

## MESSAGE OF FR ROGERIO GOMES, C.SS.R

TO

### REDEMPTORIST LOCAL SUPERIORS

(Online Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023)

#### Introduction

I would like to thank each and every one of you for the service you render in animating the confreres in the local communities. It is not an easy job, because there are almost always tensions in dealing with people, which is quite normal. There are those who are always available for different tasks and can be counted on, and others who are always unhappy and make things difficult. Dealing with the mystery of the human person is always a challenge for us. So, thank you very much for the work you do!

The General Government is making efforts and using various means, including electronic means, to be present in the life of the confreres to encourage them, to accompany them and to work on themes related to Redemptorist consecrated life. We meet with all the stages of formation in the Congregation, with formators, (V) Provincial secretaries, local superiors and other groups. If we want to be a missionary body, we have to walk together, joining forces and encouraging each other as a community.

Local superiors (local animators, local coordinators) play a crucial role in religious institutions in the service of animation.

In the case of consecrated life, the fundamental commitment is to respond to the Gospel and to care for people: Both confreres and the people of God as Pastor, Animator and Administrator. Therefore, the service of local superiors is not an appendix. It is part of the service of government with the (Vice) Provincial Superior. Their mission is to watch over the apostolic life of the local community.

Constitution 139 defines the nature and role of the local superior: *The superior of the community should behave first of all as a spiritual pastor and then as a rector and administrator. His principal duty is to place himself at the service of the community, so that it may be formed and grow in Christ, and so that, in a joint effort, all may give themselves to the work of evangelisation.*

By reason of his office, he should also feel himself co-responsible for the good of the whole province.

#### Some key concepts in the service of animation in the Congregation:

Here are some key aspects of the role of the local superiors and leadership:

1. **Belief in one's own consecration and consecrated life.** This is a valid point for all superiors: (Vice) Provincial, Regional and local. If someone does not believe in his own consecration and consecrated life, he will not be able to animate his confreres. He may be an excellent administrator, everything is planned, but the heart is missing. Shepherding in consecrated life is born of a deep attachment to Christ the Redeemer and to follow him in

his mission. Part of this mission is the service of animation of other confreres. And since we are inserted in an institution and in the world, we must respond competently to these demands. Believing in one's own consecration and in consecrated life means that the exercise of service is not seen as a power of command over the confreres, but as a journey with others, taking into account the gifts and weaknesses of each one.

- 2. Promote the quality of community life:** I believe we need to include in our thinking the concept of the quality of community life. The quality of community life refers to the overall well-being, satisfaction and positive experiences that individuals and groups derive from their interactions and participation within a particular community or neighbourhood. It includes a wide range of factors that contribute to people's sense of belonging, happiness and fulfilment in their local environment. Healthy community life means happy confreres, a job well done, a positive vision for the future and a missionary witness. We need to invest in relationships with God (spiritual life), with each other (community life) and with those we are called to serve (our mission). This is contained in our Constitutions. They are a wonderful spiritual source for us. It encourages confreres to live intensely each of the five themes: community, formation, mission, leadership and spirituality.

I insist on this concept, because before we speak to the People of God about community, we must live it personally and in community. Therefore, I will highlight some key aspects that influence the quality of community life: spiritual life, faith in community life, social relationships, feeling safe in an environment based on trust, the setting up of creative and generative spaces of life, awareness of the community identity, the ecological quality of community, inclusiveness and diversity, meeting outside of set hours, effective governance and ongoing formation.

- 3. Management of the confreres and lay people.** The first team to be animated is the confreres. Part of this animation depends on the success of the mission. The confrere who goes on mission does not only communicate himself, but takes the community with him. In this sense, the experience he takes with him can be positive or negative. That is why local superiors should always ask themselves this question: how is the health of my community? It is a question to reflect on the quality of our community life. In the area of animation, the local superior must be helped by his confreres and must, on the basis of the Plan for Community Life, establish and entrust tasks, give feedback, ensure teamwork, because we are a missionary body (cf. Const. 2). It is not a question of everyone doing the same things, but of recognising the gift and ministry of each confrere and of combining diversity in harmony. In our religious communities we have not only confreres but also lay people who work with us. In this sense, the first evangelisation takes place within our communities, the first witness we give to ourselves and also to those who collaborate with us in various projects.

- 4. Discernment and decision-making.** One of the aspects that is quite weakened in general in our communities is community discernment. We are forgetting this valuable element. In our Constitutions, the term discernment appears four times: in dialogue with the world and the questions of human beings today, discerning the true signs of God's presence and designs (cf. Const. 19); in the search for God's will as a community and the role of the local superior (cf. Const. 73, 2°) and in the area of vocation promotion and formation (cf. Const. 80,83). The lack of communal discernment may explain why so many confreres see the mission as a personal one or pursue private endeavours. Decisions must be made in accordance with our Constitutions and Statutes, in line with the Congregation, while taking into account the demands of the times, local needs and the challenges of the particular context.

- 5. Resolution of personal and community conflicts:** In any team or organisation conflicts can arise. This is no different in consecrated life. Here we have to be skilful and often work with experts to help us when it comes to situations involving a confrere and the community. Beyond the narrative that the superior does not listen to me or that the confrere is always unhappy and does what he wants, we have to work with charity. In some cases, there are local superiors who are in charge of confreres with many difficulties. The great difficulty often comes from the confreres who do not ask for help and do not allow themselves to be helped. When it is a question of a community conflict, the (V) Provincial Superior should be approached, who should help in the situation. It is important to keep in mind what is the duty of the local superior and of the (V) Provincial Superior. Local superiors should not delegate their responsibility to the (V) Provincial Superior. Likewise, confreres should be educated to deal with their local superior and not directly with the (V) Provincial. It is a matter of subsidiarity.
- 6. Smooth communication.** Effective communication is a vital aspect of leadership. Local superiors must communicate to their communities the objectives, orientations and changes in the programme and what is happening in the life of the Congregation. They must also be attentive to the concerns and opinions of the confreres and pass on that information to the higher levels of the Congregation, in this case, the (V) Provincial Superiors. Local communities are not islands in the Congregation or in the province; on the contrary, they are part of the missionary body called the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. For this reason, local superiors must keep abreast of what is happening in the life of the Congregation and also in the (V) Province. Daily reading of Scala News and the bulletin of the (V) Province puts the local community in tune with the Congregation and with the (V) Province itself.
- 7. Administration and allocation of Resources:** Local Superiors are responsible for managing the resources of their area, which may include budgets, staff, equipment and facilities. In this area it is very important to create a culture of transparency in the management of our resources. Although we have our sources of income, our resources come from the goodness of the People of God and, often, from the offering of widows. It is therefore essential that the local community is aware of the administrative aspects. The community meetings are places to present to the confreres the administrative and financial situation of the community. Knowing how much we receive, how much we spend and where we spend it puts us in tune with the exercise of poverty (cf. Const. 61-70) and our simplicity of life, as well as the participation of all in the administration of the goods of the Congregation.
- 8. Formation and community development.** The Superior plays an important role in identifying the formation and development needs within his community and facilitating opportunities for confreres to acquire new skills and knowledge. We know that ongoing formation is a weak point in the Congregation and also in the (V) Provinces. However, local communities can foresee times for ongoing formation in their community meetings based on local pastoral needs, consecrated life, relevant topics in the Church and in today's world to better understand today's culture. In this sense, when drawing up the *Plan for Community Life*, it is possible to foresee times for ongoing community formation on topics that can help the confreres in their mission. It is important that the local communities have contact with the documents of the Congregation, that space be created to study them in community meetings. Why do they study the documents of the dioceses and participate in the formation programmes of the dioceses and not participate in the formation

programmes offered by the (V) Provinces? If the (V) Province does not offer this possibility, the confreres have to claim it, because it is their right.

9. **Role model and safeguarding:** The Church has insisted on the issue of safeguarding. Much emphasis is placed on the issue of sexual abuse, but we must consider that among us there are other abuses: of power, of conscience, spiritual and economic. As a Congregation, we must think about creating a culture of care for others: our formandi, confreres, co-workers and partners in our mission. When we speak of care, we are thinking of creating an environment within our human relationships based on the Gospel, affecting our personal being and our relationships, creating an environment of trust. It is about caring for ourselves personally and as a community. Taking care of our spiritual, mental, bodily and relational health is important if we are to fulfil our mission. The (V) Provinces that have created clear policies and sensitised the confreres are now safer and have no or very few cases.
10. **Encourage confreres in the process of Restructuring for Mission:** The Congregation is living a process of restructuring for mission. It is a new time, a time of the Spirit. The Congregation is not ours, it belongs to the Lord, and the Spirit stirs its movement from our synodal body, the General Chapters. If the Congregation had the same face as the one founded by St. Alphonsus, it would have disappeared. Today, we are the face of the Congregation and we must do all we can to ensure that it fulfils its mission: what Congregation do we want for the future? Restructuring is a phenomenon that is taking place in the Church, in all religious congregations and in the commercial world. It is impossible for a confrere to be unaware of this reality. Unless he is completely disinterested in the things of the Congregation. Today's world asks us to change if we are to respond creatively to our mission. Therefore, it is important to encourage confreres in this direction and to review the decisions of the last three General Chapters in this regard.

## Conclusion

Local superiors serve as a reference point for the members of the community. Therefore, they must be in tune with the mission of the Congregation and the professionalism of their service, setting a model for others to follow.

Courage in your mission! The Congregation recognises and counts on your work of animation of its apostolic life. Constantly seek other aids that enhance your service, using both spiritual and psychological counselling to assist you both from an individual and community point of view. Often there are issues linked to the community that someone can work on with more serenity.

In the service of animation there are those who will support us with their prayers and their availability, and there are some who will always put obstacles in our way. The important thing is to cultivate a mystique of service, dialogue, listening, and also to help those confreres who never desire to be part of a missionary body with the community. Thank you very much, God bless you and keep up the good work. Go forward in your mission, we are together!

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R.

Superior General