

Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer

GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING A REDEMPTORIST CHARACTER IN OUR CHURCHES, PARISHES, AND SHRINES



COMMISSION OF NEW INITIATIVES
GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR EVANGELIZATION

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Superior Generalis

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Solemnity of the Most Holy Redeemer

WITNESSES OF THE REDEEMER:

In Solidarity for Mission in a Wounded World

Dear Confreres, Sisters, and Partners in Mission,

On this Solemnity of the Most Holy Redeemer, I greet you in the name of the General Council and the Secretariat for Evangelization. May Christ our Redeemer continue to strengthen your witness to God's merciful and redeeming love in our wounded world. May he accompany us as we bring the Gospel to the abandoned and the poor, especially during the ongoing challenge and suffering of this pandemic.

In its Final Message (n. 8), the 25th General Chapter urged us to make our own the challenge of Pope Francis to "go forth from your own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel' (EG20), and to evaluate our structures ... In this context, our missionary vocation in the Church takes on new and timely significance." Among these structures which we need to evaluate and renew are our Churches: Shrines, Public Chapels and Parishes.

For this reason, the General Chapter decided that a Commission undertake a study of our Churches and their

pastoral ministry in order to provide a vision and direction for this work of evangelization, thus ensuring that our churches become places of welcome and encounter with the Redeemer (Decision 9). Although the pandemic interrupted some of the work of this commission, we are now ready to offer you the fruits of its study and reflection, which has benefitted from the experience and insight of many Confreres and co-workers from every Conference and continent.

Throughout the history of our Congregation, Churches have played an important role in our missionary work. As 'places of welcome and encounter with the Redeemer', they have served as genuine instruments of evangelization for the abandoned and the poor. We remember the missionary work and preaching carried out by St. Alphonsus and generations of Redemptorists in Ciorani and Pagani. We appreciate the welcoming ministry of St. Gerard at Materdomini, and Fr. De Paolo in Frosinone. We recall the 'perpetual mission' offered by St. Clement and others at St. Benno's in Warsaw. In every place in which Redemptorist Missionaries established the Congregation, our Churches became genuine instruments of evangelization, welcome and encounter.

It is our hope that the material, reflections and guidelines offered in this document will assist those serving in Redemptorist Churches throughout the world to ensure that these Churches continue to embody the Redemptorist charism and respond to the challenges of evangelization in today's world. I strongly encourage you to reflect on this document together, in community or pastoral team meetings. The processes suggested in the third section might be especially helpful to teams of Redemptorists,

Guidelines - Churches, Parishes and Shrines

Sisters and Partners in Mission engaged in the mission of our Churches.

As we witness to the Redeemer, may the prayers and example of our Saints and Blessed Redemptorists, as well as the tender love of our Mother of Perpetual Help, continue to accompany us in our mission to bring the joy of the Gospel to the abandoned and the poor. Blessed and joyful feast to all!

Michael Brehl, C.S.R.

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.
Superior General



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Preface

The XXV General Chapter asked for a study on how pastoral ministry in our Churches could better respond to the challenges of evangelization in today's world and be places of welcome and encounter with the Redeemer. Decision # 9 states:

“Redemptorist Churches and Pastoral Ministry. The General Government will establish a Commission/Body that will undertake an in-depth study of how our churches and pastoral ministry in our churches (including our parishes) can respond to the challenges of evangelization in the twenty-first century, thus ensuring that our churches become places of welcome and encounter with the Redeemer”.

The Commission for New Missionary Initiatives, which is part of the General Secretariat for Evangelization, took on this task and explored various possibilities for responding to this decision of the General Chapter. After an internal exercise of analysis and dialogue, the Commission elaborated a working document and introduced a process of reflection to involve the communities that exercise their pastoral ministry in churches, parishes, and shrines. A consultation process was thus initiated with the participation of focus groups in some of these communities. Father General was aware of this work and made some suggestions and recommendations that the Commission members have integrated accordingly. This consultation process continued in October 2020 in coordination with the General Consultors, Conference Coordinators, and Major Superiors, with the participation of lay associates who

support the Redemptorist apostolate in their respective communities.

After incorporating the contributions and suggestions from different communities and individuals, this draft was presented to the General Government for revision during the June 2021 meeting of the General Council. Thus, the current document has received the endorsement of the General Government and is now presented to the Congregation as material for reflection and inspiration within the communities that carry out their pastoral ministry in Churches, Parishes, and Shrines. This document seeks to examine our pastoral ministry in light of current challenges and clearly identify how such ministry embodies our Redemptorist charism and responds to the challenges of today's world.

While this document outlines some characteristics that should identify our pastoral ministry in the Redemptorist Churches, we are aware of the great diversity of settings in which this ministry occurs. Therefore, we recognize that this document is valid as long as it is read and reflected upon within a particular context and in a community setting. In any case, the criterion of discernment offered in Constitution # 5 points out a common path for all:

"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."

The document consists of three parts:

- an introduction;
- a second section identifies the qualities that should characterize our Redemptorist churches, parishes, and shrines; and
- a third section offers some processes or dynamics that can be used at the Conference, Unit, or Local Community level to reflect on the qualities of Redemptorist ministry and to discern new strategies for maintaining and deepening the Redemptorist character of such ministry.

We encourage confreres and lay partners to continue to use this resource as a starting point, identifying those essential elements that should be present in the exercise of our ministry in Redemptorist Churches, parishes, and shrines.

**COMMISSION FOR NEW MISSIONARY INITIATIVES
GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR EVANGELIZATION**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. “Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World” is the challenge that the XXV General Chapter has offered to the Redemptorist Congregation for this sexennium. This theme should echo wherever Redemptorists find themselves and carry out their mission.

2. The restructuring and reconfiguration process must be for the mission. We are a “Missionary Congregation”. It is for this reason that the 25th General Chapter in its Final Document, part III, no. 9 seeks to involve our churches in this process of missionary revitalization when it states: “The General Government will establish a Commission/Body that will undertake an in-depth study of how our churches and pastoral ministry (including our parishes) can respond to the challenges of evangelization in the twenty-first century thus ensuring that our churches become places of welcome and encounter with the Redeemer.” It further calls for broad consultation among our churches, possibly by organising a congress or colloquium of Redemptorist churches, and by publishing a directory or ratio that offers a vision and direction for the pastoral ministry of our churches.

3. We also want to be in communion with Pope Francis, who calls us to be a Church “that goes out”, as a “field hospital”, caring for the wounded of society. His concern for Evangelization makes him cry out: “Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ... More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mk

6:37) (*Evangelii Gaudium* 49).” His universal pastoral gaze extends further to our much-threatened Common Home (*Laudato si*) and to fragmented families (*Amoris Laetitia*).

4. Our Churches, especially our Shrines, must be integrated into our missionary charism. They are, at the same time, places of “permanent mission” and starting points for “missionary outreach” and evangelization in the true sense (Cfr. Const. 14). The mandate to evangelize is the reason for our presence in these places (Cfr. Const. 5). An evangelization that illuminates contemporary society’s struggles with the Word and with the actions of Jesus, an evangelization that sympathizes with all who are victims, thrown to the margins of society, and that offers reconciliation and rekindles hope in all hearts. However, we recognize that many of our parishes and churches are important centres of sacramental ministry, including celebrations, preaching and confessions. The truly missionary character of the Church compels us to look “outward” (GS 20), and come in contact with the most abandoned, poor and wounded of society.

5. It is time to join our efforts in our churches, parishes and shrines, drawing common lines of missionary action that converge and identify our Redemptorist charism throughout the world. We invite all responsible confreres to be involved in the process of seeking a common missionary vision and joint action that renew our identity as sons of St. Alphonsus de Liguori and enthusiastic proclaimers of Plentiful Redemption. The missionary project of our churches must be the result of discernment and planning done together. Similarly, the continuity of the pastoral projects must be ensured, so that the lives of the faithful are not arbitrarily altered when the pastoral agents are changed.

6. The present document, is a tool to reflect on how our Redemptorist Churches and the pastoral ministry in our churches can respond to the challenges of Evangelization today in this wounded world of today. Redemptorists work in varied socio-cultural contexts around the world. This is a reality that enriches the Congregation and highlights its international character. At the same time, it is necessary that both Redemptorists and lay people enter into a process of dialogue with their local reality in order to enrich it with the Redemptorist charism (cf. Const. 19, 66).

This document should be seen as a resource that can stimulate us to move in this direction. It can also be implemented within the current processes of restructuring in the Congregation, in conjunction with the Apostolic Plan and the Missionary Priorities of our Conferences and Units. Another valuable resource is *Communicanda 1* of November 2017, entitled *Priorities for Restructuring Mission*. Engaging with these resources, reflecting on them and defining lines of action will enhance the missionary character of our pastoral works and accentuate the Redemptorist character of our Churches.

This document is in two parts after this introduction. Section II identifies qualities that ought to mark our Redemptorist churches, parishes, and shrines. Although the descriptions may be new, the reality is not. Rather, these marks of Redemptorist ministry go back to the birth of the congregation and to the ministry of the Redemptorists since 1732. Section III of these guidelines provides a series of processes or dynamics that may be used at the level of conference, unit, or local community to reflect on the qualities of Redemptorist ministry at each level and to discern new strategies for maintaining and deepening our Redemptorist character.

7. There are also processes and dynamics to be used with Redemptorist communities, in collaboration with the laity, to read the signs of the times, to seek ways to enhance present methods of Evangelization, and to dream new ones either in present ministries or in new apostolic endeavours. Ultimately, this document aims to help Redemptorists around the world to be witnesses to the Redeemer in a wounded world.

It is hoped that the use of this document will help to assist the eCongregation in an in-depth study to see how our various ministries may respond to the challenges of Evangelization in our wounded world and offer practical guidelines to one another for new initiatives in Evangelization.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF REDEMPTORIST CHURCHES, PARISHES, AND SHRINES

8. One of the favourite constitutions of Redemptorists is C. 20 which enumerates characteristics of followers of Jesus Christ in the Spirit of St. Alphonsus. We are to be “strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer.” While it is one thing to hear these beautiful virtues presented to us, it is another thing to bring them to life in each one of us. This human and spiritual development requires specific practices that help to nurture our faith, hope, and love; that enflame our zeal; and that bring us humbly before the Lord daily to deepen our relationship in prayer. No single Redemptorist embodies all of these qualities at once, but they are the ideal to which we are called, knowing that as they flourish in our lives we will become more and more who we are called to be as disciples of Jesus in the Redemptorist Tradition.

9. Over the past nearly 300 years Redemptorists have been at the service of the Church, especially to the poor and the most abandoned, in a variety of ministries. Over the past fifty years and more we have heard of the virtues of Redemptorists in ministry: closeness to the people, dynamic preachers, and zealous workers for the poor and the most abandoned. In the context of these guidelines for our churches, parishes, and shrines, we would like to speak of certain “virtues,” if you will, of our ministries - of our exercise of pastoral ministry, by putting into practice apostolic charity, missionary charity and pastoral charity (cf. Const. 52-54).. What should people find when they come to us and what do we bring when we go out from our places of ministry to meet today’s shepherds of Scala to whom we are sent? Without pretending to do away with any of the

rich reflections on qualities of Redemptorist ministry that have preceded these guidelines, we identify the following virtues that should mark our churches, parishes, and shrines: Places of Welcome and Community; Places of Word and Sacrament; Places of Popular Devotion; Places of Formation and Learning; and Places of Missionary Outreach. We offer these for our reflection with the hope that they will resonate with the confreres and that we might adopt practices in our ministry to grow in these virtues.

Places of Welcome and Community

10. Throughout the world, Redemptorist churches are known as places of solace and warmth. They are sanctuaries in the real sense of that word, places where people feel safe at home. This is often due to the availability and dedication of Redemptorists whose ministry has been marked by closeness to people offering a place of welcome, openness, inclusivity, and safety.

Closeness to people

11. The Redemptorist charism is marked by a closeness to the people among whom Redemptorists live and serve. Conscious of their own need of for God's healing and mercy, they are called to be attentive to the wounds of today's world and so live in solidarity with those who suffer (message of GC2016). Such solidarity is cultivated through a simplicity of life and language which makes Redemptorists more approachable and authentic (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 108); their availability to people through a ministry of presence and friendship; their readiness to listen

attentively and compassionately to their concerns and struggles; and to minister joyfully to people through prayer and sacrament. This closeness leads us not to be satisfied with the people coming to us because we must take the initiative and go out to meet each person.

Open Doors and Hearts

12. The expression of this charism allows people to experience Redemptorist churches as places with open doors and hearts. We speak of open doors literally and figuratively. It can be disheartening for the faithful to come to a church and find locked doors. So, we begin with unlocked doors, which point to unlocked hearts where we hope the faithful will find a 'home' into which they are welcomed and accepted. Under these conditions, people can hear more readily the Word of God and so bring about conversion in their lives (Constitution 10). To this extent, the manner in which Redemptorists minister in our churches is central to the missionary dynamism to which we are called in service to those groups who are most marginalised (Const. 14). Included within our quality of open doors and open hearts would be seeking to build bridges to facilitate encounters between faith, culture, and science. This would allow us to learn "new languages" or new ways to express ourselves with those who pursue similar goals as we do, but whose approaches and strategies differ from ours.

An Apostolic Community

13. Pastoral ministry in Redemptorist churches must also be characterised by collaborative links in the apostolate between professed Redemptorists and lay people. Although our work takes place in many churches, parishes and

shrines, it is important to maintain the awareness and practice of a true missionary team composed of the laity, consecrated men and women, priests and other ministries around us. The laity are called to co-operate in the mission of preaching the Plentiful Redemption through their own way of life, being a leaven in the world, and through apostolic activity. In this way, each Redemptorist church is truly an apostolic community and a "perfect sign of Christ among men" (Est. Gen. 14c). This collaborative team approach to pastoral ministry requires adequate planning and resources for theological, spiritual and practical formation of both professed Redemptorists and Lay Partners in mission. We need to promote initiatives and pastoral projects, creative and original, that put us in tune with the Church "going out" as proposed by Pope Francis. In this sense, periodic meetings for reflection and planning play an essential role. The processes included in this document constitute an appropriate resource to help in such team building efforts.

A Safe Place for All

14. Attention should be given to ensure that our churches are comfortable, safe and accessible to all God's people. Concern should be shown for those with disabilities, providing adequate and safe facilities so to avoid hindering access and opportunities to engage in ministry where appropriate. Integral to the preaching of the Gospel, Redemptorists and lay ministers are tasked to ensure that our churches are safe places for children and vulnerable adults; this is a fundamental element of the preaching of the Gospel. Respect for the dignity of God's people compels us to safeguard against any form of abuse to a person. Our Churches, parishes, and shrines should develop and display appropriate policies and guidelines in our churches

and undertake specific training and conscientisation for our staff and for all who come to our churches.

A place which adheres to the option for the poor

15. "The choice in favour of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church" (Const. 5 and EG 09), and this demands of us to be always ready to welcome and go out to meet the poor and abandoned, and to find ways to meet their material and spiritual needs. It is the duty of each Redemptorist to establish pastoral ministries to help us fulfill this constitutional mandate of our vocation.

Places of Word and Sacrament

16. The inspiration for the founding of the Congregation had its origins in St. Alphonsus' experience with the apostolic missions and with the country people around Scala. They did not have access to the Word and Sacrament of our rich Catholic faith. Whereas the people of Naples had more priests than work for them, the poor in Scala lacked clergy to bring the Good News to them and to sustain them in their faith. So, our churches, parishes and shrines should be place of Word and Sacrament where the following practices enhance our ability to be so.

A Place of Explicit Proclamation of the Gospel.

17. The work of evangelisation for Redemptorists have always given a privileged place to the explicit proclamation of the Gospel (cf. Const. 5, 10). While Redemptorists'

preaching may sometimes have been described as moralistic, the fact remains that the first thing we must preach is the core or heart of the Gospel, summed up succinctly in those words of St. John that St. Alphonsus loved so much: "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son" (John 3:16). Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of preaching the core of the Gospel which can then be followed by catechesis and, only after that, by moral imperatives ("A Big Heart Open to God: Interview with Pope Francis" by Antonio Spadaro, *America*, September 30, 2013). Redemptorist preaching must also emphasise the prophetic dimension of the Gospel, which generates personal conversion and the conversion of sinful structures within society.

Simplicity of Preaching

18. We Redemptorists have a reputation in particular for being dynamic preachers of the Word of God. This gift only comes through personal encounter with the Word of God through prayer and connecting ourselves with the hearts and lives of the people to whom we preach.

19. Alphonsus called us to a style of preaching that would bring the Good News to the real experiences of people. That comes through our closeness to the people and to their concerns, to our being aware of the "joys and hopes" and the "griefs and anxieties" of the people of our day.

20. Simplicity of preaching does not imply that our preaching is simplistic or lacking in depth. It means, rather, that the Word we preach becomes accessible to all our listeners because of our choice of language, images, and clarity of preaching.

Prophetic Proclamation

21. Our preaching must continuously proclaim the option of a preferential love for the most abandoned, especially the poor, as our Constitutions remind us (Cfr. Const 4; Lk 4, 18). Prophetic preaching necessarily includes the clear denunciation of all that opposes the Kingdom of justice, peace, and fraternity in society. In this way, we help the faithful discover their prophetic vocation in the world, and so together commit ourselves to make concrete choices in favour of the poor and for the transformation of unjust structures.

Celebrating the Sacramental Life of the Church

22. Our Redemptorist churches should be centres of sacramental celebration. Aware of the importance of the liturgical celebration and valuing the liturgical tradition of the Church, we look for ways to promote a lively and life-giving liturgy that links the celebration of the abundant life in the Lord with the concrete life of the present assembly. Of the seven sacraments, two, in particular, should mark our ministries:

The Eucharist: Preaching and Real Presence

23. While we tell the story of God's love and our salvation through preaching the Word, we celebrate that salvation daily in our churches, parishes, and shrines through in the Eucharist. The Eucharist, as the "source and summit" of Christian life, is both a sign of our communion in Christ and

the means to grow in communion (Cfr. Const. 29). Masses in our churches and shrines should meet the needs of the people whom we serve so that we are truly a welcoming community at the service of the People of God. May we always pay special attention to the right of "active, conscious and fruitful participation" of the faithful in the celebrations (SC 11). Given St. Alphonsus' great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament reserved on the altar, our churches and shrines ought to be special places for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Sacrament of Conversion

24. St. Alphonsus begins his Guide for Confessors with the words "Without a doubt, God will richly reward conscientious confessors." Then the first thing to which he counsels confessors in fulfilling their role as "father" is charity. He goes so far as to offer sample words to say to ensure penitents that they are welcome and should not be afraid in approaching the sacrament. Therefore, Redemptorists, as "apostles of conversion" (cf. Const. 11), never cease to offer assistance to the faithful who come to our churches and shrines in search of continual renewal, to lead them to put on the new man in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:24) and to bear witness to their faith in daily life (cf. Const. 3). To do this effectively, it is important to ensure that confessors are always available and ready to promote opportunities for personal encounters.

25. It is not uncommon to find people today who no longer celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation because of a bad experience in the confessional. Pope Francis reminds us "that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us

on to do our best” (EG #44). On the other hand, we may also be called to a new catechesis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation to raise consciousness of sin, to encourage people to review seriously their lives, to acknowledge failures in love, and to seek reconciliation and peace.

Theological and Pastoral Orientation of the Via Media

26. St. Alphonsus says in the introduction to his moral theology that his thought was influenced more through preaching missions and hearing confessions than by reading books of theology. This wonderful quality of St. Alphonsus points to the effect that his closeness to the people had on his theological reflection and pastoral practice. In his moral theology, which was written principally to train Redemptorist seminarians, Alphonsus encouraged a path to avoid the two extremes of rigorism and laxism. This quality has been a mark of Redemptorist theological reflection and pastoral practice. It guides our preaching and our pastoral practice in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as well as in all our ministry. We avoid the extremes because they ordinarily fail to reflect the fullness of the Tradition but also because they tend to harm people. *In medio stat virtus* is not simply a pleasant aphorism but reflects the wisdom of charting a middle course in our theological and pastoral reflection so that the People of God are served well by us. People ought never leave one of our churches, parishes, or shrines feeling farther away from God and the Church because of something that we said or did.

27. Through our celebration of Word and Sacrament, our churches, parishes and shrines should be places where people experience the plentiful redemption offered to us through Jesus, our Redeemer.

Places of Popular Piety

Popular Piety in our Tradition

28. For St. Alphonsus and most of his followers, popular piety was a path of personal sanctification and community life. Through his devotion to the Crib, the Cross, Eucharist and Mary, the practice of novenas, the rosary, and popular songs, he formed the minds and hearts of our early confreres. For this reason, popular piety was the great instrument of Evangelization and dialogue with the poor and the abandoned. Preaching and devotion went hand in hand, as we read in all of our founder's popular publications.

Popular Piety as a Valid Spirituality

29. Today, the Church recognizes the irreplaceable value of popular piety as an authentic Christian spirituality, "... incarnated in the culture of the lowly ... and a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 124; Aparecida Document, 258-265).

Respect and Promotion of Popular Piety

30. Our churches welcome and respect the authentic popular piety of each individual and of recognised groups and associations of the faithful. At the same time, as

missionary preachers we always seek to enrich popular piety with the proclamation of the Word of God and catechetical formation so that it can lead to the liturgical celebration that is at the centre of the Church's life. In this way, the faithful are given a spiritual experience that connects their devotional practices with the sacramental and communal life of the Church.

The pastoral dimension of a joyful celebration

31. The festive nature of popular piety is an important component for many Catholic communities that find ways to express themselves within the liturgy and their local cultures. It is an opportunity for fraternal encounter, a moment of communal joy and celebration that always deserves special attention. It is also an occasion for explicit Evangelization, which allows us to illuminate with the Word of God the different realities of people's lives. The Triduum, Novenas, and other popular celebrations should be prepared with special care so that the Word of God can also reach families, groups, movements, and communities.

Redemptorist Spirituality

32. As Redemptorists, we have much to offer in our spirituality of plentiful redemption, which guides us on a spiritual path centred on the paschal mystery of Christ the Redeemer, in the love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, in active participation in a missionary church and in the celebration of our Redemptorist saints. It is a spirituality that we must radiate and offer as a means of deepening the faith life of the faithful linked to our Congregation.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

33. In particular, devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help must hold a special place in the devotional life promoted in our churches. This Byzantine Icon of the 15th century, the *Theotókos*, points us to the abundant Redemption, which is constantly offered to us by God in this Icon of Love. The words of Pope Pius IX should echo in our churches: “Make her known throughout the world!” Whether through the traditional Perpetual Help Novena or through other pastoral initiatives, that brings the serene gaze of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to people, to families and many other places, this is an international devotion that characterizes us as Redemptorist Missionaries in every country where we live and mission.

Places of Formation and Learning

34. The life and pastoral ministry of Saint Alphonsus were about teaching and formation in the broadest sense. He wrote his moral theology as a text to form Redemptorist seminarians in a sound approach to moral theology. He formed people spiritually through his preaching, his confessional practise, his spiritual writings, and in many other ways. He also shaped the thinking and imagination of countless Italians over the years who still sing a Christmas hymn which speaks of a God who is not distant but one who came down from the heavens to dwell with us (*Tu scendi dalle stelle*). In his artwork he taught that Jesus and Mary

and Joseph were people like us, who looked like a family down the street, just as today we see images of Mary where she appears to be Asian or Latina, or native to the country where she is venerated. St. Alphonsus taught formally, as in his moral theology, and informally, through his art and music. Similarly, our ministries of churches, shrines, and parishes ought to be places where formation and learning occur both formally and informally.

Formal Structures of Formation and Learning

35. Formal structures of formation and learning would include structured programs geared to the formation of the whole person, although these programs may be more specifically focused on intellectual, spiritual, pastoral, or human formation. Among them we could consider the following as examples:

Formation in the Faith

36. Depending on the nature of the ministry and the people served, there may be programs for formation in the faith that are more catechetical and those that are more for spiritual formation. Among such structured programs one may include religious education for all age groups; sacramental preparation, in particular programs like the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA); occasional lecture series or educational programs. Programs that focus more on spiritual formation might include parish missions; Days of Recollection and/or annual retreats.

Formation for Ministries in the Church

37. Providing programs for formation for the ministries of the church underscores our commitment to empower the laity to fulfil their ministries within the church. Aware that people may be hesitant to volunteer for ministries we ought to call forth people to serve and provide the necessary formation so that they may serve well.

Formation in Redemptorist Spirituality

38. Provide for formation in Redemptorist spirituality through, for example, periodic lectures or programs on Redemptorist spirituality and by celebrating the feasts of Redemptorist Saints, Martyrs, and Beatified.

Formation for Partners in Mission

39. Inspired by the direction and wisdom offered in the Directory for Partners in Mission, we might establish programs for initial and ongoing formation for our Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer and our Redemptorist Laity/Associates. These programs may include formation within the four forms of partnership in mission with the laity. (See Chapter 3 of the Directory for Partnership in Mission).

Formation and Learning in Informal Ways

40. It would be impossible to list the many ways in which we teach and form people informally. This formation occurs in a number of areas. Our commitment to partnership with

the laity and encouraging the involvement of the laity in all aspects of our ministries reinforce an ecclesiology of the People of God and recognize the gifts and ministries of all. Other examples of informal formation would be through the content of our homilies, the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments of the church; the way we celebrate the liturgies; the literature available in the church; the societies or confraternities that we endorse and encourage in our communities; the artwork that adorns the worship and community space; and the music used in celebrations.

41. Creating a Place of Formation and Learning involves both formal and informal ways of fostering growth in the faith. We do well to pay attention to both ways to ensure sound and consistent message that will help people to grow in their faith and in their service to the Church and the world.

Places of Missionary Outreach

42. The inspiration for our congregation came to St. Alphonsus as he found himself in the hill country of Scala away from the churches and heartbeat of Naples. There he came upon people who did not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel or to celebrate the sacraments with the same frequency as elsewhere. He founded the Congregation as a missionary apostolic community sent to seek out and to preach to the poor and the most abandoned. From St. Alphonsus's unrealized dream to be a missionary to China to the expansion of the missionary work of the congregation beyond the Alps, to our service in nearly 80 countries around the world today, Redemptorists have sought to go out to find those most in need of hearing the Gospel and its message of plentiful redemption.

43. Our present-day reality continues to call us to go forth to new lands where we might preach the Gospel. What identifies the Redemptorist Missionaries is not so much the where but the how (Cfr. Chap. III, Art. 3, Const. 52-55), of being missionaries of the Gospel in every place and circumstance. But we may not need to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to minister to the poor and the most abandoned, but only hundreds or thousands of feet from the doors of our churches, parishes, and shrines. Our missionary outreach may only require our opening the door and going outside. How might our churches, parishes, and shrines be not only places where people enter to worship and to hear the Good News but also places from which we and our partners in mission go forth in missionary outreach? Missionary initiatives should have a central place in our annual planning.

Redemptorists among the People

44. A quality of Redemptorists that is often recognized and appreciated is our closeness to the people. People see us as ordinary people like them. One of the reasons is that we have traditionally been men on the street, immersed in the lives of the people whom we serve. That closeness to the people ought to make us more aware of all that goes on around our places of ministry and help us to identify and to reach out to “those for whom the Church has not yet been able to provide sufficient means of salvation, those who have never heard the Church's message, or at least do not receive it as the ‘Good News’, and finally those who suffer harm because of division in the Church” (Constitution 3).

Collaboration with Laity

45. We recognize the gifts of our partners in mission and other lay people in our missionary outreach. They are often the ones with their finger on the pulse of the broader community and may direct our missionary efforts. Among strategies that could be helpful are listening sessions with groups mentioned in Constitution 3, particularly those who have never heard the Good News or those who have left the Church for a variety of reasons.

Places of Encounter

46. Our missionary outreach may take forms that are not explicitly evangelizing. For example, permitting the use of our ministry site for meetings and discussions important to those in our neighbourhood. Our hospitality may open the door to further interest in who we are and what we are about.

Places of Social Justice

47. A point of convergence between the Gospel and people with no particular religious affiliation is often the social teaching of the Church. We may reach out to others through assistance programs such as soup kitchens, legal counsel to refugees and immigrants, homeless shelters, and so forth. In such programs, we may be open to volunteers of any faith and no faith at all, ensuring that safeguarding standards are met.

In addition to specific assistance programs, we ought to offer opportunities for those who wish to reflect more intentionally on the social teaching of the church which supports the ministry and invite them to assume with us an attitude of prophetic denunciation of structures of sin. The Congregation, sent in particular to the abandoned and oppressed (cf. Cons 3:4), should foster the prophetic character of our proclamation, which is an expression of our charism. That same prophetic character which, in turn, leads the Congregation to ecological conversion and to welcome the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor as one (cf. LS 49).

In the same way, it should promote a more generous insertion and a more incarnated presence, as a sign and seed of the Kingdom of God in a wounded world.

Use of Media

48. Advances in technology offer us other ways of missionary outreach where there is no defined “congregation,” but they permit us to reach whoever chooses to access what we offer through the use of the Internet and various forms of social media. These may include people who are no longer able to come to our churches and shrines but also, and more particularly, those who have never been inclined to do so.

49. In this sense, we might speak of our traditional methods of Evangelization taking place in “gathered settings” where people come to church or to another location to celebrate the sacraments and/or to participate in a parish mission or retreat or popular devotion. “Non-gathered” settings of Evangelization refer to the “virtual community” that watches

a novena online or listens to a homily or podcast that has been posted online. While technology may be able to tell us how many people have accessed our offerings, it cannot tell us who they are and what impact our efforts have had.

Conclusion

In this section we have tried to identify qualities of our Redemptorist ministries and to flesh out some of the ways in which we might make our ministry sites better Places of Welcome and Community, Places of Word and Sacrament, Places of Popular Devotion, Places of Formation and Learning, and Places of Missionary Outreach.

We have suggested only a few ways in which our ministry might enhance these characteristics of our ministry and help us to full preach the Gospel and to live our charism more effectively in the church today.

Section III which follows offers dynamics to assist Redemptorists and our Partners in Mission at the conference, unit, and local level to reflect further on ways to evangelize more effectively taking into account their local reality so that the Redemptorist charism may be embodied there.

III. SAMPLE PROCESSES TO ENGAGE PARISH/CHURCH/SHRINE STAFF IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT REDEMPTORIST IDENTITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF EVANGELIZATION

In the previous section we have outlined traditional characteristics of Redemptorist Ministry in our Churches and Parishes, and, for the most part, in our Shrines as well. In this section we offer suggested processes to engage Redemptorist communities, ideally in cooperation with lay leaders and partners in mission.

First, we suggest these exercises to examine our identity as a Redemptorist missionary community, especially in the light of the Missionary and Apostolic Priorities and Apostolic Plans of the Conferences and Units. While each Conference/Unit has determined its own priorities, which were subject to the approval of the General Government, three missionary priorities consistently stand out and should be taken into account in your reflections: the young, the migrants and the materially poor.

You will notice a recurring question in the processes which focuses on any suggestions for restructuring or reconfiguration of the apostolic commitments of the unit in light of your reflection on both the Redemptorist character of your ministry and whether and how well it responds to the missionary priorities of your Conference/Unit and the charism of the Redemptorists.

If you develop other useful tools in the course of engaging these processes, please share them with the Secretariat for Evangelization so that they might be made available to other members of the Congregation.

A. Processes to Reflect on the Identity of our Redemptorist Missionary Community

PROCESS I: Where are we and where would we like to go?

GOAL: To identify characteristics of our present-day ministry and to consider means to deepen our Redemptorist identity.

STEPS:

- i. Ask each participant to write down two or three words that they or people who come to your church/parish/shrine would use to describe the character or qualities of Redemptorist ministry there. The words may be positive or negative. There are no right or wrong answers.
- ii. If the group is larger than seven persons, divide into smaller groups of 7 or less and ask the participants to say why they used those words to describe the ministry. Ask them to offer specific examples from their experience that support their description of Redemptorist ministry at your location.
- iii. Review the descriptive words used to describe your ministry, particularly in light of the Characteristics of Redemptorist Ministry from Section II of these Guidelines. What words affirm your Redemptorist ministry? What words challenge your Redemptorist ministry?

- iv. Ask participants (in large group or again in small groups, depending on the number of participants) to suggest specific strategies/actions to foster the positive qualities of Redemptorist ministry and to rectify negative qualities of Redemptorist ministry.
- v. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the progress and to revise the strategies if necessary, in order to deepen the Redemptorist character of your ministry.
- vi. As you reflect on this process, what you have learned and what steps you might take going forward, are there any implications that you see in terms of the reconfiguration of the ministry of the congregation in your conference/unit? Might your experience and reflection confirm the Redemptorist presence in your ministry or suggest other initiatives that might be more in line with our Redemptorist charism and mission?

PROCESS II: What is our ideal and how may we strive for it?

GOAL: To describe the ideal way in which you would like your ministry to be seen and experienced by the people whom you serve and to strategize how to meet that ideal.

STEPS:

- i. Ask participants to reflect quietly on their own, possibly writing down, on what words they would use to describe the ideal qualities of your Redemptorist ministry.

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- ii. Take a few moments and have participants share their reflections with one or two persons sitting near them.
- iii. Ask people, in the style of brainstorming, to name the qualities that would describe ideally their ministry.
- iv. From the list, ask them to prioritize the top five or six qualities that fit most closely their ministry.
- v. Ask participants to suggest specific strategies/actions that will help them to achieve the qualities to which they aspire.
- vi. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the progress and to revise the strategies if necessary, in order to reach the ideal Redemptorist character of your ministry.
- vii. As you reflect on this process, what you have learned and what steps you might take going forward, are there any implications that you see in terms of the reconfiguration of the ministry of the congregation in your conference/unit? Might your experience and reflection confirm the Redemptorist presence in your ministry or suggest other initiatives that might be more in line with our Redemptorist charism and mission?

PROCESS III: How might we grow in one of the “virtues” of Redemptorist ministry?

GOAL: To choose one of the “virtues” of Redemptorist Ministry as outlined in Section II and seek to develop practices to encourage our growth in that “virtue.”

STEPS:

- i. Ask participants to reflect quietly on the five “virtues” of Redemptorist ministry: places of 1) Welcome and Community; 2) Word and Sacrament; 3) Popular Devotion; 4) Formation and Learning; 5) Missionary Outreach. Ask them to choose one “virtue” that they think merits attention in your ministry.
- ii. Take a few moments and have participants share their reflections with one or two persons sitting near them as to why they chose that particular virtue
- iii. In the large group, listen to the responses of the participants and their reasons why a particular “virtue” needs attention at this time.
- iv. Brainstorm on specific practices that might be adopted to nurture growth in this virtue.
- v. Identify two or three practices and seek consensus from the group on trying to implement these practices.
- vi. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the progress and to revise the strategies if necessary, in order to grow in this “virtue” of Redemptorist ministry.

B. Processes to Discern Effective Ways to Evangelize in our Redemptorist Ministry

PROCESS I: Examining overall efforts in Evangelization

Constitution 3 states that “the most abandoned, to whom in particular the Congregation is sent, are those for whom the Church has not yet been able to provide sufficient means of salvation, those who have never heard the Church's message, or at least do not receive it as the "Good News", and finally those who suffer harm because of division in the Church.”

GOAL: To strengthen or initiate efforts in Evangelization in Redemptorist ministry.

STEPS:

- i. Ask participants to reflect personally on the following two questions in light of Constitution 3. Examining the socio-cultural and religious context within which you minister, who are the poor and most abandoned whom the Church has been unable to reach so far in your ministry? What are the challenges to Evangelization in your current ministry?

- ii. Ask participants to share the results of their reflection (either in large group or in smaller groups if there are more than seven persons in the group. If small groups are used, set aside time for small groups and then a large group to hear the responses of participants).

Guidelines - Churches, Parishes and Shrines

- iii. Give the participants a chance to reflect on the responses from one another. Invite them to discuss how and why they might focus their energy on one particular group of persons over another. This might include a reflection on staffing, expertise, and other resources.
- iv. Ask them to prioritize the list as to which group they would concentrate their efforts.
- v. Ask participants to suggest specific methods of or strategies for Evangelization to the target group.
- vi. Set and a timeline for implementing these efforts and indicate the person who will be responsible primarily to follow through on the suggestions.
- vii. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the progress of efforts in Evangelization and to revise the strategies if necessary, in order to evangelize more effectively the group of people on whom you have focused your energies.
- viii. As you reflect on this process, what you have learned and what steps you might take going forward, are there any implications that you see in terms of the reconfiguration of the ministry of the congregation in your conference/unit? Might your experience and reflection confirm the Redemptorist presence in your ministry or suggest other initiatives that might be more in line with our Redemptorist charism and mission?

PROCESS II: Examining Efforts in Evangelization in light of Missionary Priorities

Each conference and unit of the congregation has been asked to identify missionary priorities and apostolic priorities. This process invites participants to examine one or more of their missionary priorities and to reflect on how and whether their current apostolic priorities respond to ministry of Evangelization in their church, parish, and/or shrine.

STEPS:

i. Invite the participants to reflect on the missionary priorities of the conference/unit by reading them aloud.

ii. Invite participants to select one missionary priority that might be most relevant to their ministry (the apostolic priority in which they serve) and to state why they believe that this priority merits immediate attention.

iii. Invite participants to name what efforts in Evangelization are currently being carried out to respond to this missionary priority of the conference/unit.

iv. Reflect on the effectiveness of these current missionary endeavours:

Are they “successful” in terms of preaching the Gospel? If so, how? If not, why not?

Gather the responses so that all participants may see them and reflect on them.

v. Suggest ways that current efforts in Evangelization may be improved or adapted in order to be more effective, or

perhaps abandoned because they no longer serve our mission.

vi. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the progress of efforts in Evangelization and to revise the strategies, if necessary, in order to evangelize more effectively in light of the missionary priority of your conference/unit.

PROCESS III – Listening session(s) with Missionary Priorities Group

Each conference and unit of the congregation has been asked to identify missionary priorities. This process provides a means for dialogue between the group to whom we direct our ministry (Missionary Priority) and the Redemptorists and staff of our church, parish, or shrine. Preparation for this process would include identifying and inviting representatives from the Missionary Priority group targeted.

i. Begin with an appropriate period of prayer and then invite participants to introduce themselves and to state briefly a hope that they bring to the meeting.

ii. Invite a Redemptorist or a Redemptorist representative to speak briefly about our charism and mission in the world, addressing the theme of plentiful redemption and offering hope and healing to the wounded of our world.

iii. Invite participants to speak openly about their own needs in light of the Redemptorist mission. Allow participants to speak without interruption. It might even be helpful to have

participants brainstorm where they simply name areas that the group can return to for further discussion.

iv. Invite a response from the Redemptorist or the Redemptorist representative.

v. It might be helpful to prioritize areas that came up for discussion and action so that there is a direction to take after the listening session is over. The direction may simply be another listening session. It may also be helpful to form focus groups who would address individual issues that arose in the listening session to see how Redemptorists and members of the missionary priority group may work together in mission.

vi. Some type of follow-up/evaluation should be scheduled so that the work of the listening session is not lost and so that future planning may occur.

PROCESS IV – Reflecting on Evangelization in Time of a Pandemic

This document was drafted and reworked during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. This last process serves both to assist us in imagining new ways to evangelize when a pandemic wounds the whole world and share with the Congregation specific responses that have been taken in various apostolic ministries throughout the congregation.

i. Invite the participants to reflect quietly in prayer before entering into the process. In particular, invite them to remember those who have died from the Corona virus and for strength for healthcare workers.

ii. Invite participants to identify those whom you serve in your ministry who are particularly vulnerable and wounded at this time, due to the pandemic. Who are they? What do they need?

iii. Invite participants to suggest new efforts in Evangelization that would respond to these members of your faith community (or larger faith community, depending on your apostolic work), given the context of the pandemic. Please be specific.

iv. Invite participants to choose one particular initiative and strategize when and how it might begin in your ministry.

v. Set a date to reconvene the group to evaluate the new initiative in light of the context of the pandemic. Has anything happened that warrants a change in approach to ministry? Have new needs emerged? Revise the strategies or create new ones, if necessary, to respond more fully to the wounds of the people you serve.

vi. As you reflect on this process, what you have learned and what steps you might take going forward, are there any implications that you see in terms of the reconfiguration of the ministry of the Congregation in your Conference/Unit? Might your experience and reflection confirm the Redemptorist presence in your ministry or suggest other initiatives that might be more in line with our Redemptorist charism and mission?