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270th Anniversary of the Approval of the Congregation and Rule by Benedict XIV

WITNESSES OF THE REDEEMER:

In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World

Dear Confreres, Sisters, and Redemptorist Associates,

As we celebrate this significant anniversary – 270 years – in the life of our Congregation, we give thanks to God for calling us “to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the Word of God to the poor” (Constitution 1, Rule of St. Alphonsus). Our very reason for being – the heart of our vocation – is this missionary spirit which revitalizes our *Vita Apostolica* by uniting our missionary work and our consecrated life specially dedicated to God.

With this goal of revitalizing our *Vita Apostolica*, the 25th General Chapter mandated the General Government to prepare a *Communicanda* on leadership (Decision 26). In the Message of the 25th General Chapter to the Congregation, the capitulars reminded us that we need “leaders in the style of Jesus Christ, communities and persons who exercise leadership in the mission” with specific gifts, qualities, preparation and vision (Message, #15).

More than ever, this leadership is essential for the Congregation in this moment of historic change in the Church and in society. With this letter, I send you *Communicanda 2: “Revitalizing Our Apostolic Life: Leadership in the Style of Jesus,”* prepared by the General Government. This *Communicanda* is the result of a process of reflection, prayer and discussion in which the General Council has been engaged over the last eighteen months. We hope that it might assist communities and individuals to reflect on the service of leadership to which we are all called, as well as assist those among us to whom we have entrusted specific and important leadership roles.

“Leadership in the style of Jesus Christ” is also very close to the heart of Pope Francis. At a Meeting with Bishops in Panama (January 24, 2019), Pope Francis shared some of his insights regarding leadership. In the text below, I have chosen some of the themes which address the concerns articulated by the General Chapter, especially in the areas of Mission, Administration, Availability and Authority. These words should touch the heart of everyone called to the service of leadership in the Congregation. I am sure you will understand how appropriate his words are for leaders today – whether Provincials, Local Superiors, or Consultors. In offering you this text of the Holy Father, I have taken the liberty of substituting “Superiors” for “Bishops” and “confreres” for “priests”.



About Mission, Leadership and Compassion: Our [confreres] are normally the ones responsible [for the Mission], ... they are on the front lines. They shoulder the burden and the heat of the day (cf. Mt 20:12), exposed to an endless number of daily situations that can wear them down. So they need our closeness, our understanding and encouragement; they need our fatherhood. The outcome of our pastoral work, evangelization and mission does not depend on the material means and resources at our disposal, or on the number of our events and activities, but on the centrality of compassion ... I am worried about how the compassion of Christ has lost a central place in the Church, even among Catholic groups. There is schism, condemnation, cruelty, exaggerated self-praise, the denouncing of heresy ... May compassion never be lost in our Church and may the centrality of compassion never be lost in the life of a [Superior]. Christ's kenosis is the supreme expression of the Father's compassion. Christ's Church is the Church of compassion, and that begins at home. It is always good to ask ourselves as pastors, "How much does the life of my [confreres] affect me?" Am I able to be a father, or am I content to be a mere executive? Do I allow myself to be bothered?

About Leadership and Administration: We know that our work, our visits and meetings have a necessarily administrative component. This is part of our responsibility, but it does not mean that we should spend all our limited time on administrative tasks. When visiting, the most important thing – the one thing we cannot delegate – is "listening". Many of our everyday tasks we ought to entrust to others. What we cannot delegate, however, is the ability to listen, the ability to keep track of the good health and the lives of our [confreres]. We cannot delegate to others the door that must be open to them. An open door that invites trust rather than fear, sincerity rather than hypocrisy, a frank and respectful exchange rather than a stern monologue.

About Leadership and Availability: This is something that comes from the heart; yes, do have your diaries full, God be praised, knowing that you have earned your meal, but if you see that a [confrere] has called today, then call him back tomorrow, latest, and say: "You called me. What's up? Do you need me now or can you wait for such and such a day? That [confrere] will know from that day on that he has a father.

About Leadership and Authority: The word "authority" is derived from the Latin root *augere*: "to increase, promote, advance". The authority of a pastor is based on his ability to help others to grow, to give priority to his [confreres] rather than himself (for that would simply make him a confirmed bachelor, not a father). The joy of a father and pastor lies in seeing his children grow and become fruitful. Brothers, let this be our authority and the sign of our fruitfulness.

Text of Pope Francis, *Meeting with Bishops*,
Panama, January 24, 2019



Brothers and sisters, I invite you to take this *Communicanda* as a starting point for conversation and dialogue about our service of leadership in the style of Jesus Christ. The *Communicanda* deals with issues that concern all of us in the daily living out of our Redemptorist vocation. I ask that every community take the *Communicanda*, reflect on it, pray with it, discuss it and its implications for us as communities. All of us are called to this service – in our Redemptorist communities; in our ministry and apostolic work; among the people of God and in civil society. It is my hope that this *Communicanda* will provoke the same depth of reflection and conversation as it has for the General Council. As with any such document, it does not try to say everything that could be said. It is not exhaustive, but I pray that it might offer some insights and practical perspectives which can help us to follow the example of Jesus Christ more closely.

Perhaps it is best to leave the last words in this letter to Jesus:

“You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give you. This I command you: love one another.” (John 15:14-17)

May we follow Christ our Redeemer so closely that we might truly live the Gospel friendship to which we are called (Constitution 34), and bear fruit that will last!

May St. Alphonsus and Our Mother of Perpetual Help always accompany us, and may the Holy Spirit fill us with wisdom and hope, courage and light.

Your brother in Christ our Redeemer,

Michael Brehl C.Ss.R.

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