (Con. 56). The vows are certainly of great consequence in the life-long process of self-giving, but so is a commitment to a “life of brotherly love” and “apostolic charity”, as our formula for profession makes clear.
2. For Redemptorists, the vows are to be lived in the light of the mission received by the Congregation and have as much to do with the community as the individual members. Individually, the vows might be seen as determining how Redemptorists deal with the social order, sexuality and property. Together they represent a

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freely assumed and public commitment to a life of self-giving that is modeled after the pattern of Christ’s love for His Church. Like His, our gift is total and irreversible.10

1. Can it be helpful, then, to single out one vow as having a unique value for the vita apostolica in the first decade of the twenty- first century? If so, which one? When one considers the evangelical testimony of the vows against the background of current events, one could make a case that religious chastity offers a unique witness in the face of the public scandals caused by the sexual misconduct of clerics and religious as well as the reduction of sexual expression to a necessary biological urge. On the other hand, given our preference for the abandoned and among them, the poor, we certainly want to understand better and live more coherently the evangelical counsel of poverty. However, I will argue that obedience plays a particularly decisive role in the apostolic life today.
2. It is practically a cliché to say that we live in midst of a rapidly changing world, Church and Congregation. Our age is called a transition time that is marked by “great advances in science and technology as well as powerful means of communication that sometimes colonize the spirit.”11 There is the ambiguous experience of globalization that makes us interdependent at the same time as it undermines particular cultural identities. But our day also presents “kairos moments in which we are surprised and realize that the God who speaks is the Lord of history.” We experience a “thirst for and crisis of meaning that holds out to us a thousand proposals and promises.”12
3. Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelica Testificatio* (29 June 1971), n. 7.
4. International Congress on Consecrated Life, F*inal Document What the Spirit is saying to the Consecrated Life?* (Roma, November, 2004), n. 2.
5. *Ibidem.*

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1. Even in the “in-between time” of the present moment, the Congregation must make choices. It is not free to be capricious nor can it determine the criteria for its options by its own lights alone. Amid a cacophony of voices that seek to “colonize” its spirit, the Congregation needs to distinguish the voice of Him who has called us to be His “helpers, companions and ministers in the great work of Redemption by preaching the Word of salvation to the poor” (Con. 2). Because Redemptorists are called to respond to situations of real pastoral urgency (Con. 5), our choices should be evaluated regularly, lest we allow ourselves to “to settle down in surroundings and structures in which [our] work would no longer be missionary” (Con. 15).
2. The tumultuous experience of change in our Institute over the last five decades as well as the flux of the world today demand that Redemptorists have listening and discerning hearts that are free to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So, I propose we give particular attention to the vow of obedience as a commitment to a co-responsible search for the will of God according to the charism of the Congregation.
3. While a complete consideration of the vow must include the role of authority in the apostolic life as well as the obligation of the members to obey the legitimate demands of their superiors, in this reflection I would like to think about our vow in the radical context described by Paul VI: “Even more than a purely formal and legalistic obeisance to Church law or submission to ecclesiastical authority, [obedience] is a penetration and acceptance of the mystery of Christ, who, through obedience, saved us. It is a continuation of His fundamental gesture: saying Yes to the will of the Father.”13

[13] Obedience in this fundamental sense is consonant with the Word of God and the rich spiritual patrimony of the Congregation

1. Paul VI, *Discorsi al Popolo di Dio,* 1966-1967 (Roma 1968) 119.

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and will help us distinguish the voice of our Master and recognize the kairos within the chaos of our times.

##### A question and a response

1. The Gospels present a number of “vocation stories,” accounts that relate Jesus extending a call that is accepted or rejected by the His listeners. My favorite “story” is the entire Gospel of John, which begins with a question and concludes with an invitation. The first words of Jesus are “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1: 38); the Gospel closes with his words to Peter “You follow me” (Jn 21: 22). Unlike the call of the apostles in the Synoptics, the first words of Jesus to Andrew and the other disciple is an appeal to their desire, their dreams, and their ideals: “What are you looking for?” The Gospel is the story of the astounding encounter between the God, who “so loved the world,” and the deepest hungers of the human heart. The call to follow comes after the revelation of the paschal mystery in which the saving plan of the Father is fully disclosed.
2. The search for God has always been the quest of every being thirsting for the Absolute and the Eternal.14 [14] The great religious traditions mirror this search, as do secularized societies, where men and women seek some kind of meaning in life, death, love and suffering without reference to a revealed faith. Like Paul in the Areopagus, if we are attentive to the “shrines” that these societies construct, we can discern many altars to the Agnostos Theos (cf. Acts 17: 23).
3. For Redemptorists, the quest for ultimate meaning finds the definitive answer in Jesus Christ. Together with our brothers
4. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Instruction The Service of Authority and Obedience: Faciem tuam,*

*Domine, Requiram*, (Vatican City 2008), n. 3.

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and sisters in faith, we confess “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God” (Jn 6: 68-69). Yet, even when we come to the joyful recognition that we have found what we were looking for (cf. Jn 1: 41), the search continues.

1. Our profession is the “definitive act of our missionary life” (Con. 54), yet it is also the continuation of the quest. I think of the image of Jesus in the chapel of General Curia, which presents him in three-quarters profile. There remains always the hidden side of the Master, so our prayer continues to be “Your face, o Lord, I seek” (Ps 27: 8).

##### Obedience is owed to God alone

1. The necessary point of departure for considering obedience is faith, our response to the most fundamental vocation that we received at baptism. In its theological sense, obedience is owed to God alone. Any other manifestation of religious obedience is a mediation, a means to an end, directed towards the only genuinely important and decisive will in the life of a Christian and, therefore, a Redemptorist.15
2. Obedience acknowledges the primacy of God over everything and everyone.16 Thus, in their most fundamental identities, the Congregation and the Church are not structured into two classes, those who command and those who obey. To all His disciples, Jesus says “You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers” (Mt 23: 8). Everyone in the Church must search for the
3. Cf. José Rovira, CMF, *Autorità-Obbedienza e la Ricerca della Volontà di Dio,* Conference given to the 71st assembly of the Union of Superiors General (29 May 2008).
4. *The Service of Authority*, 3b.

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will of God and all are called to be obedient, since he who does the will of the Father is “brother, sister and mother” to Jesus Christ (Mt 12: 50).

##### Christ is the model of obedience

1. The Constitutions recognize that Redemptorists have been given a visible model of how we should seek and live out the will of God in history. The first constitution on the vow of obedience begins “Following the example of Christ, who came to do the will of his Father, and give his life as redemption for many… ” (Con. 71). Obedience to the will of God was not something added to Christ’s personality but rather its full expression: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me” (Jn 4: 34).17 As His “helpers, companions and ministers in the great work of Redemption”, we too are called to an obedience that continues the mission given to Christ by the Father.
2. Thus, when Redemptorists speak about the “mission” of the Congregation, we are talking about obedience, not tired slogans or prefabricated answers. By this vow, we are “seeking the Kingdom of God and sharing intimately in the paschal mystery of Christ, which is the mystery of obedience” (Con. 71).
3. The point of reference is Christ and the mystery of His kenosis. The concrete expression of the mission in history is not always self-evident; hence we search for God’s will in a spirit of faith and love. Saint Alphonsus urges us to continue this quest, teaching that our true realization comes from loving God, who is so deserving of our love, but the perfection of the love of God consists in uniting our will with His.18
4. T*he Service of Authority,* 23a.
5. Sant’Alfonso de Liguori, *Uniformità alla volontà di Dio*, Città Nuova, Roma 1999, 55.

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##### What is this «Will of God»?

1. What is this “will” of the Father that we must seek and – like Christ – strive to carry out within the framework of the time and the circumstances in which the Congregation finds itself? The answer can be found in the first words of the prayer Jesus gave us: to act in such a way that the Father is recognized as the only Holy One, that His historical and eschatological Kingdom come and that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Mt 6: 9-10).19 The Divine Will begins to be done when we believe in the Son sent by the Father out of love for the world (Jn 3: 16ff) so that no one will perish (cf. Jn 6: 40). The invisible point of reference for the will of God is the Father’s extravagant love (Mt 5: 42-48); its point of visible reference is Christ’s behavior towards those He loved (cf. Jn 15: 9-17).20
2. St. Paul lists apparently exemplary actions that finally are worthless, if they are done without love (1Cor 13: 1-3). Likewise, Saint Alphonsus teaches that it is not enough to do praiseworthy things, if the behavior is not done in conformity to will of God.21 So, too, not every pastoral option assumed by a confrere, a local community or a Province can be judged as consonant with the charism of the Congregation, if the choice is not made in harmony with God’s will. Saint Augustine succinctly observed Martyres non facit poena sed causa – it is not pain that makes martyrs but rather their cause.22
3. Rovira, op cit., 4.
4. Ibid., 4.
5. *Uniformità alla volontà di Dio*, 76.
6. S. Augustinus, *Sermo* 328, 8.

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1. Yet the authentic experience of God always remains the experience of otherness23 As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in his second encyclical, “However great the similarity that may be established between Creator and creature, the dissimilarity between them is always greater.”24 The prophet invites us to “seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near” (Is 55: 6) and immediately warns against any false intimacy or facile familiarity: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Is 55: 8-9).
2. The sublime “otherness” of God means that we must seek His will through paths which are consonant with His revelation. First and foremost, the real obedience of any disciple is “adhering to the Word with which God reveals and communicates himself.”25 The following of Christ as presented in the Gospel is the fundamental norm of religious life and must be considered as the supreme rule in the Congregation.26
3. Another mediation of God’s will is the teaching office of the Church, which has the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, teaching authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ. However, this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant.27 It may teach only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards the deposit of faith with dedication and expounds it faithfully.28
4. *The Service of Authority*, 7.
5. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Spe Salvi* (2007), n. 43
6. *The Service of Authority*, 7.
7. Cf. *Constitutions and Statutes C.SsR*., n. 74; *Perfectae Caritatis,* n. 2a.
8. Vatican II, *Constitution Dei Verbum*, n. 10.
9. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* nn. 85-86.

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1. There are other mediations of God’s will that are specific to one’s vocation in life. Religious men and women are called to follow the obedient Christ within an “evangelical project or a charismatic one, inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the Church.”29 In his apostolic exhortation, Vita Consecrata, Pope John Paul II indicated a pressing need today for every Institute to return to the Rule, “since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church.”30
2. The force of the our proper norms is clearly stated in Constitution 74: “Superiors and members then, united in community by the Holy Spirit, must observe Constitutions, statutes and decrees legitimately promulgated, looking on them as the authentic means whereby individual confreres and communities show their constant fidelity to God’s will. In this way they carry out the mission of Christ who said of Himself: ‘I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me’ (Jn 6: 38).” Ignorance of the Constitutions and Statutes or their relegation to the periphery of the life of a province or of the entire Congregation clearly jeopardizes the fidelity of its members.
3. Finally, a specific mediation of the will of God for the Congregation is the voice of the abandoned poor. We think of the decisive encounter of Alphonsus with the shepherds and goat herders in the heights above Scala. What he “heard” there led him to understand and accept the will of God: that he leave behind the poor of the back alleys of Naples and spend the rest of his life among the abandoned people of the countryside.
4. *The Service of Authority*, 9.
5. *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

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1. We remember that whenever Alphonsus intended to describe his Institute to ecclesiastical or civil authorities, he emphasized as an essential characteristic the fact that his communities would be located in the midst of the abandoned poor of the countryside. This feature distinguished the Redemptorists from the Pii Operai and other missionary groups that continued to live in the cities while making an occasional foray into the world of the abandoned.
2. In my opinion, Alphonsus insisted on this feature not simply for pastoral reasons, that is, to give the abandoned greater access to our houses and afford the missionaries an easier entry to different dioceses. Knowing the decisive role that the voice of the abandoned poor played in his own discernment, I believe that Alphonsus wanted his companions always close to the type of people for whom Jesus himself showed a clear preference. Thus, their voice would continue to reveal for Redemptorists the originality of their vocation. As he wrote to the communities in Scifelli and Frosinone in 1778:

*Assist souls, but specially the poor, the peasants and the most abandoned. Remember that God evangelizare pauperibus misit nos in these our days. Engrave this firmly on your hearts and look only for God among the abandoned poor if you wish to please Jesus Christ*.31

1. Our Constitutions invite us to discover the Lord in the people who have a special claim on us: the “abandoned” (Con. 3), with special attention for “the poor, the deprived and the oppressed” (Con. 4) and a preference for “situations of pastoral need” (Con. 5). We look for God in the concrete circumstances of life, striving
2. Cf. Antonio M. Tannoia, *Della vita ed istituto del Venerabile Servo di Dio Alfonso Mª Liguori, Vescovo di S. Agata de’ Goti e Fondatore della Congregazione de’ preti*

*missionari del SS. Redentor*e, 4 vol., Napoli 1798-1802, vol. IV, cap. 9, 44.

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to “encounter the Lord where He is already present and at work in his own mysterious way” (Con. 7) and letting the specific circumstances of a pastoral situation teach us what sort of response we should make (Con. 8). The gift of the Holy Spirit allows us to perceive God at work in the ordinary circumstances of life (Con.

24) but especially in the “anxious questionings” of the men and women of our day (Con. 19).

1. In summary, obedience is a fundamental attitude of every believer, not the exclusive prerogative of a small group of people who profess it as an evangelical counsel. Redemptorists, like everyone else in the Church are called to obey, following the example of Jesus, who came not to do His own will but the will of the Father (Jn 6: 38). The difference is that each of us within the Church lives out this obedience to God according to his charism and vocation. The will of God does not exist prior to the vocation; it is through the specific vocation that God makes known His will for the individual.32 So, by our vow we have committed ourselves to obey in a Redemptorist style: searching for the will of God that is mediated by His Word, the norms of our charismatic project and the voice of the abandoned poor.

##### ACT

*See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* (Is 43: 19)

1. I repeat the assertion made earlier in this letter: that obedience is the axial vow for Redemptorists in an age of change. In the past, this vow was seen principally in personal and legalistic
2. Cf. Rovira, op. cit., 8.

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terms. While our Constitutions still understand the vow as obliging the members to obey the legitimate commands of superiors (Con. 71), there is an urgent need to see the vow as a call to create “obedient communities” at every level of the Congregation. The vows are always of individuals and of the community. It would be a serious mistake to separate these two dimensions and reduce them simply to individual obligations.

1. Without a community that is committed to searching obediently for the will of God, it is difficult, if not impossible for individuals to remain obedient. It is clear that none of us can live fully and joyfully the freedom of the vow of obedience without the force of an obedient community, since the obedience of each individual to the Father takes place within the framework of the ecclesial community. It is not just the fundamental and personal relationship between one’s conscience and God that is significant; the relationship with our brothers is equally important. In fact, the vitality of a community is closely linked with the quality of its obedience as a community.33
2. How can we assure that our communities, whether local, provincial or the Congregation itself,34 remain obedient? I believe we need to distinguish among the many voices that seek to colonize our spirit by intensifying our attention to the Word of God, the charismatic project of the Congregation and the voice of the abandoned poor.
3. Sabatino Maiorano, C.Ss.R., “Autorità e vita fraterna: dialogo, discernimento ed obbedienza”, in *Il Servizio dell’Autorità e l’Obbedienza*, Roma 2009, 88.
4. C*onstitution* 22 reminds us that “community” can refer to the whole

Congregation, to the (vice-)province, or to a local or personal community.

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##### A lamp for our feet… a light for our path

1. The Word of God is the source of our vocation, our daily sustenance and the content of our missionary work. We need to proclaim, meditate on, share, and pray in obedience to the Word and strive to make the Word our “first book of spirituality.”35 Because of the absolutely vital role the Word plays for disciples, the Congregation must give greater value to listening, which is not, first and foremost, a technique of group dynamics but rather a continual quest for what the Father wants.
2. As a pious Jew, Jesus would have begun his daily prayer by repeating the words of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Dt 6: 4-5). He tells His disciples, “Whoever is of God listens to the words of God” (Jn 8: 47). How can our communities demonstrate this daily attentiveness to the Word of God?
3. The rhythm of community life should help the members to listen attentively to the Word. Daily reading of Scripture and periods of common meditation will help us hear the Word as a community and ask the light of the Holy Spirit in order to understand it. Many local communities have a weekly time of sharing in preparation for Sunday preaching or other moments of extraordinary proclamation. We should encourage each other to let the Word change our hearts and give greater value to the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual direction.
4. If we agree with Saint Jerome that “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,”36 then the difficulty in discovering
5. *Vita Consecrata*, 94.
6. St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* (nn. 1.2: CCL 73, 1-3).

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the prophetic dimension of our vocation might be rooted in unfamiliarity with God’s Word. After all, Jesus commissions His apostles by saying “you shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1: 8); it is to Him and His Kingdom that we give testimony. Saint John Chrysostom observed that the apostles came down from the mount in Galilee, where they had met the risen Lord, without any written stone tablets as Moses had: their lives would become the living gospel, from that moment on.37

##### At the heart of the community…

**is the Redeemer himself and his spirit of love**

1. It seems to me that we need to agree that whether we follow Christ in one way or another is not arbitrary. In the matter of vocation there is nothing arbitrary. Each Christian must seek out his vocation, that is, God’s will in his individual case and, once he has found it, like the merchant in the parable of Jesus, “rejoice and sell all he has” to live in fidelity with the call of the Lord (Mt 13: 44). For my Mom and Dad, their vocation as spouses and parents is superior to all others because it is their vocation, that is, the one to which they were called. For me, to be a Redemptorist is the best possible way of life because it is the one to which God has invited me.
2. By our profession, we have responded to the Lord with the total gift of ourselves and have committed ourselves to seeking the will of God within a concrete ecclesial community, the Congregation. Our obedience to God, something invisible, takes place within the framework of our visible community.
3. Cited in Benedict XVI, *Message to the People of God of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop*s (2008), 10.

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1. Just as we cannot affirm that we love the God we cannot see, if we despise the brother we do see (cf. 1Jn 4: 20-21), Redemptorists cannot state that they are seeking the will of God unless this search takes place within the visible community of the Congregation. So, the norms to guide discernment and decision-making are of crucial importance to avoid the danger of reducing the mission of the Congregation to a job or a career that is done principally for one’s own self-aggrandizement and thus to be managed more or less by each individual.38 Our Constitutions propose that the search for God’s will is a task for which every member of the Congregation is co-responsible.
2. No Redemptorist can disqualify himself from helping to create an obedient community, since to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the sake of the common good (Con. 92; cf. 1Cor 12: 7; Con. 72). Thus, a crucial service for those in authority is to encourage the community in its effort to listen to, discern and carry out the will of God, “leading the members in such a way that they will co-operate with an active and responsible obedience in applying themselves to their duties and to the activities they undertake” (Con. 72).
3. An important instrument in the exercise of co-responsible obedience is dialogue, termed by Paul VI as a new name for charity39 and for which the consecrated life has to offer a privileged experience.40 While community discernment is not a substitute for the service of authority in the community, those in authority must always keep in mind that the community is the best place in which to recognize and accept the will of God.41
4. Cf. *The Service of Authority*, 23.
5. Paul VI, *Encyclical Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), n. 64.
6. *Vita Consecrata*, 74.
7. *The Service of Authority,* 20e.

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1. Our Constitutions and Statutes, as well as the decrees of recent General Chapters, propose a number of ways in which the community seeks the will of God. Provincial assemblies and chapters are privileged moments for listening, discerning the will of God and making an effective response. All the members of a (Vice-) Province should have an opportunity to contribute generously to the reflection of the chapter, either through participation in a well- conceived process of preparation or as elected members. To this end, the members of a Unit should be well informed regarding the questions that will be examined by a chapter and have the opportunity to express their opinion.
2. The principle of co-responsibility does not mean that everyone has to be physically present at a chapter. In fact, the General Council has serious questions about the effectiveness of massive chapters, especially as an ordinary expression of government in larger Units. Among the many problems of this form of government, we have seen that such bodies produce determinations that are often so vague and expressed in language so general that a provincial government receives little effective guidance for the exercise of its mandate. The lack of a clear direction for a Province is an invitation to the sort of exaggerated individualism that hampers a number of Units today. Lacking an obedient and collegial discernment of its priorities, the members of a Unit are encouraged to “find something to do”, thereby accelerating the fragmentation of the community.
3. In our Congregation, elections are not simply a matter of casting ballots and counting them; much less a search for someone who would leave the members undisturbed in the pursuit of their individual projects. Rather, elections should be an important exercise of the vow of obedience by the provincial community that is characterized by a humble and co-responsible search for the will of God. Since the electoral process should be conducted

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in a prayerful atmosphere and hopefully lead to a convergence of insight, the Congregation should examine with a critical eye some roughly democratic yet privatized processes, such as balloting by mail. It is hard to see how such a system favors dialogue and discernment by the members of the Unit. The apostolic purpose of the Congregation should penetrate and inspire the discernment and selection of leaders.

1. The XXII General Chapter (1997) recommended to the Congregation the use of the plan of community life. Some Provinces make regular use of this instrument and have found in it a powerful means for the search for God’s will in the concrete situation of the local community. The preparation of the plan provokes a fruitful dialogue aimed at inserting the personal gifts of each member into a common project. A regular evaluation of the plan can provide for a profitable review of life by the members and open the door to ongoing conversion.
2. Finally, given the particular role of the local superior in the discernment of the community (cf. for example Cons. 72, 136; Gen. Stat. 037), an important structure to promote co-responsibility are regular meetings of superiors, aimed at their continuing formation in what is expected of them according to the charismatic project of the Congregation.

##### The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me…

1. Together with obedience to the Word of God and adherence to the Constitutions and Statutes, our obedient attention to the voice of the abandoned poor helps to ensure our fidelity to the will of God. Over the years I have meditated often on the encounter of the deacon Philip with the court official of Candace, queen of

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Ethiopia, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8: 27ff). As he traveled from Jerusalem, the eunuch was making a well intentioned reading of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah but, try as he might, he simply could not understand the text. When Philip climbed into his carriage and explained the Word, the official not only understood but was converted to the Lord. His life took a new direction and he asked to be baptized.

1. Is there a lesson for us in that passage from Acts? Redemptorists have a “page” before our eyes, be it the very Word of God or the present moment of history, and, despite our efforts, we cannot “read” it – its meaning escapes us. Just as the Spirit led Philip to help the eunuch understand what he was reading, so the Spirit has given the abandoned poor to the Congregation as our tutors. If we do not listen to their voice, the written page of Scripture, the Constitutions and Statutes and the world around us will remain largely indecipherable to us.
2. We listen to the abandoned poor, first and foremost, because of Jesus Christ, who began his public ministry with a proclamation of hope for the poor, the deprived and the oppressed of the earth: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4: 18-19). Alphonsus linked the mission of the Congregation with the mission of Jesus Christ and used that passage from Luke to help us understand why we exist in the Church.
3. We are not introducing people to a distant and diffident God but rather helping people see that God has taken the first step and is already among them. We listen to the abandoned poor in order to discover the Lord “where he is already present and

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working in his own mysterious way” (Con. 7) especially among those marginalized by Church or society. God has entrusted us with the mission of witnessing to His own kenosis that takes Him to the depths of our world and back to heaven, of telling that story to others who otherwise will have little chance of hearing it and offering to them full participation in divine life.

1. Listening to the voice of the abandoned poor not only convinces us of their claim upon us, we also realize that they offer their own gifts to the Congregation. Through them, we experience the mystery of God’s power that is made manifest in weakness (2 Cor 4: 7-9), not only among the people we serve but also in the fragility of our own resources. The poor teach us that strength is found in community and relationships, and so encourage us to search for new structures of cooperation that will bolster our missionary work. Finally, the abandoned poor invite us to a mission that is always a gratuitous response to the abundant love of God: “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Mt 10: 8). It is our own experience of the gracious compassion of God that compels us to make the total gift of ourselves.
2. The poor do not need us. If we choose not to go to them, God will find someone else, since God hears the cry of the poor. My brothers, the point is that we need the poor, if we are to be true to the mission that has been given to us. Obedience to their voice is not simply “doing things” for them but rather to enter a process of conversion that leads us to empty ourselves and offer our lives as a gift. To do this, we must recognize that abandoned poor really exist; they are not simply theories or statistics but have names and faces. We go where the Church cannot or will not go and listen to the people we find there. If we listen to their voice, together with the Word of God and our Constitutions and Statutes, we will learn what we should do.

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##### Conclusion

*But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”… Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the LORD. May it be done to me according to your word.”* (Lk 1: 34.38)

1. The International Congress on the Consecrated Life, an unprecedented gathering in 2004 of over 800 participants – mostly Superiors General of Congregations of men and women, together with presidents of practically all the national conferences of religious and a number of theologians – produced a Final Document with a number of audacious pronouncements. Among the most intriguing is the following:

“*For some time now something new has been coming into being among us beyond other realities of death (obsolete traditions and styles, dying institutions). The agony of what is dying and trust in what is being born affects us. Although we do not yet see clearly what the Spirit is bringing to birth in consecrated life, still we identify… sprouts of newness…*”42

1. After eighteen years of listening to Redemptorists and the brothers and sisters who accompany us as well as members of other institutes of the consecrated life, I am more convinced than ever that something new is being born in our Congregation. Our exercise of the vow of obedience will help us to glimpse what the Spirit is bringing to birth and give us hearts that are free enough to do our part in the great work of Redemption.
2. We must be like Mary at the Annunciation: she questions (Lk 1: 34), she reflects, she meditates. She trusts and abandons
3. *What is the Spirit saying*, 2.

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herself to God. Her obedience is “believing but questioning;”43 at the same time, “quick to obey.”44 She “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2: 19), thereby “finding the profound knot that unites apparently distinct events, acts and things in the great divine plan.”45 We recognize in her our Mother, ready at every moment to help us, but also our model in the ways of faith.46 May she help us to listen to the Lord and recognize the grandeur of our vocation. May she lead us always to a more profound love for her Son, the Redeemer of the world.

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,

Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

*(The original language of this document is English)*

1. *The Service of Authority*, 31a.
2. *Vita Consecrata*, 112c.
3. *Message to the People of God*, 9.
4. Vatican II, *Constitution Lumen Gentium*, 65

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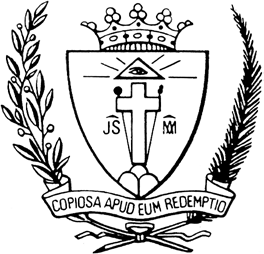
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## Redemptorist Cardinals



Victor Augusto DECHAMPS, born in Melle, Belgium in 1810; ordained priest in 1834; Professed in 1836; created Cardinal in 1875; died in Malinas, Belgium, in 1883

Villem VAN ROSSUM, born in Zwolle, Holland in 1854; professed in 1874; ordained in 1879; created Cardinal in 1911; died in Maastricht, Holland in 1932

José Clemente MAURER, born in Püttlingen, Germany in 1900; professed in 1921; ordained in 1925; created Cardinal in 1967; died in Sucre, Bolivia in 1990

Julio TERRAZAS SANDOVAL, born in Vallegrande, Bolivia, in 1936; professed in 1957; ordained in 1962; created Cardinal in 2001; died in Cochabamba Bolivia in 2015

Varkey VITHAYATHIL, born in Parur, India in 1927; professed in 1947; ordained 1954; created Cardinal in 2001; died in Emmakulan, India in 2011

Joseph William TOBIN, born in Detroit, MI. USA in 1952; professed in 1972; ordained in 1978; created Cardinal in 2016; currently Archbishop of Newark, NJ. USA.