

CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

**WITNESSES AND MESSENGERS
OF THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL**

Declaration of the XXV General Chapter

ROME 2015

Declaration of the XXV General Chapter of the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretian Missionaries), held in Rome from August 24 to September 16, 2015 (cf. *Annales Congregationis*, vol. 72-II, 2015).

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Decree <i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> (1965)
AG	Decree <i>Ad Gentes</i> (1965)
Aut	<i>Autobiography</i> of St. Anthony Mary Claret
CC	<i>Constitutions</i>
Dir	<i>Directory</i>
EC	<i>Epistolario Claretiano</i>
EG	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> (2013)
EN	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> (1975)
LS	Encyclical <i>Laudato Si'</i> (2015)
MCT	<i>Mission of the Claretian Today</i> (1979)
MFL	<i>Men on Fire with Love</i> (2009)
TMHL	<i>That They May Have Life</i> (2003)
MV	Bull <i>Misericordiae Vultus</i> (2015)
RM	Encyclical <i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (1990)
SAFC	Instruction <i>Starting Afresh From Christ</i> (2002)
SW	<i>Servants of the Word</i> (1991)
VC	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Vita Consecrata</i> (1996)
VD	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Verbum Domini</i> (2010)

Biblical citations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

INTRODUCTION

1. We are missionaries! The Mission belongs to the core of our most fundamental identity.¹ We have received from the Spirit a charism that conforms us to Jesus and makes us similar to the apostles, in a communion of life, totally dedicated to the Father and to the Kingdom (cf. *CC* 3-4). One hundred and fifty years ago, our Claretian community experienced a great joy when the Church approved our Constitutions and recognized, with joy, that our Congregation of Missionaries is a gift of the Spirit. Today, also with great joy, we proclaim gratefully with Mary the greatness of the Lord.
2. The Church of the Second Vatican Council has emphasized the Trinitarian understanding of Mission (cf. *AG* 1-3) and considers herself a collaborator in God's Mission. In the last years, we have felt challenged by the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium*, fruit of the 2012 Synod of Bishops on new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith. The mission is not just a part or an additional dimension of our life. It is neither an adornment nor something we can do without. As disciples of Jesus we have been chosen to bring light, to bless, to enliven, to raise up, to heal and to free (cf. *EG* 273). Like Claret, we have been anointed to announce the Good News to the poor.² We exist to carry out the Mission in the midst of the People of God. Mission, therefore, means much more than the ministries we exercise: it is the nucleus of our vocation (cf. *MFL* 37) and as such it marks our spirituality, guides our entire formative process, determines our style of community life, animation and governance and the organization of our economy. It is expressed through our presence and in the services that we seek to adapt to the times, places and cultures. Like the Church (cf. *EN* 14), we have meaning only in relation to Mission: to seek and ensure that God the Father is known, loved, served and praised by all³ and that the Kingdom – his plan of love for humanity and Creation – is fully realized.
3. The Gift of the Spirit, our participation in the Mission:
 - 1) Springs from his action in us,⁴ especially through the Eucharist and the Word of God, listened to, prayed, shared and offered to others⁵ and impels us to maintain an attitude of constant listening and discernment, seeking in daily life and in the evolution of the world the signs of the presence of the Kingdom.⁶
 - 2) Grants us the immense gift of the missionary community, impelling us to live in profound communion (cf. *CC* 4, 10) and to care for our fraternity as our first missionary testimony.⁷
 - 3) Makes us “communities in mission.” Thus, each activity, task and ministry is to be accomplished in such a way that we all live it as our own, and each one carries it out in the name of the community, with the knowledge and conviction of being sent by the community.⁸
 - 4) Has a privileged expression in the quality of our lives (cf. *EG* 259), which are called to give witness to the absolute primacy of God and his Kingdom, the divine option for the poor, the weak, the impoverished and the sacred value of human rights, of creation and of all life.⁹

¹ Cf. *CC* 2; *Dir* 26.

² Cf. *CC* 39; *MCT* 58.

³ Cf. *CC* 40; *Aut* 233.

⁴ Cf. *EG* 12, 11; *MCT* 146; *MFL* 16, 29.

⁵ Cf. *CC* 12,35; *MFL* 54.1, 59.

⁶ Cf. *CC* 34, *Dir* 106-107; *MFL* 54.4.

⁷ Cf. *Dir* 36, 104; *MFL* 16.

⁸ Cf. *CC* 13; *MCT* 139; *MFL* 57.

⁹ Cf. *EG* 198-201; *LS* 158, 207, 216-221.

- 5) Announces explicitly Jesus Christ and his Kingdom in a spirit of dialogue (cf. *EG* 45, 110) and invites us to be ready and prepared to go to the existential, geographical, social and cultural frontiers of evangelization and to contemplate reality from there (cf. *EG* 30).
 - 6) Unites us with other disciples, also called to participate in the Mission, with the universal Church and the local churches, and with millions of men and women of good will committed to transform the world according to God's plan.¹⁰
4. Our charism entails being totally of God and living completely committed to his Kingdom;¹¹ like Jesus, consecrated and sent¹² and following the example of Mary, the first disciple and mother of disciples (cf. *MCT* 150-151). Therefore, our practice of the evangelical counsels has an indispensable missionary dimension.

¹⁰ Cf. *CC* 6, 46; *MFL* 4, 22.

¹¹ Cf. *CC* 159; *Dir* 102.

¹² Cf. *CC* 3; *MCT* 55.

I

CHALLENGES FROM GOD IN OUR TIMES

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking ... (Rev 3:20)

5. We live in an era of interconnections. Much more than in other moments of history, humanity is aware of the existing relationship between the diverse dimensions of reality and life; the common destiny of all peoples... “The earth is the Lord’s [the lover of life] and all that is in it” (*Ps* 24:1; cf. *Wis* 11:26). Our God, with his mysterious presence, speaks to us and challenges us through creation, humanity, and his Church. The Risen Lord has been given all power. He is with us until the end of time (cf. *Mt* 28:20). His Spirit, Lord and Giver of life, challenges us with inexpressible groaning. The Church, the people of God, hears these challenges, discerns them and presents them to us. As a missionary community we feel challenged by:

THE CRY OF MOTHER EARTH

6. Within the Church, we are already very conscious of what is happening to our “mother earth”: loss of biodiversity, deterioration of the quality of life, social degradation and global inequality (cf. *LS* 17-61). We are one human family. But, while many live under the laws of consumerism, there are billions of people who are excluded and whose interests do not seem to count (cf. *LS* 49). Numerous cultures and ethnic groups are under threat of disintegration and disappearing. The groaning of sister earth and the cry of those abandoned demand that humanity takes a different course (cf. *LS* 53). It is urgent to “bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” (*LS* 13) capable of opposing the unsustainable exploitation fueled by the inordinate desire to possess and by a radically unjust economic system (cf. *EG* 59-60).
7. The Church has appealed to all peoples of good will to be aware of the gravity of these challenges and to promote a truly integral ecology in which all creatures receive the respect, protection and care they deserve, while the human being occupies a position that is consistent with the infinite dignity given by God.¹³ We are called to look after the Earth and to care for one another so that the whole of God’s project can be integrally accomplished in each person from conception to death: God does not only want his children to survive, rather that they may have life to the full and as true brothers and sisters, enjoying what has been given to all (cf. *EG* 192).
8. *This situation demands that we initiate a process of “ecological conversion” which should redefine our mission and lifestyles (cf. LS 216-232). How do we translate in our personal and community lives the Church’s call to combat the logic of violence, excessive consumerism, exploitation and selfishness?(cf. LS 230) How do we cultivate attitudes of the heart that enable us to live with sobriety and simplicity, with deep joy and without being obsessed with consumerism? The passion for life belongs to the core of our missionary vocation (cf. TMHL 8). Let our contribution ensure that humanity not disappoint God’s expectations!*¹⁴

¹³ Cf. *LS* 81; *EG* 178, 274.

¹⁴ Cf. *LS* 60-61; *MFL* 2i.

THE CLAMOR OF THE POOR AND FOR JUSTICE

9. The cry of the poor and of those in need is heard in diverse ways in our world. We are challenged by the situations of inequality and injustice that are causing an ever wider gap between the rich and the poor, the growing number of those excluded and neglected (immigrants, displaced, refugees, homeless, peoples under threat, maltreated women, children, elderly and abandoned sick people, etc.) and the many who resort to violence (at times in the name of creeds and religions). Millions of innocent people suffer without reason; the so called natural catastrophes affect in a special way thousands of families who have not been protected by others nor by us. Power and money have displaced God and the neighbor from the center of so many hearts.
10. *We ask ourselves to what extent have we also participated in this self-centered culture of instant gratification that is destroying the world;¹⁵ and we feel called to denounce the idolatry of money and of the market and to promote the social inclusion of the poor, dialogue, peace, justice, and the defense of the integrity of creation (JPIC).¹⁶ In union with God, we want to hear this cry and respond to it with all our strength (cf. EG 187-192), to cooperate with the liberating action of the Spirit and to identify ourselves with Christ who became poor and was always close to the poor and excluded (cf. EG 178, 186). It is not just a matter of promoting small gestures to particular persons, but to commit ourselves, with charity and compassion to the establishment of the Kingdom, to bringing it to all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and to all peoples.¹⁷*

THE DREAM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

11. In the last decades, humanity has shown a deep longing for unity. The awareness of forming one family is growing and is strongly manifested in the younger generations. The search for the difficult balance between unity and diversity provokes many social tensions which often result in jeopardizing peace. Violence affects and punishes many peoples of the earth. Millions of people live under harassment and in fear; they feel forced to leave their homes and see their most fundamental rights threatened (cf. EG 217-221); thousands of Christians suffer persecution because of their faith.
12. But, at the same time, there are many people and groups who work for peace through patient and persistent dialogue, the quest for reconciliation, the building of a harmonious social life and respect for all. Hope is also making its way in the world! Individuals, groups, movements, organizations, communities and entire peoples are working for peace. Families and educational institutions play an essential role in this process (cf. MFL 2g), as do those who commit themselves with courage to the policies that promote integral development, the common good, transparency, integrity, service to others and the struggle against corruption. The Church also wants to be a sacrament in the world of *shalom*: catholic, meaning open to all, to the other, without hurting or eliminating them, until one day we shall all become a “Kingdom and People of God”.
13. *For this reason, we feel called to conform our lives and mission to a prophetic dialogue (inter-confessional, inter-religious, political, etc.) and as a sign of compassion.¹⁸ And from here we favor what unites, reconciles and brings peace, tears down walls that separate, supports those who work for peace and reconciliation no matter what creed they profess or outlook they may*

¹⁵ Cf. EG 193-195; LS 162.

¹⁶ Cf. EG 186-258; MFL 2.

¹⁷ Cf. EG 179-181, 236.

¹⁸ Cf. EG 238-258; MV 15.

have (cf. MFL 2b). The heartfelt compassion, [cordialidad] which has been granted to us as a gift will help us in this.

THE MEANING OF LIFE AND ITS CARE

- 14.** In many of its dimensions, today's reality is made up of contradictory tendencies, of the battle between cultures that care for life and cultures that promote death¹⁹. On one side, the appreciation for life is growing. We human beings are happy when we are able to establish among ourselves relationships of love and care, boosted by the interactions facilitated by social media. But at the same time, millions of people experience loneliness and abandonment, harmful addictions, fragility, sickness, depression and the weight of unresolved guilt. Many of our contemporaries experience "an infinite sadness" (EG 2; 265).
- 15.** In many regions of the world, where for centuries faith guided the search for the meaning of life, God has lost significance and importance for many. Together with millions of people of good will, there are those who have made the satisfaction of their interests and pleasures the fundamental meaning of their lives. We are all tempted in this way. In many societies some fundamental values (family, the common good, care for the weak, etc.) have deteriorated and undergone a serious relativization. The fragmentation of life and its rapid rhythm impede serenity, thoroughness and the formation of life principles (cf. LS 18). Children, teenagers and youth, who are particularly vulnerable, grow without orientations, often deprived of the happiness that God wants for them and the means of discovering it; their problems and needs and those of their families challenge us in a special way (cf. MFL 2c, 60). Today, the Church invites us to be messengers of the joy and mercy of the Gospel, to break down barriers of indifference and to accompany and open our hearts without fear to those living in the outmost fringes of society (cf. MV 15).
- 16.** *We feel called to discover and bring forth in us the gifts of the Spirit; to share the joy and blessedness of the Gospel; to put into practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (cf. MV 15) and to express our heart-felt compassion in our encounter with each person (cf. EG 127) and our concern for the vulnerable (cf. EG 209-216); to be – personally and as community – credible witnesses of hope in God who never wants to hide himself; to "live in mercy" and promote the joyful proclamation of forgiveness and the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness.*²⁰

THE NEW DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CONTINENT

- 17.** Technology has radically transformed the world of communications, to the extent that we can now speak of a new digital continent populated by millions of internet users. The possibilities of access to information and the instantaneous exchange of messages increase day by day. The world is becoming more and more a global village, although many people and individuals remain unjustly disconnected. Ways of manipulation and control are also multiplied. The Church invites us to be present in this "new continent" and also warns us of its illusions and traps (cf. LS 47).
- 18.** *As servants of the Word, we feel called to search for the signs of God in the digital world, to share our experience of the Gospel in new communication codes and to combat the viruses of manipulation, superficiality and depersonalization. What a revolution Claret would have encouraged if he had the possibilities offered today by these new technologies! (cf. MFL 2j).*

¹⁹ Cf. TMHL 6-7; MFL 2a.

²⁰ Cf. EG 288; MV 9-10.

A CHURCH GOING FORTH

19. Aware of these and many other challenges, the Church has proposed to serve the Kingdom as a “Church going forth” towards the human peripheries: accompanying the life of the poor, inserting herself into their lives and trying to understand the soul of each people, recognizing in them the signs of the presence of God, creating bridges and opportunities of encounter between the Gospel and all cultures.²¹ As in the first communities, today there are also some disciples who doubt if it is really appropriate to *go forth*? Should we not prepare ourselves better and wait for some other moment? Will we not be contaminated by meeting others? In gratitude to the magisterium of the successors of Peter, we perceive in the words of Pope Francis a deep and fresh missionary dimension very much in line with the spirit that animated Claret.
20. *Thus we feel challenged to leave our comfort zones and excessive concern about ourselves (cf. EG 2; 27), to promote the disposition of the Church “permanently in a state of mission” (EG 25), to boost in her our “missionary outreach” according to our evangelizing charism, to overcome any sort of worldliness or spiritual sloth²² and to grow in missionary availability, inculturation and incarnation and openness to the universal mission of the Church and of the Congregation.²³*

AMONG THE PEOPLE WITH MANY FACES AND CHARISMS

21. We are increasingly aware that announcing the Gospel is a task of the whole people of God: people with many faces, various charisms, ways of life and ministries in which all of us are disciple-missionaries (cf. EG 11-21), people who seek the transformation of the world according to God’s plan.
22. *From the gift of the missionary vocation we have received, we feel challenged to be active agents of an ecclesiology of communion-mission in which everyone (men and women) participate and nobody is excluded; and to collaborate in the creation and consolidation of Christian communities full of the life and joy of the Gospel (cf. CC 47). At this moment, Claret’s call to think and do with others echoes in us in a special way.²⁴*

SEDUCTION BY THE SPIRIT

23. Our time is characterized simultaneously by the anxiety and search for a non-dualistic, integrating spirituality, by the enticement of many idolatries and the spread of unbelief. All this constitutes new challenges for evangelization. That is why the Church wants “evangelizers with Spirit”, in whom this fire burns.²⁵ These evangelizers pray and work, are socially committed as missionaries, and breathe with the lungs of prayer and intercession. Their life in the Spirit is expressed into anti-idolatry attitudes, and through contemplation, adoration, poverty, humility, simplicity, authenticity and honesty.
24. *This challenge leads us to a deep serious spiritual journey – personal and communal – in which the Spirit will always be our guide and inspiration and in which an authentic spiritual discernment will guide and accompany each one of our steps (cf. MFL 54.4). Aware of our limitations and sins, we feel that the invitation the Church made to consecrated people to be joyful witnesses of the absolute primacy of the God and his Kingdom was very much addressed to us.*

²¹ Cf. EG 20-24, 115-118.

²² Cf. EG 81-83; 93-97.

²³ Cf. CC 48; MFL 22.

²⁴ Cf. Dir 114; MFL 22.

²⁵ Cf. EG 261-262; MFL 1-65.

THE GRACE OF BEING A MISSIONARY COMMUNITY

25. As Psalm 133 proclaims, “How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell together as one!” What a joy to see the foundation and consolidation of the Congregation in many parts of the world, the lives of so many sick and elderly whose lives have been spent in service and fidelity (cf. *EG* 96), the intense fraternal communion of our martyrs, the silent, generous and enthusiastic dedication of many of our brothers of all ages! On the contrary, how sad it is to discover that we are not always faithful to the gifts of the Lord!
26. The community of the disciple-missionaries with Jesus and from Jesus, the principal mediation of mission, helps us to move from the pre-eminence of the *I* to the primacy of the *We* and makes us witnesses and messengers of the Kingdom (cf. *MFL* 17). Called to have “one heart and one mind”, and “to share all in common” (cf. *Acts* 4:32), far from asking each one to abandon who he is, the Gospel invites us to open up ourselves to that sharing for which we have been created: our being as community strengthens, enriches and deepens our personal self. *I* am because *We* are. The missionary community – a precious gift – nourished fully in the Eucharist, is a privileged place that strengthens and facilitates our personal fulfilment (cf. *CC* 10-12). In this world of sadness and dissatisfaction, the missionary vocation full of joy, facilitates a priceless true happiness.²⁶
27. *Therefore, we feel challenged to promote the beauty of the community and to reactivate our fraternal covenant²⁷ so as to avoid indifference, the existence of persons who live without consideration of others and separated from them, groups without community living, and apostolic individualism. We are also called to cultivate: the art of listening (within and outside of the community), concern for the other, spiritual sharing, fraternal relationships, and transparency in the sharing of goods. May the Spirit help us always to make our fraternal life a transparent and joyful proclamation of the Kingdom!*

FIDELITY TO OUR CLARETIAN MISSIONARY VOCATION

28. In these last decades, with the occasion of the beatifications of our brothers, we have contemplated with great joy the love, appreciation and fidelity to the vocation shown by so many Claretian Missionaries of all times and places. We are impressed and filled with joy also to discover the faithful and simple steadfastness with which thousands of people with whom we share the faith have preserved the gifts of God amid difficulties.
29. Six years ago, in 2009, our XXIV General Chapter invited us to live more joyfully and deeply our missionary vocation and our sense of belonging to the Congregation (cf. *MFL* 37). Today, we feel the same call with a new vigor. We observe with joy that the collaboration among organisms and the sharing of goods have instilled in us a deeper sense of belonging to the Congregation; we continue to be called upon to strengthen these dimensions that express our true fraternity.²⁸
30. *Accepting the insistence of the Church, we feel invited – personally and as a community – to cultivate a creative fidelity, able to consolidate and deepen our missionary identity, reinterpret the charism in new settings and lead us to live it more joyfully. We note with concern the observation already made by the General Chapter of 2009, “we are not as close to the youth, or as disposed to accompany them as we would like to believe” and we repeat its proposal that each and every one of us be more involved in inviting them to be servants for the Kingdom and ministers of the Word (cf. *MFL* 19).*

²⁶ Cf. *Ps* 16; *MFL* 33.

²⁷ Cf. *MFL* 16-17, 56.

²⁸ Cf. *MFL* 23-27, 64-65.

31. *We see the need to promote among ourselves a culture of fidelity to our vocation, to be increasingly aware of our duty to mutually care for each other respectfully, but also courageously (cf. CC 53-55) and to welcome the Church's call to credibility. We are grateful for the effort many of our brothers have made and are making to improve formation in the Congregation, but at the same time we see clearly the need to intensify the real transforming capacity of the formative process. The true concern of a Claretian for the initial formation is proven by the seriousness of his dedication to his own ongoing formation as disciple-missionary, a formation that can never be considered completed.*

32. The Church is convinced that today the Spirit is asking of us a “pastoral and missionary conversion that cannot leave things as they presently are”, (cf. EG 25-33) capable of transforming everything into a suitably channel of evangelization. She warns us about the temptations that lie in wait for evangelizers (cf. EG 76-109). Her challenge and all those we have noted here present us with serious questions:

- *How can we today be witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel in each one of our places?*
- *How can we encourage a new phase of evangelization that is more open to the Spirit, full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love, and attraction? (cf. EG 261)*
- *How can we collaborate with the Spirit to find new ways, languages, creative methods and more eloquent symbols of the Kingdom? (cf. EG 11)*

33. There are many questions, but we are not overwhelmed by them. We know that Jesus walks with us, speaks to us and seeks with us the glory of the Father, that the human person might live, that the poor might live, that nature might live (cf. TMHL 8). United with Jesus, trusting in his Spirit, resting in the arms of the Father amid creative and generous surrender, the Spirit will lead us wherever he wills and shall make us in his own time “mysteriously fruitful” (cf. EG 279-280).

II

CHARISMATIC TRAITS IN MISSION

*If you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you (Rev 3:20)*

34. Our Congregation, present on the five continents, desires to hear the challenges of our God who continues to lovingly knock on our door. As heirs of the charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret, we ask: *To keep the inheritance we have received alive and fruitful, what is the Spirit asking of us at this moment in the history of humanity?*
35. In 1979, a similar question was asked by the XIX General Chapter and it responded with *The Mission of the Claretian Today (MCT)*. Recalling the 1967 special Chapter, the Congregation enumerated the following “identifying traits of every Claretian:
- A profound experience of God as Father: a living of our divine sonship.
 - Conformity with Christ who was anointed and sent to save mankind.
 - A deep sense of Marian sonship.
 - A strict evangelical life following the poor, chaste, and obedient Christ.
 - Community life in the style of the apostles.
 - A fervent expression of the love which unites us with God, and apostolic zeal for the salvation of mankind.
 - A faithfilled, prayerful and loving ministry of the Word listened to and assimilated.” (*MCT* 82-83).

In addition, the aforementioned Chapter described certain attitudes found in Claret as well as in many other Claretian missionaries (cf. *MCT* 84-85), and proposed some options which the Congregation asserts “should guide and articulate all our missionary actions” (*Dir* 110-115). Almost 40 years later, we are filled with joy to note the affinity of that discernment with that of this XXV General Chapter.

36. Accepting the Church’s call on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, we gratefully recognize that the Lord has blessed us generously. While sin has continued to manifest itself among us, the signs of God’s grace have been and are much greater. United with Mary we wish to add to her *Magnificat*, for the Lord has done great things:
- The Spirit of Claret is alive and every day more inspiring.
 - The Word of God occupies a place ever more central to our mission and spirituality.
 - He has facilitated the growth of the Congregation and has enriched it with missionaries from many places.
 - He sustains our fraternity and helps us to leave behind jealousies and prejudices and to strengthen our communion within the Congregation.
 - He has strengthened our awareness of ecclesial communion and has granted us a better understanding of the gift of Mission.
 - He has made us capable of responding to the needs of many people, especially the poor, and the new faces of poverty.
 - He has motivated us with the testimony of our martyrs and the ecclesial recognition of their testimony.
 - He graces us with the dedication of many Claretians (missionaries in formation, brothers, deacons and presbyters).

- He has facilitated the increase of collaboration and the sharing of goods and resources among us.

37. Along the same line, the Spirit has granted us a solid and profound body of doctrine, reminding us that his gifts are not only received to be preserved, but to be deepened and developed in docility to his ever new and creative action.²⁹ What traits would the Spirit want us to be identified with especially in the coming years? Do the challenges bid us emphasize some particular traits? We believe so. Affirming their importance at this moment, we highlight various traits without calling into question the relevance of others, and inviting awareness of the close link they all have with each other.

38. With great joy we note the importance that the members of the Congregation give to our state of being “Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary”. Contemplating Mary will help us to understand these traits much better.

MISSIONARIES ‘WITH SPIRIT’

Rejoice!... Do not be afraid!... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (Lk 1:28, 30, 35)

39. We have been graced with a particular spirituality, inherited from St. Anthony Mary Claret and from our rich tradition. As Sons of the Heart of Mary, we are called to be men open to the Spirit, led by him and always docile to his motions; men on fire with love. The Church of our time strengthens this trait when she talks of “evangelizers with Spirit” (EG 259), who are aflame with the fire of the Spirit (cf. EG 261) and of mission (cf. EG 268-274).

40. Our path of spirituality in mission opens in each one of us and in every community processes of listening to the Master, of a progressive identification with his style of life that is obedient, celibate and poor (cf. CC 39); and increases our testimony to great missionaries at all times and places, even against the tide, and our proclamation of the Gospel with boldness. Docility to the Spirit enables the flourishing of characteristic virtues of our missionary charism in us (cf. CC 39-45): boldness and creativity,³⁰ heartfelt compassion,³¹ joy,³² closeness,³³ humility and meekness.³⁴ In the face of decreasing numbers and works, persecution and death, we glory in the cross of Christ.³⁵ Without a strong spirituality and constancy in prayer (cf. CC 33) we will not be credible, able to communicate the Gospel nor become mystics in the mission.

41. For this reason, we aim to:

- 1) *Live as disciples* sensitive to the signs of the Spirit in compassionate and attentive contact with persons, and capable of receiving the gift of God in history and of interpreting events from the perspective of faith and our charism.
- 2) *Nurture our spirituality as Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* formed in the forge of her Heart.

²⁹ Cf. SAFC 20; MFL 28.

³⁰ Cf. CC 46, 62; EG 33.

³¹ Cf. CC 40; EG 44-45.

³² Cf. CC 58; EG 21.

³³ Cf. CC 46; EG 23.

³⁴ Cf. CC 41-42; EG 146.

³⁵ Phil 2:6-11; CC 43-45.

- 3) Acquire *an attitude of missionary outreach* in collaboration with the Spirit for the transformation of realities. Here is the best place for our missionary discernment to seek out those activities that are most urgent, opportune and effective.
- 4) Be *witnesses of the joy that the Spirit generates in us*, overcoming pessimism, spiritual sloth, worldliness and our own weaknesses.

LISTENERS AND SERVANTS OF THE WORD OF GOD

Let it be with me according to your word (Lk 1:38)
Do whatever He tells you (Jn 2:5)

42. Our charismatic heritage defines us as “listeners and servants of the Word”.³⁶ We are in the Church and in society an echo of Claret (cf. *Aut* 686), passionate minister of the Gospel in season and out of season, using all means at his disposal.³⁷ We, like Mary, as Sons of her Heart, want to welcome and meditate upon the Word in our hearts and to proclaim it with passion.
43. The Church of today has helped us to understand in a new way that our God is speaking to us in order to establish a permanent dialogue of life, the dialogue of the Covenant. The Father who speaks in various ways and manners – in creation, in the history of human salvation, in the Scriptures – speaks in a definitive way in His Son Jesus, the incarnate Word, and in the Sacraments of his presence.³⁸ With Mother Church we can speak of a “symphony of the Word”. God our Father expects from us a free and committed response to his Word. Listening to the Word generates in us habits of silence, adoration, contemplation and discernment.
44. The Spirit helps us understand the depth of God (cf. *1 Cor* 2:11). The hermeneutic key to properly listen to the Word is God’s love for his People, and the revelation of the mysteries of the Kingdom to the humble, the poor and excluded (cf. *VD* 90-108). The ministry of the Word belongs to the core of our charismatic experience; it is a link between mission and life. If we do not encourage the dialogue of the Covenant with our God, and with all those people who in one way or another listen to his voice, our preaching will be in vain.
45. For this reason we aim to:
 - 1) Promote *vocational and pastoral listening to the Word* that makes the Bible – especially throughout the liturgical year – the guide of God’s journey with us and of our own journey with God.
 - 2) *Read, understand and welcome the Word under the action of the Spirit* (cf. *VD* 15) and to find out how through the Word the person of Jesus Christ speaks to us, addresses us, helps us to understand the signs of the times and shows us the Mission (cf. *VD* 12).
 - 3) Encourage *listening to the Word within the various contexts*, shared with others and to discover its transforming power which leads us to conversion and healing (cf. *Mt* 8:8).
 - 4) *Listen to God in the events of life*; particularly in the events of the lives of the poor and those who suffer violence and injustice.
 - 5) *Proclaim the Word*, using the most appropriate and discerned means, above all in places where the Word is not heard, or where there is not an adequate response.

³⁶ *CC* 6; *SW* 7.

³⁷ Cf. *Aut* 113, 118.

³⁸ Cf. *VD* 6, 8, 22-26.

- 6) *Be messengers, witnesses and interpreters of the Word*, listening to God who speaks through the various religious traditions and cultures, and speaking about God using language appropriate to the different cultures.
- 7) *Be prophets who announce the Word of God* and to be witnesses of what we preach with our life in all aspects.
- 8) *Be men of dialogue*, able to recognize significant signs (the powerful signs of Jesus) for others to believe the Gospel message.

MISSIONARIES IN COMMUNITY

Here is your mother! ... And...the disciple took her into his own home (Jn 19:27)

46. From the beginning we have lived in community, in the style of the apostles with Jesus and the first community, which had one heart and one mind and had everything in common³⁹. In the community we are sons of God the Father and sent by Him, and brothers among ourselves. Like the beloved disciple, we welcome Mary into our home as our Mother. To live as a missionary community is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which we must welcome and care for by loving one another (cf. *CC 15*); it is He who shapes our fellowship and forms us into disciples-missionaries among the people of God. Our communities – inter-generational and inter-cultural (cf. *CC 17*) – are called to be a parable of communion, an eschatological sign, an evangelizing word, in today's world.
47. As witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel, in apostolic community, we strive to have a common vision in addressing the human peripheries that challenge us in every place to have an attitude of missionary outreach. With the attitude of a true discernment community we convert our vision into a mission project. Within this project, we integrate the ministries and services of each and every member, according to our gifts, charisms and particular situation. Thus grows within us an awareness that we are one body with different members in mission, and individualism is avoided.
48. For this reason, we aim to:
 - 1) Shape our communities to be an *eschatological sign of unity, peace and reconciliation*.
 - 2) Build, among ourselves, a missionary community in *a spirit of dialogue, acceptance and mutual appreciation*, discerning together its ministries and services.
 - 3) Reinforce *the sense of belonging and community co-responsibility*.
 - 4) Value and accept as indispensable *the ministry of intercessory prayer and suffering* of our elderly, sick and impaired brothers.
 - 5) Appreciate and integrate *the creative energies of the younger generation*.

³⁹ Cf. *Acts 4:32; CC 10*.

SENT TO EVANGELIZE LISTENING TO THE POOR

*He looks on his servant in her lowliness...
He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly (Lk 1:48.52)*

- 49.** Our Father Founder understood his vocation using the scene of the synagogue of Nazareth in which Jesus identified himself with the anointed, to evangelize the poor.⁴⁰ Our Constitutions present Mary, our Mother, to us as the foremost among the poor of the Lord (cf. *CC* 23). In its process of return to the Gospel and adaptation to the times, our Congregation has deepened its call to evangelize the poor and to let itself be evangelized by them. Today, it listens even more intensely to the Church's call to strengthen ever more – with boldness and creativity – the option for the poor and displaced. One cannot be Claretian if he acts as if the poor did not exist.⁴¹ Nor can he be Claretian without denouncing unfair structures, fighting against the system that subjugates the poor and proposing alternatives. The poor are “the privileged recipients of the Gospel”.⁴² Through them – as in Mary – the Gospel speaks and challenges us with a new voice.
- 50.** Our option for the poor is made credible through a poor and simple lifestyle and through the sharing of goods among ourselves and with those most in need. This also means to manage our goods without greed, trusting in the Providence of God the Father and excluding any collaboration with the god of unjust riches, just as Jesus taught us.⁴³ Evangelical poverty, chosen and professed, is our blessing.
- 51.** It upsets and moves us to see that at this time of so much scientific and technological progress, there is a majority of people who live precariously day by day; that having so many resources, an exclusion economy, a “throw-away” culture still predominates; that indifference is globalized (cf. *EG* 53-54). As evangelizers, we want to be “instruments of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor” (*EG* 187), to be deeply touched by the suffering of others (cf. *EG* 193), to become a Congregation which is poor and for the poor (cf. *EG* 198), and that lets itself be evangelized by them and evangelizes with them.
- 52.** For this reason we aim to:
- 1) *Welcome, to listen to, accompany and care for the most vulnerable of the earth: the homeless, the drug-addicts, the refugees, migrants, indigenous peoples, the elderly, abused women, unborn children, all the exploited and defenseless.*⁴⁴
 - 2) *Open ourselves to new experiences of the Spirit, who makes us go out toward the peripheries of poverty, exclusion and the “throw away” culture, who graces us with the gift of mercy and compassion, who grants us an alternative prophetic vision from the peripheries – an authentic theological and hermeneutical locus – and who leads us to promote ethical cultures of cooperation and solidarity.*
 - 3) *Give a real testimony of both personal and community poverty and simplicity, and to share our goods for the promotion of the poor.*
 - 4) *Join in with the poor as agents of evangelization and advocates of the unique mission of the Spirit.*

⁴⁰ Cf. *Aut* 118, 687.

⁴¹ Cf. *CC* 44, 46; *EG* 80.

⁴² Cf. *CC* 3, 24; *EG* 48.

⁴³ Cf. *Mk* 10:17-31; 12:28-34.

⁴⁴ Cf. *EG* 169, 209-216.

WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH AND THOSE SEEKING THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD

With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with Mary the mother of Jesus...They had all met together, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power
(Acts 1:14. 2: 1.4)

53. Our Father Founder taught us that the evangelizing mission is an enormous work of transformation of the world that has to be carried forward “by all”, in favor of all and to bring real happiness to our neighbors.⁴⁵ At Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out on the whole Christian assembly, on “young and old,” “sons and daughters,” and “on all flesh”.⁴⁶ Mary, our Mother, was there, as witness and messenger of the total mystery of Jesus in the community that had one heart and one mind (cf. *Acts* 1:14). For our Congregation the dimension of “evangelizing with others”, multiplying evangelizing leaders, and shared mission is an indispensable charismatic trait (cf. *CC* 3, 7, 48) that we understand and carry out in various ways.
54. We live the charism of Claret in different ways: brothers, students, deacons and priests. Our communities are the first place of mission and shared life. When we see people who feel graced with the charism of Claret and called to share it or called to collaborate with us in our missionary efforts, we see them in the mission as an “extended family”.
55. We are members of a Church “in mission” by the work of the Spirit, a Church that is a parable of the communion of various charisms and ministries. “In the Church, there is a diversity of ministry, but a oneness of mission” (AA 12). This is why we actively involve ourselves in the local churches and collaborate with other institutes of consecrated life (inter-congregational collaboration) and movements in accord with our charismatic identity.
56. We know that the problems of humanity need a commonly agreed and shared response. The Spirit pours itself beyond the limits of the Church, when and how it wants (cf. *Jn* 3:8). This is why we want to collaborate closely with all people, Christians or not, who act in ways that are compatible with the values of the Kingdom; we join them in their initiatives and actions.
57. Therefore, shared mission is not a strategy, but our way of being and doing.⁴⁷ For this reason, we aim to:
- 1) Learn the best ways of *sharing our evangelizing and missionary charism* with those who, from different forms of life (consecrated, lay, matrimonial, and ministerial) have been graced with it and form with us the Claretian family.
 - 2) Promote – in accord with our charism – *a Church of participation and communion*: to share in the mission and life of each particular church; to help form Christian communities that receive and take care of all their members;⁴⁸ to be open to share missionary services and community life with people of other institutes or forms of life.
 - 3) *Collaborate in networks* (such as NGOs), shared mission and projects of others.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Aut* 202, 213.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Acts* 2:16-18; *Joel* 2:28.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Dir* 114; *TMHL* 37; *MFL* 58.4.

⁴⁸ cf. *Ecclesia in Africa* 63.

OPEN TO THE WHOLE WORLD IN PROPHETIC DIALOGUE

They have no wine... Do what he tells you (Jn 2:3.5)

58. Like Claret, we are convinced that our spirit is for the whole world.⁴⁹ Today we understand the world in a global sense: the other, nature, the cosmos, the virtual world... This world is already inhabited by God. We need a sensitivity that will help us to discover all that he is already doing in the world (cf. *RM* 28). From here springs our dialogue with the sciences, culture, religions, etc.
59. The Mission means announcing the Gospel, taking into account the previous action of God's Spirit in the world and thus becomes *missio inter gentes*, prophetic dialogue (cf. *MFL* 58). The Church that is born of the *missio Dei* is shown to be a community that not only gives, but also receives; that does not impose, but persuades; that loves and respects freedom and dignity, which empties itself and is humble to grow with the other (cf. *EG* 171). In the dialogue of life questions and the more serious issues of the mission emerge (cf. *LS* 10). Thus, we discovered how God reveals himself in various contexts and how these prepare us for God's revelation.
60. The Congregation takes as its own this style of being listeners and servants of the Word. The XXIV General Chapter signaled to us the importance of the prophetic dialogue of life as key to our pastoral and missionary activity (cf. *MFL* 58, 2). We now need to enter into a new phase, open and creative. Dialogue takes different forms: dialogue as *presence* – living more than doing–, *inter-religious and inter-cultural* dialogue which promotes peace and reconciliation; dialogue *with creation* that leads to ecological conversion. In this dialogue we live the announcement and the denouncement that is part of prophecy, a dialogue which we also extend to the new digital continent and to the new generations of youth to evangelize and to be evangelized. We are men on fire with love (charity) and “dialogue is the new name of charity” (*VC* 74).
61. When dialogue is difficult, prayer, intercession, patience, mercy and humility will reinforce our hope that the Spirit will carry out his work in others and in us.
62. Prophetic dialogue with others opens up for us new horizons, new opportunities and gives us new impetus and energy for a more creative, imaginative and innovative mission.
63. For this reason, we aim to:
- 1) *Make dialogue our style and means of evangelization*: configuring our words, works, ministries and lifestyles.
 - 2) *Sincerely be open to new ideas* with special attention to those coming from the young generation, trying to understand their circumstances, cultures and ways of being, and to discern and respond to them; to look for the “mystique of the encounter”; for this purpose it is necessary to become enculturated, to overcome prejudices, fears and defenses.
 - 3) Encourage *ecumenical, intercultural, interfaith and social dialogue* that promotes reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.⁵⁰
 - 4) Approach formation – initial and ongoing – from the perspective of *prophetic dialogue and creative imagination*.

⁴⁹ Anthony Mary Claret, *Letter to D. Giovanni Brunelli* (Vic, 12th August 1849): *EC* I, 305.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa* 105.

III

PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

*I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.
To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne (Rev 3:20-21)*

64. With the spiritual and charismatic sensitivity that has been granted to us, and in fidelity to the traits that we have highlighted, how can we not open our door to him who calls us through the cry of our mother earth, the clamor of the poor, of justice, of the victims of violence, of the denial of God?
65. We resolve to be – with Jesus – a Congregation “going forth” (cf. *Mk* 1:38) which receives the call of the Church to the pastoral-missionary and ecological conversion: we commit ourselves to form – under the guidance of the Spirit – communities of witnesses and messengers; we will take care to be men of deep spirituality who – open to the recommendation of Pope Francis to the Congregation – adore our God the Father “in spirit and truth” (cf. *Jn* 4:23) and embrace the processes of transformation that the Spirit grants us. And all of this, we want to live in the joy that is born of God (cf. *Aut* 444, 754), which Mary, our mother, experienced (cf. *Lk* 1-2) and which is characteristic in receiving the Gospel.⁵¹ There will not be privations and adversities (cf. *CC* 9, 44) that will prevent us from living and proclaiming the beatitudes of Jesus.⁵² The Spirit of our Father and our Mother will speak for us.⁵³

A CONGREGATION “GOING FORTH”

66. As in the case of our Father Founder (cf. *Aut* 270-271), today, Mary of the Pentecost – heart and fire – makes us restless,⁵⁴ impels our path, shakes our fear and inertias, and sends us forth to proclaim the Gospel in new places and peripheries; so that the whole Christ may be born and grow through the troublesome human history; so that we may be witnesses of compassion and mercy, universal brothers of the world.
67. Our **missionary objective** during the next six years will be: to walk forward, to open up new frontiers of all kinds – including ways of thinking – to seek out new pathways. For this:
- 1) We will encourage a true *pastoral conversion within the whole Congregation*: abandoning what is obsolete, and opting for what are imaginative and innovative models of evangelization that take us to human peripheries (exclusion, violence, injustice, victims of natural catastrophes, meaninglessness) and to the new places of prophetic dialogue (interreligious, interfaith, intercultural).
 - 2) We will include in our evangelization – shared with others and as an essential dimension – *the defense and care* of life, family, cultures, peoples and creation.
 - 3) We will contribute to the *multiplication of evangelizers* for a Church “going forth”, inclusive, participative and co-responsible. We will renew and better coordinate our places of education and formation which we already have: theological centers, institutes of consecrated life, online education, formation of educators and of pastoral agents, etc.

⁵¹ Cf. *Acts* 2:46; 4:33; 5:41; 8:8; 8:39; 11:23; 16:34.

⁵² Cf. *CC* 4; *Aut* 213.

⁵³ Cf. *Mt* 10:20; *Aut* 687.

⁵⁴ Text inspired from the prayer to the image in the General Curia by Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga.

- 4) We will encourage *an opportune and efficient response to urgent needs of evangelization* – from different places and regions where we are – so as to not to become stagnated and to review our positions.
- 5) We will look for effective ways of *mobilizing, coordinating and animating* – within the whole Congregation and in the different continents – the objectives and actions of the Mission Procure, the Secretariat of JPIC and our presence in NGOs and in the United Nations.
- 6) We will encourage *commitments of welcome and accompaniment of persons and groups impoverished and excluded*, promoting processes of inclusion and social transformation.
- 7) *We will form persons and teams* (that understand the possibilities and limits of the information and communication technologies) to evangelize using the communication media. We will also encourage the coordination of the Claretian publication ministries.

68. Our objective regarding the **evangelization of the youth generation and their preparation to respond to the calling of the Lord**, will be: to go forth to meet them, to walk with them and to help them be attentive to Jesus’ call. For this:

- 1) We will see that each province and delegation has the necessary personnel and structures so that *Youth Ministry and especially Vocation Ministry* may be properly attended to and coordinated. To facilitate this the General Government will propose guidelines and criteria for the whole Congregation in accord with the charismatic traits outlined in this Chapter.
- 2) We will take seriously *the human, theological, pastoral and spiritual preparation of our pastoral agents of evangelization of the youth*, so that they might be better prepared to reach out to them, respond with creativity to their questions, accompany them with wisdom in their journey, and to challenge their decisions prophetically.
- 3) We will promote *the creation of groups and communities of teenagers and young people that will initiate processes of searching for God*, of faith, vocation discernment and Christian and apostolic commitment.
- 4) We will, each and every one of us, *encourage vocations* (cf. CC 58). We will create an authentic culture of vocation, in which the Word of God and the surrounding human situations really challenge us, and in which the different forms of Christian life are presented with clarity, and in a very specific way our missionary vocation as “Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary” in all its diverse forms (cf. CC 7).

BEING A COMMUNITY OF WITNESSES AND MESSENGERS

69. To be “community” is a verb and not just a noun. It is an action, a process. It is a grace which must be asked for, nurtured, and allowed to grow, not just the result of our efforts. As sons of the “heart”, should we not put great effort to be communities of “one heart and one mind” in which we share our spiritual and material goods, whereby we enjoy the favor of God’s people, and God adds new members (cf. *Acts 2:44-47*). To be community is possible when we accept the presence of the Father, and Mary our Mother, who make us brothers (cf. *Aut 609*) with the only Master who makes us disciples and brings us joy with his Presence and the love of the Spirit which is poured into our hearts. Only then does our mission becomes credible (cf. *Jn 17:21*).

70. Our goal during the next six years to create **missionary communities**: that will rediscover the joy of living in communities which are houses and schools of communion; that give witness to God’s primacy and, in and of themselves, will announce the Gospel. For this to happen:

- 1) We will promote among ourselves *attitudes, of mutual and loving appreciation, of interests in who the other is and for what he does*. In this way healthy communities can develop: where dialogue occurs, grace is shared, a sense of trust and freedom develops, the joy of the Gospel is shared, pardon and reconciliation heals our wounds, and no one and nothing (i.e. abuse of social media, the new technologies, and other interests) isolates us from one another.
- 2) We will *encourage each of our communities to get involved – in accord with our charism – in the local church*, to be open to collaborate in projects that go beyond the local diocese, and becomes more visible in the social media, citizenship projects and cultural context of the society in which it is located, to transform this reality according to God's plan, and to offer generous and qualified collaboration, solidarity, or support (cf. CC 6, 46).
- 3) We will insist that *every community elaborate together its "Community Project"* (vision, mission and life) in a spirit of discernment, prayer and togetherness. Respecting the privacy of the community, it may be opportune to include others with whom we share our mission and charism. To this end, the community will dedicate the necessary time needed and give priority to this above other commitments. The project will be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis.
- 4) We will make *pastoral conversion a major concern in our communities*: for this we will place under community discernment our apostolic commitments and the status of our fraternal life, so both can be in harmony and respond to the orientations of this Chapter.
- 5) We will animate in the whole Congregation, under the responsibility of the General Government, *an interdisciplinary reflection regarding community life* as experienced at all levels (local, province and delegation, and worldwide).

71. With respect to the **economy of our Congregation, provinces and delegations, and communities**, our goal for the next six years is: to increase the sharing of goods in solidarity, and to be an expression of a poor Church that evangelizes the poor, in the style of Claret. For this:

- 1) We will rediscover *the joy of being poor like Jesus* (cf. CC 23, 26) conforming more and more our styles of life, organization and economic activity to a missionary Gospel poverty which makes credible our evangelization, witnesses to solidarity, and to a trust in Providence.
- 2) We will adopt measures and *develop programs, involving the interprovincial conferences, to select and prepare local and provincial treasurers and administrators of works*.
- 3) We will undertake *measures so that provinces and delegations program their economy using projections* (beyond the annual budget) with more transparency and competence in order to increase resources that support their ministries on the peripheries and allows them to support ministries of other provinces and delegations under the coordination of the General Government (cf. Dir 582).
- 4) We will provide *appropriate instruments and a style of organization that facilitates the coordination* of the Congregation's property for the benefit of its universal mission.

72. Our goal with respect to the **governance of our Congregation** is to make sure that those who exercise the service of authority, discern and act "according to God's heart," to accompany persons, to foster missionary cooperation, to promote the creativity and innovation that the Spirit requires in every time and place. For this:

- 1) We will encourage *a governance that is shared, compassionate, inspired by Jesus and in those attitudes found in the heart of Mary*. Thus, we will ensure proper qualification and support for those who will provide the services of animation, and we will enhance the role of the inter-provincial conferences.

- 2) From initial formation, we will see that *assignments animate and reinforce the universal mission of the Congregation – in close dialogue of the General Government with the major superiors*. We will develop programs that improve the preparation of those who are going to be sent, and the disposition to the host provinces, delegations and communities who are going to receive them.
- 3) We will explore *new methods and ways of organizing our general and provincial chapters* in its different phases (preparation, implementation and evaluation) as well as *the inter-provincial conferences*.
- 4) We will bring to conclusion *those processes of reorganization* already initiated and will consolidate those already carried out in accordance with the criteria set out in the last General Chapters.

MEN WHO ADORE GOD IN THE SPIRIT

- 73.** In the forge of her Heart, Mary as the collaborator of the Spirit teaches us to proclaim the “greatness of God” and to “rejoice in God our savior” (cf. *Lk 1:46*). *As first disciple*, she teaches us how to listen to the Word (cf. *Lk 1:38*), to keep it in our heart (cf. *Lk 2: 19*) and to take care of the needs of others (cf. *Jn 2:3*). *As mother at the foot of the Cross*, she conforms us with Jesus (cf. *Jn 19:26*), prays with us for the coming of the Spirit (cf. *Acts 1:14*) and the arrival of the final victory against Evil who wants to destroy the creation of God (cf. *Rev 12*). Therefore, a son of the Heart of Mary’s “only concern is how he may follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, enduring and striving constantly and solely for the greater glory of God and the salvation of humankind” (CC 9).
- 74.** Our objective with regard to the **spirituality** for the next six years is: to joyfully go forth in the path of the Lord, to proclaim with our life and mission the supremacy of God, following the spiritual life journey of our Founder, as reflected in his autobiography. For this:
- 1) We will develop and carry out – under the guidance of the General Government – *a formative and spiritual itinerary* to help all Claretians know and live deeply and passionately our spiritual patrimony.
 - 2) We shall take care very specially of *the vocational listening and shared Word of God*, particularly in the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the liturgical year.
 - 3) We will use a pedagogy that helps us – as persons and communities – to be *men who adore God in spirit and truth* (cf. *Jn 4:20-24*) and thus show the emptiness of any kind of idolatry.
 - 4) We shall work on *our personal projects to encourage progress in the missionary life*, foster in us spiritual accompaniment, and look for ways to dialogue about these in community.
 - 5) We shall encourage *the joyful living of the vocation we have received (lay, priestly and diaconal)* and will grow deeper in it and we shall highlight – in our spirituality and formation – our common vocation as missionaries and religious, and we will pray that the Lord send more workers to the harvest.
 - 6) We shall participate more actively *in the spiritual journey of Christian communities and, when present, in their popular religiosity*, and in those human groups with whom we share life, creating places and times that allow for participation, all of which are for us a source of spirituality.
 - 7) We shall continue to promote *the Forge experiences*. We shall foster the realization of the *Residential Forge* in various geographical and language areas and the participation of all in special moments of our life.

75. Our objective regarding initial as well as ongoing **formation** for the next six years is: to progress and grow as disciples, called by the Master to be with Him, and to be sent as witnesses and messengers, until we are transformed as was our Father Founder throughout the course of his life. For this:

- 1) *We will review the General Plan of Formation* keeping in mind our charismatic traits and the challenges of our time, and will define our formation (initial and continuous) as truly transformative processes.
- 2) *We will make certain that the accompaniment during initial formation* includes a personal meeting between each student and his formator to facilitate discernment and vocational growth. This meeting will be held at least once a month in the case of the temporary professed and more frequently in the previous stages of formation. We will organize workshops and specific programs to prepare formators in doing this accompaniment.
- 3) We will reinforce in all our formation processes, centers and stages, those actions that help to prepare our formandi for intercultural living, inculturation and a commitment to *the universal mission of the Congregation*. We will consolidate the existing intercultural formation centers and will try to increase their number and the presence of formators from various backgrounds.
- 4) We will form *formation communities* to be witnesses and messengers of the Gospel committed to the formation process.
- 5) We will endeavor to see that *formators perform their ministry free of other tasks* that might prevent them from joyfully carrying out their assignment as a very important part of the unique and common Claretian Mission (cf. CC 77).
- 6) We will strive to improve *those initiatives for the preparation of formators* already underway (especially the “Heart of Mary” School for Formators) and to organize in various languages other intensive programs that promote the reception, understanding and accompaniment of the new generation of vocations.
- 7) We will continue the initiative *Encounter with Claret* and study the possibility of other renewal programs.
- 8) We will devote time and effort to update *our own Biblical-Theological formation and knowledge of the social and political circumstances of the day*, as we try to offer missionary services that are relevant to the times (cf. CC 56, 74).

Conclusion

The Chapter discernment stops here. It is the result of a wish and a prayer: to place ourselves in the “upper room,” (cf. *Acts* 1:15) the Cenacle of the Spirit, and with Mary our mother always in the center, to listen to the challenges of God in our world, to highlight those traits by which the Spirit identifies us, to let its fire transform us and its wind make us a Congregation going forth to the peripheries of the world. If we are faithful to the vocation received we will be happy and will communicate – with our own style – the Joy of the Gospel.

We hope that this document will be received like a short film that tries to capture in a few scenes the intense process of discernment, prayed, shared and endorsed by all.

The Chapter members represent only three percent of the entire Congregation. Among us are reflected a wonderful variety of languages, peoples and cultures. Once again we find that fraternal intercultural dialogue is possible, that through gestures of closeness and mutual belonging, any barrier is surmountable. Nothing daunts a united Congregation.

We are motivated by a strong desire for change, which is expressed in pastoral conversion – missionary and ecological – to which the Church of today call us, and in the decision to leave our areas of comfort to become a “Congregation going forth.”

We have received a charismatic heritage which energizes us ever more and helps us to discover our reason for being in the local churches, in the world church, and in society.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary, so beautifully depicted in the mural which presides over our General House chapel, is our inspiration. With her, let's go forth, walking together with the people, in joyful adoration! We are missionaries!



TO MOTHER MARY OF PENTECOST

Mounted on the cross is the whole mystery
Of that great love that sets us free.
All peoples can be brothers,
Those of the olive and of the far away maize,
Forming themselves into a single Eucharist.

Green is the hope of the Earth,
Despite the shadows of death,
And all the hands – of all colors –
Are hands of your Son,
Wounded by poverty or by sin,
Asking for and offering the Gospel.

Icon of a missionary Church,
Cradling in your heart the Living Flame,
And in your bare feet bringing forth the Word.
Clothed by a Promise,
Luminous like faithful armor,
Yet mission and martyrdom urge you on.

In between Cross and Glory
You go forth always in step
With the Son, and the daughters and sons
Relentless itinerant of the Kingdom.

You are always Mother, Mother now
Of that total Christ born and growing
Through an evolving human history.

Mother of the Word and its disciple,
Master of listening and of service,
Maternal Cenacle of the Church:
Never turn back, Mother!
Encourage the twelve going forth,
And all seventy,
For we are bewildered,
Perhaps, at the onslaught
of God's windstorm!

Open our eyes and ears,
Shake from us fear and inertia,
Give us a heart of flesh and chrism,
Clothe us with joy and courage,
Send us, to the Wind that brings you,
Witnesses of your Son,
Paschal servers and deacons,
Brothers universal of the world!

(Pedro Casaldáliga)

**Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis
to the General Chapter
of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

Dear Claretian Missionaries,

Welcome! It is a great joy for me to meet with you. I am grateful to your General Superior, Fr. Matthew Vattamattam, for his kind words, his expression of ecclesial communion, and I hope for his successful work in the responsibilities that you, his brothers, have entrusted in him.

“Witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel” is, as I have been informed, the central theme of your Chapter discernment. “Witnesses,” because joy cannot be expressed if it is not present and profoundly rooted in one’s personal life, as well as in the community. “Messengers,” because what is good must be shared and in sharing this joy, it is purified and multiplied, making it truly “evangelical.”

How do you find the Congregation in your Chapter analysis? In the exercises of discernment, how do you hear the challenges put forth by the Spirit? One sure way to hear the challenges is to place yourselves in the realities of the different peripheries of the world. In these places these challenges are heard with greater clarity. This is even more important for a missionary Congregation such as yours.

We are celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life. I began this year by sending a letter to all consecrated religious in which I invited them to look at their past with thanksgiving, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope. I repeat this to you once more. When Jesus is at the center of our life, we are capable of giving witness and communicating the joy of the Gospel.

To “give thanks for our past” is to give thanks to God for the testimony of many of our brothers who, sustained by their faith, lived their vocation with a profound joy – some of them even up to the point of martyrdom. This also calls us to recognize the merciful hand of God who, regardless of our weaknesses and inconsistencies, continues to work marvels in the midst of the people of God.

“Living the present with passion” is fundamental to the missionary project in the Spirit of St. Anthony Mary Claret, who placed as his model in his Coat of Arms *Caritas Christi urget nos* (“the Love of Christ Impels Us). To love as Jesus loved should challenge each of our pastoral options.

“Embracing the future with hope” means not to allow yourselves to be dragged down by discouragement. Do not be afraid. It is the Lord who sends you. Always place your eyes on those who await the proclamation, and those who need your witness in order to feel the merciful presence of God in their lives.

I thank you for your lives and your missionary work. Please give my greetings to each and every one of your brothers and, in particular, to those who are ill or advanced in age, and collaborate now with their prayers and their witness to the Congregation’s mission. Take care of those who are in the process of initial formation: help them to interiorize those values that your founder expressed as a means of faithfulness to the charism, which the Lord has blessed the Church through your Congregation. Also take my greetings to all the laity with which you share your lives and mission.

St. Anthony Mary Claret, as a founder, gave you a beautiful name: “Sons of the Heart of Mary.” Allow all of the dimensions of your lives to be profoundly marked by this “cordiality” which inspired Mary’s beautiful hymn of the *Magnificat*; and express the motherliness of the Church, Merciful Mother, who never tires of waiting, accompanying and forgiving. I entrust you to Mary and bless you. Please do not forget to pray for me, I need it.