CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

MEN ON FIRE WITH LOVE

Called to live

our missionary vocation today

DECLARATION

OF THE XXIV GENERAL CHAPTER

ROME - 2009

**introduction**

Dear brothers:

With the conclusion of the XXIV General Chapter, we place in your hands this document that contains the discernment that was begun in each of the Claretian communities. You will remember that approximately a year and a half ago we started our journey towards the General Chapter with a question that expressed our desire to be faithful to Claret’s missionary dream: How are we to live our missionary vocation today?

The celebration of the bicentenary of our Founder’s birth led to a renewed awareness of our identity and we felt the desire to live it and express it in a new way so that it might stay alive in us and continue to be life-giving for many others.

At the centre of the Chapter reflection has been the “definition of the missionary” which summarizes the vocation response of our Fr. Founder. From this perspective we considered the situation of the world, the Church and Congregation, trying to discover the calls that God has for us at this moment in our history. With this in mind, we have also chosen the priorities for the coming years and the proposals that should make them operational.

How do we feel within each of us this fire of charity that, as it “enkindle our hearts,” urges us on to desire “to set the whole world ablaze with the fire of divine love”? What do we need to feed this fire and to pass it on to the new generations of Claretians? These are questions that we have asked ourselves during the Chapter. To grasp the full meaning of this chapter document we should keep before us the questions that led to our reflection. To take on the priorities chosen by the Chapter for the coming years we must ask ourselves as individuals and as communities, these same questions.

For us the chapter experience was a powerful call to live our Claretian missionary vocation with renewed enthusiasm. We hope that you find in these pages a strong encouragement to do so to the full.

I
THE CALL OF GOD

# In Our World

As “Men on Fire with love,” we, the Claretian Missionaries, see the tension between light and shadows in the world in which we live. As Christians we believe that the person, created by God out of love and for love, is at the centre of our vision (cf. *CCC* 358). All men and women, have a common origin, a common end and a common mission (cf. *CCC* 360). The human race, together with all creation, forms a unity. This oneness reaches its fulfilment with Jesus Christ, in Him, and through Him. He reveals the dignity of each person, the purpose of our existence. His Gospel calls us to solidarity and love (*SRS* no. 38 par. 6). The major challenge is for all of us to live as brothers and to care for the earth where we live.

Several pressing issuesthat we perceive in the world today and which touch our lives give us an idea of the *tremendous challenges* facing humanity. Many local, national and international groups are working to address these challenges. The General Chapter has chosen to highlight ten *o*f these, with positive and negative aspects, because of their importance for the life and mission of our Congregation.

1. *In defence of Life:* The gift of life is an integral part of God’s revelation (cf. John 10:10). As evangelizers we are committed to the defence and the development of life to its fullest. Yet, there is an increase of violence at all levels of our society: in schools, in families, through abortion, euthanasia, drug, arms and human trafficking, state-sponsored and international terrorism, etc. The reaction of some groups is more violence, often against innocent people.Some Claretians have seen firsthand the tragic consequences of war and terrorism arising from unresolved ethnic, religious, political, social and economic conflicts. *Violence against the human person is an affront to the divine plan and challenges us, as people of the Gospel, to cry out prophetically against this “culture of violence and death” and to support those who work for peace and the value of life.*
2. *Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue*: There is a growing awareness of its importance. Nonetheless there is no shortage of problems related to the lack of religious freedom, fundamentalist movements, religious conflicts, the tensions between traditional and "imported" religions, etc. In some places there is blatant hostility to religion despite its positive contribution to society. *This situation is a strong challenge for us to present religion as a path of reconciliation for the human family and to deepen our efforts regarding inter-religious dialogue.*
3. *Care of families and future generations:* The family continues to play an important role in the transmission of values and in the formation of persons. However, striking changes are occurring in family life in the world today. Divorce, single parent families, lack of permanent commitment, same-sex unions are all realities that challenge this basic structure of our society. It is also important to note that the vast majority of the developing world are young people: youth everywhere are searching for meaning in a world that often treats them more as consumers rather than as builders of the future.*We are called to listen to the values that youth can offer us and to respond creatively to their needs and to the needs of families.*
4. *Economic solidarity.* Our world is rich in resources but they are unevenly distributed. The recent economic crisis has confirmed the need for global economic solidarity, business ethics, and responsible use of goods and resources. The local impact of this global crisis is the loss of millions of jobs and increased costs of basic necessities for poor and working people around the world. This has generated societies where more people are starving and where in some cases suicide has increased.[[1]](#footnote-2) *We are called to promote more just economic policies that serve the welfare of people; and to take greater interest in those alternative policies that show economic solidarity and that promote sustainable development, those that allow for social transformation and defend the most vulnerable in our society.*
5. *Option for the poor and marginalised:* At all levels of society many secular and religious groups are working towards alleviating poverty. Still, the number of poor people is increasing[[2]](#footnote-3). Even in more developed countries there is a growing number of people living below the poverty level and most of these are women and children. Too often the poor are overlooked. *We feel called to know them by name, to live and work in the forgotten sectors of large urban centres where the poor are just faceless masses living in shanty towns. We are also present in the vast rural areas, where the poor are exploited and marginalized from national development plans where the most basic rights as citizens are ignored.*
6. *Solidarity with migrants.* The phenomenon of international migration can be a positive contribution to the economic needs and cultural enrichment of many societies. However, migration and the displacement of peoples caused by factors such as natural disasters, famine, economic and political instability is a reality that cannot be ignored. In fact, *responding to the needs of migrants continues to be a major concern for us.*
7. *The challenge of education:* Education is an important tool for confronting many of the ills of our society and for the development of the human person. Fortunately the value of education is being more recognized throughout the world. Yet at times, education for profit appears to be more important than educating for values. Furthermore, access to education is still extremely limited in many areas of our world. *Given the importance of education in our ministry, we recognize this as a serious and demanding challenge.*
8. *Promoting health:* Advances in medicine and medical technology have improved the quality of life of many and allowed them to live longer. But the access to this care continues to be a major challenge. Tragically, millions of people when faced with illness, even curable illness, are not able to get proper medical attention. Most of these are children. Even in the more developed countries many hundreds of thousands of children cannot afford proper medical care. Some of us have responded to this basic need with parish dispensaries, clinics, and alternative therapies. *On the other hand, advances in bioethics and healthcare technology have brought with them new and challenging moral questions*.
9. *Care of creation:* God entrusted creation to our care, and in truth we have not been very good stewards. Like many people on our planet, we are ever more aware of the harm done by the degradation of the land, contamination of water, and the pollution of the air. We are trashing our planet and threatening the future of all forms of life. This planetary suicide must stop or it will surely be the end of life as we know it. Some options, presented as alternatives, such as agrofuels, instead of resolving the problem, aggravate it[[3]](#footnote-4). Our missionaries know all too well the consequences of radical climate change: extreme weather like hurricanes, droughts, heat waves, floods, etc. *Our challenge is to stimulate and sustain the “ecological conversion”[[4]](#footnote-5) which makes humanity more sensitive to our being stewards of creation.*
10. *New possibilities of the information society.* More than ever the technological advances make it possible for people to have more options for communication. Although new technologies may bring us closer together for some, it can lead to loneliness and alienation. The challenge for us is to use these new means of communication to reach out to people around the world with a prophetic message of hope and one that calls attention to the injustices faced by so many people. *We feel a special call to reach out to the youth using the technology available to us and to promote a culture of respect, dialogue and friendship[[5]](#footnote-6).*

# In the Church

We also know that God calls us through the Church and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council to share “the joys and hopes, sorrows and anguish” of the human family (*GS* 1). Within the Church today we are called, together with all Christians, to be disciples and missionaries in accord with our particular way of life and charism.

Among the calls that the Church presents to us, through its Magisterium (Synods, Latin American Episcopal Conference in Aparecida, etc.) and through various ecclesial events (World Youth Day or World Families’ Meeting), our Chapter highlights seven. We believe that the Church calls us today:

1. *To centre ourselves in Jesus Christ*, “the same yesterday, today and always” (*Heb* 13:8) and “to put out into the deep,” re-creating our mission based on a “new ‘creativity’ in charity” (cf. [*NMI*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html)*,* 50).
2. *To renew our understanding and experience of the theological virtue of charity*,[[6]](#footnote-7) which is so crucial to the definition of the missionary.
3. To make the *Eucharist and the Word* the source of our spirituality and the force that urges us on in the mission.[[7]](#footnote-8)
4. *To be attentive to everything that happens in the various parts of our world and the Church*; and to be ready to respond using the missionary criteria of what is “most urgent, timely and effective.”
5. *To take heart in the evangelizing witness* of those who embody the Church’s commitment for life, for the dignity of persons, especially for those impoverished and excluded. These are groups, movements, communities, families and individuals living their faith and ministry of evangelization with passion and creativity, sometimes in very difficult and hostile situations.
6. *To live our charismatic identity in communion, co-responsibility and harmony with other charisms, ministries and ways of life*; promoting the role of the laity, especially that of women, in the Church.
7. *To establish our missionary service in those places where disbelief prevails*, where faith is most in decline and the faithful are most neglected.

The Church today invites us to respond to another call without which we cannot be credible witnesses. We become aware of our limitations and sins when on certain occasions:

1. Having received the grace of God’s Word and sent to proclaim it, we try to pass it on without reflecting on it, praying over it, adequately internalizing it, consequently failing to offer a credible and effective message to contemporary society.
2. Sent to announce the good news, to cure the sick and to give hope to those who live in search of meaning, we ourselves are in a crisis of faith and hope and are spiritually sick.
3. Celebrating the sacraments, the Covenant of God with the world, we allow ourselves to be led astray by ritualism, routine and lack of mysticism; religious acts then become merely repetitive and alienating.
4. As missionaries, representing the one and good Shepherd, his presence in us is not transparent in the way we live our life; we are blind guides or mercenary pastors who give scandal to the “little ones” (as in cases of sexual abuse by clergy or religious) or just leave the ministry when difficulties arise.
5. Though called to unity by Jesus that the world might believe, we exclude from our heart a brother or sister, we refuse to participate in community dialogue meant to provide mutual encouragement and when needed fraternal correction, and we do not share our spiritual and material goods.

There are calls that come to us from the consecrated life itself, to which we belong:

1. To shape our way of life with a “passion for Christ and for humanity”; from the perspective of the two evangelical icons of the Samaritan woman at the well and the good Samaritan, symbols of the thirst for God and the tender mercy towards the marginalized, those who suffer violence and the impoverished (cf. the International Congress of Consecrated Life, 2004).
2. To follow the example of those institutes, communities and persons who promote through shared mission new ways of evangelization, the struggle for justice, the care of creation and inter-religious dialogue.
3. To live with the tension that arises from the lack of confidence in and proper consideration of the religious life[[8]](#footnote-9). The challenge for us is how to collaborate with the bishops while still being faithful to our charism and to our prophetic role in the Church.

# In the Congregation

1. Recent years have been a time of grace for which we give thanks to the Lord. In the life of the Congregation there are more positive aspects than those that produce pain and sadness. Not everything that has been lived and tried has expressed holiness, community vitality and pastoral boldness and commitment but we believe that the Lord manifests his power in our fragility (cf. *VC* 20; *C*C 51, 53). W*e feel called by the Spirit to commit our life for the sake of the Kingdom*. We will highlight some of the calls that we recognize more keenly.

## Called to strengthen the experience of god in our life

Called to be listeners and servants of the Word, we are aware that life in the Spirit has to occupy first place in our life project (cf. *VC* 93). Thus we have tried in recent years to cultivate our missionary vocation in fidelity to the evangelical and charismatic roots expressed in the Constitutions (*TMHL* 48). Among the many initiatives begun in the last decades, the bicentenary celebrations of the birth of St. Anthony Mary Claret have been a singularly important moment of animation for the life of the Congregation.

Also at this time, in accord with the guidelines of the Constitutions and of previous General Chapters, there has been a deeper listening to and a growing appreciation for the Word of God. Sharing our journey with individuals and peoples, above all with the poorest, continues to be for us a great source of spiritual rejuvenation. Today, many Claretians, from all cultural origins, ages and mission contexts, show an intense desire to grow in the Spirit, joyfully cultivating, in the midst of the difficulties, their response to the call they have received.

Since 1849 many of our brothers have embodied the ideal formulated by Claret and are a reference and stimulus for us in the path of holiness. Many today in our communities live exemplary lives of great human and spiritual qualities. They commit themselves daily in service to those to whom they have been sent. Others have already finished their journey in this life and their memory sustains our commitment. In 2005 we experienced with great joy the beatification of Fr. Andrew Sola whose example encourages us to take up the being sent as a missionary to its final consequences.

In spite of all this, in many of us there can be seen symptoms of weariness, spiritual mediocrity and lack of vocational and missionary enthusiasm. Often it is difficult for us to take significant time for personal reflection, the prayerful reading of the Word and the serious study of the reality from our faith. At times we do not take full advantage of the spiritual dynamism that the liturgy offers us, forgetting the primacy of the Father and his Kingdom; we take on comfortable life styles and distance ourselves from the major concerns of the Church and the world without giving testimony to the value of perseverance, sharing, the cross and renunciation. The number of those who abandon the Congregation, or do not join it after showing an initial interest, *challenges us to be better witnesses to the experience of God in our lives and to deepen our sense of belonging to the Congregation.*

## Called to live in continuous formation

The present globalisation, the transformation in the world and its consequences influence us for good and for evil. At times we naively ignore our fragility and drop our guard (cf. *Mt* 24:42-44; *Mk* 13:38; *CC* 53). Today the essential means offered for initial formation, are not sufficient to help us live “firmly and constantly by Christ” (*CC* 73). To speak of discipleship and consecrated life is to speak of “a never ending formation” (*SAfC* 15). *We feel then an intense call, backed up by the Church, to give continuous formation a fundamental priority. At no stage of life can a person consider himself totally formed.* (cf. *VC* 69*).*

Also, in the area of formation there are lights and shadows. Following the moment of grace that the Congregation experienced in the post-conciliar renewal and incorporated into the ‘General Plan of Formation’, we have made a notable effort to develop programmes of initial and permanent formation that are revitalising and dynamic. The stages of formation have been enhanced, the number of inter-cultural centres has increased with good results, a good number of novitiates have well articulated programmes and many Claretians have found in the missions where they serve rich opportunities for formation.

At times the many continuous formation initiatives do not find the desired response. We tend to waste the opportunities that daily life offers us in this area (cf. *SAfC* 15) and often we maintain inadequate apostolic methods and tools. Also, the lack of attention to many community libraries and the absence of plans for specialisation in many Major Institutes are a serious concern for us. *We are called to provide formative means that animate us to live our vocation with more joy and generosity, to re-enforce belonging to the Congregation in a way that helps us to offer missionary service in a timely, creative and efficient manner and that expresses the relevance of study in the life of the missionary (*cf*. CC* 56*).*

In addition, it is not always easy to find people prepared and ready for the task of initial formation. We appreciate the effort and dedication of those involved in this. Sometimes, nevertheless, their lack of specific preparation, frequent changes of appointment and the need to carry out other jobs make their commitment and the proper accompaniment of the formandi difficult. These points reflect a problem of priorities both for the person and the Major Institutes which also reinforces this call.

## Called to re-commit ourselves to the community

Recalling the primacy given by Jesus to brotherly love (cf. *Jn* 13: 34-35; *Mt*: 25, 40), the Church insists that the fraternal life in community is our first missionary statement (cf. EN 21; *FLiC* 54; *IPM* 28). We have received a grace that brings us together for the missionary proclamation of the Word and calls us to live in the midst of those who are marginalised. For this “a Claretian’s first and principal belonging must be his deep communion with his brothers who are called and sent, as he is, to be witnesses and heralds of the Good News”. (*MCT* 133). ‘First’, ‘principal’ and ‘deep’ are very clear terms. However the impact of individualism is very evident and in our societies the understanding of happiness, personal fulfilment and the value of privacy are concepts often not in harmony with Gospel values. Today *we feel called to renew the covenant that brings us together as a community, to re-connect and deepen the ties that unite us as a family, into one body.*

While some have paid attention to this important dimension of our vocation, there are many missionaries who edify the community each day by their sincere, open and transparent spirit. They involve themselves in the common projects of mission and put them before their own. They pardon, welcome and share with others and give proof of genuine love (cf. *CC* 10-19). The Congregation as such and many of our communities are a sign of the Gospel encounter of people of different generations, ethnic groups and cultures. Our houses are usually known for their hospitality and family atmosphere. Attention to the elderly and sick is a cause of admiration for many. Many communities have entered into intense discernment and shared search for the will of God but some have not. The attempts to make local superiors truly animators of fraternal life face many problems. Our resistance to move from ‘I’ to ‘we’ has a very negative effect for our options in service to the local church and the shared mission. *We feel, then, a strong call to pass from the old man, who tends to close in on himself and on his belongings, to the new man who gives himself to the brothers and the things of the Kingdom (*cf*. FLiC* 21, 39*).*

## Called to invite others to embrace this vocation

Above all, we give thanks to the Lord for all those who have joined the Congregation over the past years and for the vigour of the spirit of Claret in the Church. Perhaps there have never been so many faithful who have identified themselves with the person of Claret and who, like him, desire to live and proclaim the Gospel using all means possible. During this sexennium there have been more first professions and ordinations than in the previous two[[9]](#footnote-10). The Congregation flourishes in places where in the recent past it hardly existed and many missionaries and lay ministers are signs that animate us to live the personal and community commitment that the vocation ministry demands of us.

There are, however, plenty of reasons for concern: in some areas where the Congregation has been well established it is difficult to bring the Gospel to the youth and there are almost no candidates for the missionary life. In others, richer in vocations over the past years, their number has decreased. In many communities nobody takes specific responsibility for the vocation ministry. Those who have been given the responsibility at times do not diligently devote themselves to the task. In the Congregation as a whole the number of novices has decreased in the last two years. For a long time now there has been a decrease in the number of Missionary Brothers. In some Major Institutes they do not even exist. The reasons may be many: the lack of understanding of our history, the excessive clericalization of the Congregation, the disregard of the religious life as an integral element of our vocation, the distorted images regarding lay consecration, the persistence of inadequate juridical structures and many cultural factors[[10]](#footnote-11). The apparent disinterest in the vocation of the Missionary Brother strongly challenges us and invites us reflect deeply. We know that one’s vocation is a mystery but *we feel a strong call by the Spirit to question our way of life, the capacity for inviting and welcoming to our communities and our preparation and availability to create an atmosphere where vocations are nourished*. We are not as close to the youth or as disposed to accompany them as would like to believe. E*ach and every one of us must be willing, to involve ourselves more decisively in this ministry: the Kingdom needs servants and the Word needs ministers* (cf. *Mt* 9: 38*; CC* 58)*.*

## Called to work apostolically in a renewed way

To identify our mission just with apostolic works is dangerous and theologically incorrect. Called to place the mission in the heart and the heart in the mission, we have been born to live, give witness to and proclaim the Gospel and not just to undertake apostolic works, even though these have an inestimable value. Today then, *we feel called, like Claret, to “pray, work and suffer”, so that the quality of our personal and community life reinforces the proclamation of the Kingdom that we wish to express through our apostolic actions.*

The Congregation is very much alive apostolically, it has redefined the guide-lines of its missionary action and its apostolic profile has been transformed. The revision of options and priorities, styles and positions, and its geographic and cultural extension reveals great vitality. During these six years we have, with varying results, worked on the priorities marked out by the XXIII General Chapter: shared mission, dialogue, transmission of faith, solidarity with the poor, the marginalized and those whose right to life has been threatened. Many of our missionaries have intensified their commitment and opened new fronts in favour of the poor and excluded, immigrants and displaced, children and youth, the formation of evangelisers. They have been very involved in the ministry of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, education, evangelisation of the culture, biblical ministry, missionary animation and solidarity with our missions, mass-media, evangelical use of new technology etc. Yet there still remains much more to be done.

Some serious concerns were raised during the process of the Chapter. Are we giving too much priority to pastoral service within established institutions at the expense of other means that could better express missionary itinerancy and that could perhaps help us better respond to the needs of today in a more creative manner? Why do we still have so few specialised pastoral teams and why is it so difficult for some to work as part of a team? Have there been too many pastoral initiatives proposed without sufficient discernment and community reflection? Apostolic diversity is enriching, apostolic dispersion is a danger, above all if it is due to placing personal agendas over community projects, if it is due to seeking comfort or to a lack of creative or missionary audacity. Ready to enkindle the insight, availability and catholicity which the Constitutions invite us to develop (cf. *CC* 48), *we feel the call to discern what styles of ministry, apostolic works, positions and commitments we have to give precedence to and which projects we can perform together. The same call exhorts us to collaborate with others and to create networks within the Church* (cf. *CC* 6, 46)*, emphasising the shared mission as our normal means of ministry* (cf. *TMHL* 37)*.*

## Called to continue revising our structures

Our structures seek that the Congregation is always responsive to the service of the Church and humanity (cf. *CC* 136). The last General Chapter, continuing previous calls of the Congregation (cf. IPM 51-56), proposed to move towards a more balanced and efficient configuration of our Major Institutes (*TMHL* 26). Since then several Provinces and Delegations have been created in order to be more responsive to the missionary challenges: Indonesia-Timor Leste (2005), Central Africa (2005), Santiago (2007), North East India (2007), West Nigeria (2007), Brazil (2008). Other processes for reorganisation continue in different regions.

Despite the natural resistance to change, these processes have been characterised by missionary concern, realism, participation and a generous availability of the people and Major Institutes involved. Also during these years many brothers – among them a good number of young missionaries – have accepted extra-provincial appointments and the collaboration between Major Institutes has increased in several areas. But it is also true that, despite the importance of the inter-provincial Conferences, these have not had the dynamic and coordinating influence that was hoped for. Neither do we manage to inculturate ourselves as we would like in many places and contexts. *We feel, then, a strong call to a more universal vision, one that reaches beyond our own Major Institutes. Taking into account the evaluation of the processes undertaken thus far, we feel called to continue discerning what type of organisation best responds to the challenges of the mission.*

## Called to show our communion through a new economic model

The world is experiencing a profound economic crisis which, as always, affects those who are most poor. Despite this the Congregation has managed to confront some of the danger signs detected a few years ago. In general, the patrimony of the Congregation as a whole has improved and the General Administration, through good organisation and management can face the future with a certain calm. The sharing of goods between Major Institutes has increased although some could be more generous. The Congregation has resources at its disposal but for these to be better utilised it is urgent to coordinate their use for the benefit of all. A good number of Claretians and communities share a large part of their life and resources with the poor but there continues to be among us a few examples of a lack of economic transparency, practices inconsistent with evangelical poverty and unsupportive behaviour. Hard work, austerity and transparency, so deeply rooted in our tradition, continue to be very important. We all influence the economy of the Congregation through our fidelity to professed poverty and the sharing of goods within our own community.

The Congregation needs to find people prepared and ready to serve as economes (cf. *Dir* 550; *TMHL* 62). Despite several formation initiatives in this area, their impact has been minimal. Some Major Institutes and communities count on the help of lay specialists in this area and this is worth continuing.

Fortunately, our communities and apostolic endeavours have grown considerably in some regions, above all in Africa and Asia. To keep these missionary presences, we need to intensify congregational collaboration, sharing of goods, coordination for the use of resources and to move forward the self-sufficiency projects encouraged by past Chapters (cf. *IPM* 31,*TMHL* 76: *Dir.* 521). Many Major Institutes continue to need the economic help of the rest of the Congregation. On the other hand, some Provinces, which until now have been characterised by their ability to raise funds and generously share them, are now not able to do so as before. All of this affects the possible help for missions in emerging areas. *We feel, therefore, called to seek evangelical and efficient means to obtain resources, to coordinate and share them, taking always into account criteria of justice, ethics and solidarity in accord with the Gospel and the tradition of the Congregation.*

**II**

**THE FIRE WITHIN US**

28 We want to welcome and listen to these calls from God which we recognise in the situation of the world, the Church and the Congregation. For this reason the Chapter has been asking how do we live our missionary vocation today to better serve the Kingdom of God. In asking ourselves about our identity we are not looking for a new definition. The Spirit – above all through the post-conciliar General Chapters and the magisterium of our Superior Generals - has endowed us with a solid and profound body of doctrine. But today there are many new questions and challenges for which we need new answers (cf. *GS* 5; *VC* 98). The experiences of the Spirit are not received only to be preserved, but to be deepened and developed, with an openness towards an ever new and creative action (cf. *SafC*, 20)[[11]](#footnote-12). We *feel, then, the call to rediscover the significance of our missionary vocation in a new global, ecclesial and congregational framework.*

1. We are, first of all, a gift of God. We want to respond to this gift personally and as a community. The General Chapter of 1979 has given us an accurate perspective: “We know that recovering our own Claretian identity, creating a true communion of life and apostolic action and achieving genuine availability for mission are not things that can be brought about by decree or by mere information or study, although these are certainly indispensable. What we must do is to resituate ourselves in the very centre of our vocation experience” (*MCT* 128). *If we listen anew to the call of God and allow him to guide our interior processes, we will live our vocation with renewed meaning and joy.*
2. In the history of salvation many who have been called have transmitted and expressed their vocation in stories and symbols. Claret summarised his call and that of his companions in his “definition of the missionary”[[12]](#footnote-13) *A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily and strives by all means possible to set everyone on fire with God’s love. Nothing daunts him; he delights in privations; welcomes work, embraces sacrifices, smiles at slander, rejoices in all the torments and sorrows he suffers, and glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. His 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”.[[13]](#footnote-14)* Today this “definition of a missionary” is the final part of the *Fundamental Constitution* (cf. *CC* 9) as an expression of our identity in the Church.[[14]](#footnote-15)
3. This ‘definition’, a description of the missionary identity, has been from the very beginning of our Congregation one of the best summaries of our spirituality. It was sent by Claret to Fr. Xifré with the desire that all the missionaries carry it around with them. The first generations of Claretians were very much aware of the definition. Its contents have inspired Superior Generals and illuminated many important texts of the Congregation, especially those dealing with formation. In 1888 it held a central position in one of the first texts on the formation of novices[[15]](#footnote-16). A century later, it forms the title-page of the General Plan of Formation.
4. To live the call to evangelize more fervently, we need to remember who we are and to whom we belong. Returning to the “definition of the missionary” helps us to eliminate the ashes of routine and weariness, rekindles the burning embers of our vocation, and renews the enthusiasm we need to be “on fire”, “to spread the flames” and “to set everyone on fire with God’s love.” The “definition of the missionary” leads us to the core of a fulfilled human and Christian life: *love*[[16]](#footnote-17)*.*
5. Thanks to the Spirit we recognize ourselves as sons who are sent (cf. *J*n 20:21-23; *Rom* 8:15). This gift opens us to gratitude and prepares us to share freely that which has been freely given to us. With this vocation we receive a new name (*identity*), we become part of a new charismatic family in the Church (*belonging*), we are gifted with a way of living as “men on fire with love” (*spirituality*), we are empowered to follow an ongoing process of conformity with Christ (*formation*) and we are sent to light up the whole world in this same love of God (*mission*). Many Claretians have attested that this vocation gives one’s life a sense of joy and meaning.

**A New Name:**

**Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

1. After first profession we add to our name the initials CMF (*Cordis Mariae Filius* cf *Dir* 25). This is not just an external detail. It expresses that with our profession we take on a new identity[[17]](#footnote-18) that includes all the others: being Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the concrete way of being men, Christians, religious, ordained ministers and apostles. (cf. *CC*, 4; 159; *Dir*, 24-26; *MCT* 132). Our charismatic name[[18]](#footnote-19) expresses the new mission to which we are called: to be the “arms” of the Woman who is still defeating the dragon (cf. *Rev.* 11:19 – 12:18) through the Word of God, of which we are listeners and servants[[19]](#footnote-20).
2. The name emphasizes our condition as sons and brothers. It shows that we are human beings loved by God the Father and by Mary, our mother, in the Spirit; called to participate in the life of God (*Gen* 1:26); graced by the Spirit with filial and brotherly characteristics: dignity, liberty, confidence, joy, tenderness, compassion and solidarity. This allows us to face with hope the challenges of our mission and our personal and community life and not be like those who only rely on their own strength, methods or accomplishments.
3. The experience as sons gives meaning to our special commitment to the Heart of Mary, our Mother (*CC*, 8) which we make at our Profession: “I offer myself in special service to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary in order to fulfil the aim for which this Congregation has been established in the Church” (cf *CC* 159; *Dir* 32-34). To be sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary means to be seekers of the glory of God who desires that all his sons and daughters live with dignity and fulfilment (cf *CC* 2; *TMHL* 8) and in harmony with all of creation. *Our mission is more urgent at an historical moment when the name of God is hidden and considered banal, the rights of God’s needy children are violated and the survival of the planet is endangered.*

**A New Family:**

**Our Congregation**

1. A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary does not follow Jesus alone but as a member of the Congregation, a new charismatic family raised by the Spirit in the Church (cf. *CC* 4, 10). Because we are sons we are also brothers, brought together to share the same plan of evangelical life. “The grace which reaches and congregates us” is called to be the “principle that organizes and articulates all our hopes, aspirations and projects” (cf. *MCT* 126, 133) For this, although we live in a network of multiple belongings (family, social, ecclesial…) our belonging to Christ, expressed in the vocation we share in the Congregation, takes the first place over all.
2. Therefore, we do not join the Congregation through a contract which we are able to rescind at will. We are not part of an association in which we dedicate part of our time and energy. We are a new family in the Spirit which is not based on flesh and blood but on love and in listening to, welcoming, and proclaiming the Word of God (cf. *Mt* 12: 46-50; *Jn* 15:12). Our new relationship and our community life is symbolized and realized in the Eucharist and is nourished by prayer, family lifestyle, co-responsibility in government and collaboration in the common mission (cf CC 12-13).
3. The Congregation, as our tradition says, is the “Mother Congregation”. Towards her we bear feelings of gratitude, respect, loyalty, and dedication. It is moving to note that “mother” is the title most used by the Martyrs of Barbastro when speaking of the Congregation. In them, like in an icon, we find gathered all the basic elements which make up our identity: love for Jesus Christ, for the Heart of Mary and the Church, missionary zeal, devotion to the Word and to the Eucharist, a sense of community, a preference for the poor, etc.
4. The Congregation is made up of priests, deacons, brothers, and students sharing the same vocation (cf. *CC* 7). This diversity of gifts and functions enriches our common life and mission (cf. *SW* 8; *IPM* 30) and commits us to promote and nurture all these vocational paths.
5. Today the Congregation has many faces. We have been enriched with brothers from different countries, ethnicities, languages and cultures. The challenge to live in unity amidst diversity can be addressed with hope when we respond faithfully to the gift of love for God and one another, which is the basis of our communion (cf. *CC* 10). When we enkindle the charismatic fire of our origins we can express and build up the global community of the Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Spirit, who distributes his gifts and unites diversity, will strengthen our ties and bring forth a new body. *In this era of globalization and exclusion, of longings for peace and the reality of violence, the Claretian community, in its smallness and fragility, wishes to continue being a living sign of the Kingdom.*

**A New Lifestyle:**

**To Be on Fire with Love**

1. The missionary, in his most explicit vocation, is a man “on fire with love” and therefore “spreads its flames wherever he goes.” The anointing of the Spirit enables us to love with prophetic zeal. The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us this truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both a heart and tongue of fire, as expressions of love (cf. *Aut*. 440). In fact, "the virtue that an apostolic missionary needs most of all is love. He must love God, Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and his neighbours. If he lacks this love, all his talents, however fine in themselves, are for nothing. But if, together with his natural endowments, he has much love, he has everything" (*Aut* 438).
2. In the “definition of a missionary" we find the truth about the human person in relationship with God: *salvation is found in the God who sets us on fire*. When we accept this truth we renounce models of individualism and self-sufficiency in life and open ourselves to new forms of relationship with God and with others. For Missionary Sons, the starting point of a consistent spirituality is knowing ourselves, nurturing the core of our personality and developing our own talents. It deals, definitively, with “being reborn” (cf. Jn 3:3).

**A New Way:**

**Disciples of Jesus Today**

1. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we too can overcome the lack of enthusiasm and zeal when we allow ourselves to be accompanied by the Master along the way of the missionary life. He hears our frustrations and questions and gives us what we need to rekindle the embers of a weakened vocation: the Word that "makes the heart burn" and the Eucharist that "opens our eyes" (cf. *Lk* 24, 31-45). That was the experience of our Founder. In the forge of meditation, spiritual exercises, and especially of Scripture and the Eucharist, challenged by the social, political and ecclesial context, his heart burned with the fire of his love for God and Mary (cf. *Aut* 227, 342). Realizing that love is a gift, as well as a task, Claret calls insistently upon God the Father (*Aut* 444-445), Jesus (*Aut* 446), the Spirit[[20]](#footnote-21) and Mary: "Oh Heart of Mary, furnace and instrument of love, kindle in me the love of God and neighbour" (*Aut* 447).
2. The fire of our vocation is kept alive through a continual process of deepening the call and formation in discipleship until we are conformed with Christ (cf. *VC* 65; *GPF* 12). The gift received allows us to overcome temptations fed by forms of thinking that favour superficiality, overvalues enjoyment and rejects self-denial and sacrifice. If we open ourselves to the Spirit in a continual process of formation, we can *name our infidelity, enkindle the fire of our vocational gift, be attentive to the clamour of our people and find with them the creative responses to the changing needs of our world.*
3. Jesus is the passion that spurs us on (cf. *CC* 4) and the path we follow. With him we look for the *glory of God and the salvation of humankind, praying, working and suffering.*  *Prayer* sets our love of God and our brothers alight[[21]](#footnote-22). Missionary *work* expresses that love and communicates it. The acceptance of *suffering* refines us in the same fire as Jesus; it makes us one with the crucified of this world and makes us credible. To set ourselves alight in prayer like Claret, spurs us on to work and to suffer for the Gospel. Centring ourselves on these values throughout our life and formative journey purifies our motivation, illuminates our perplexity and directs all that we are and do for the greater glory of God and the salvation of all.

**A New Sending:**

**To Set the whole world on Fire**

1. Whoever loves Jesus will feel loved by the Father[[22]](#footnote-23), will radiate and testify to his love and will bear much fruit[[23]](#footnote-24). Our Founder, captivated by apostolic zeal “yearns and strives…to make God better known, loved, and served” (*Works* III, p. 493, cf. *Auto*. 233). This zeal of Claret, fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit (Rom 5:5; CC 39-40) knows no bounds: his spirit is “for the whole world” (*SL*, p. 179). To be on fire with love changes us into men on fire for others to the point of spreading the flame wherever we go[[24]](#footnote-25). Thus we share in the mission that comes from God. Like Claret, we can also say: “Caritas Christi urget nos” (*2 Cor* 5:14). Like our Mother we are always able to proclaim the Magnificat, because that which the Lord has said will be fulfilled (cf. *Lk* 1: 45-55). The mission entrusted to us is born from an experience of love, it is nourished by caring for it assiduously, it is radiated in the world under the sign of compassion and closeness, above all, towards the impoverished and the excluded.
2. The love of God burns in us the *desire* to share it (cf. *Works III*, p 493). It expresses an efficacious desire and that is why we *try* by all possible means “to set the whole world on fire with God’s love” and to bring his Word to the ends of the earth. That desire, necessary in any process of growth and of missionary proclamation, can easily go cold. Thus we need to enkindle it time and again with the Word of fire that comes from God[[25]](#footnote-26) and fashion it on the hard anvil of the apostolic life with its struggles and contradictions. It is not enough that the iron of our life is heated: it needs the hammering that give it “the shape the smith had planned” (*Aut*. 342). Only then, forged according to the shape of Christ, can we be bold in our mission, delight in privations, welcome work, embrace sacrifices, smile at slander, rejoice in torments and glory in the cross (cf *CC* 39-45). We need a firm determination achieved through prayer and expressed through action (*Aut* 443) to confront mediocrity, laziness and discontent.
3. When the earth is fully alight, we, humble collaborators of the One who came to bring fire to the earth (cf. *Lk* 12:49), will discover what we already knew: that the love that seduced us has a divine name and never remains anonymous (cf *Mt* 25:35-44). All that is human and humanizes has much to do with God. When our body becomes weak and our capacity for action is limited, we, servants in the way of the Word that never ends, do not cease to be missionaries. We can then “glory in the cross of Jesus Christ” as credible witnesses of the Fire that has been lit in us.
4. The missionary love that has been granted to us is imaginative and creative. Formed in the forge of the Heart of Mary we fix our gaze on those who are excluded from the love of others and who suffer terrible consequences of injustice[[26]](#footnote-27). Love sees to it that we get closer to them and stay with them, that we let ourselves be touched and accompanied by them. Ministering in the spirit of the Good Samaritan *re-ignites our fire, inspires our transforming projects and activities and makes us, together with others, credible proclaimers of the presence of the Kingdom of God.*

# III

# “THE LOVE OF CHRIST URGES US ON” (2 Cor 5: 14)

# Priorities

“…the fire of grace…over time, gets covered with ashes caused by the coldness of the atmosphere of the world which surrounds us, by our lukewarmness, by laziness in work, the fear of persecutions and the inconsistency of our resolutions; such ashes have the fire of charity covered up as if dead; what is needed then is to rake it, fan it, and add fuel to make it return to life and make it flame. For this we need to fan it and fuel it with prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, joy, vigilance of spirit, study and a major effort toward the virtues and we have to work singularly, watch over and obtain with greater diligence and fervour the salvation of the souls of people who have been entrusted to us”

(El Colegial Instruido. Librería Religiosa, Barcelona, 1861, pp. 7).

51 Contemplating the situation of the world, the Church, the Congregation and our own lives in light of the definition of the missionary, we feel the call to discover how Jesus walks by our side, to listen to his word, to sit at his table and, having been rekindled, to return to the community to be sent anew (cf. *Lk* 24: 13-35).

52 The Covenant which unites us with God the Father, expressed in the profession which we share, makes us co-responsible for the fire of love, which comes from heaven and inflames us. The Spirit moves us to revive it, expand it and to pass it on. Thus, love urges us to:

 a) to rekindle the fire within us;

 b) to set others ablaze;

 c) to pass on the fire to future generations.

# TO REKINDLE THE FIRE WITHIN US

“Rekindle the grace that is in you…God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of fortitude, charity, and temperance” (2 Tim 1:6-7)

53 We feel a special call of the Spirit to see the world with the eyes of God, to reinforce the experience of God in our lives (cf. nn. 8-11), to live in continuous formation (nn. 12-15) and to recommit ourselves to the community (nn. 16-17).

All of this urges us:

### 54 To give special attention to our experience of God and to the mystical dimension of our missionary vocation

For this:

1) We commit ourselves to give priority in our lives to the listening of the Word, the celebration of the Eucharist, daily prayer and cordimarian devotion (cf. *CC* 33-38) and to set aside time for the monthly day of recollection and the annual retreat (cf. CC 52). We will provide the necessary community environment to support this priority.

2) We will provide, taking into consideration our various cultural contexts, the means to get the best benefit possible from the rich reflection that has been done about the charism of the Congregation. We will encourage the distribution and knowledge of our history and biographies of missionaries who are remembered for their exemplary lives.

3) We will encourage reflection on our charismatic heritage through intercultural and interreligious dialogue, searching for its proper expression in our daily life and allowing ourselves to be evangelized by the lives of the people we serve.

4) We will value spiritual discernment and encourage its practice in our personal and community decision making processes. (cf. *SAO* 20).

5) We will encourage spiritual accompaniment as a means for personal growth. (cf. TMHL 70.3)

### 55 To encourage those processes and means that help us to live each stage of our life as a moment of spiritual transformation.

For this:

1) We will encourage fidelity to the personal project, so that each missionary outlines his ongoing formation programme and revises it periodically. We will do this especially through the spiritual exercises and keeping in mind the need for this project to be in harmony with the community and province project.

2) We will encourage that each missionary gives a priority to reading and study (cf. *CC* 56) and that the community facilitates conditions and resources for this.

3) “We should frequently celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, which both symbolises and perfects our spirit of constant conversion to God.” (*CC*38)

4) We will commit ourselves to live the ‘Forge Project in our daily lives’, in such a way that, with the accompaniment of the General Government, we as individuals, communities and Major Institutes relive the experience of Fire and grow in missionary zeal.

5) We will continue to arrange initiatives such as the “Forge Project” and “Encounter with Claret” to respond to the specific needs of renewal for those in middle age and those who wish to deepen their knowledge of the Founder.

6) We will accompany each person in his particular situation giving special attention to his age, health and the difficult challenges or assignments he may face.

7) We will give special care to the process of incorporating the young missionaries into the life of the Province in the first years of ministry.

8) We will organise in the Provinces and Delegations, in dialogue with the General Government, plans for specialisation and sabbaticals keeping in mind the urgencies and priorities of the Congregation.

### 56 To renew the covenant which unites us in community, personally opting for it and fostering community relationship

For this:

1) We will give thanks for the gift of community, as the place where we become brothers (*FLC* 11) and we will encourage those virtues and attitudes that help us to grow in communion: humility, sincerity, fraternal correction, reconciliation, mutual respect, concern and interest in each other.

2) We will reinforce a family atmosphere in our communities and Major Institutes paying special attention to creating a hospitable environment that favours free and honest dialogue, prayer and shared recreation.

3) We will promote opportunities in our communities that foster formation for mission, its planning and evaluation.

4) We will encourage the animation of the local community, especially through the role of the superior, providing opportunities for his formation and assuring that we all accept and understand his service of leadership to the community. (cf. *SAO* 12, 13)

5) We will avoid those aspects of individualism that may be divisive or destructive of community life.

6) As a Congregation we will reflect upon the identity of the missionary priest, deacon, and brother in the new human and ecclesial context and translate this reflection into proposals for our life and formation.

7) We will encourage positive relationships among the various cultures present in our Congregation, avoiding the predominance of one over the other and facilitating mutual understanding and learning skills for living together and for missionary collaboration. (cf. *TMHL* 28)

8) We will continue to integrate the richness that has been experienced with the incorporation of Claretians from different cultural contexts and work toward the inculturation of the Claretian charism. (cf. *TMHL* 27)

# TO SET OTHERS ABLAZE

“I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled!” (Lk 12: 49)

57 We feel a special call of the Spirit to deepen our awareness of being sent, to work apostolically in a renewed way and “to work with others” in creating networks, instilling creativity in our missionary activity and inviting others to embrace our vocation (cf. nn 18-22). All of this urges us:

### 58 To understand the mission from the perspective of love in its threefold outpouring: “missio Dei”, missio inter gentes” and “shared mission”.

1) We will view our mission with a spirituality of joyful and grateful collaboration with the Spirit who gives it life (*missio Dei*).

2) We will take as a criterion and key to all our ministries “the dialogue of life[[27]](#footnote-28)” which always takes others into account and does not exclude anyone - women or men, one Christian denomination or another, one religion or another, one culture or another (*Missio inter gentes).*

3) We reaffirm, in the same way, the priority of the Congregation for prophetic solidarity with the impoverished, marginalised and those whose right to life is threatened, in such a way that this has repercussions in our personal and community lifestyle, apostolic mission and in our institutions. (cf. *TMHL* 40)

4) We will give greater priority to “shared mission” as stated by the XXIII General Chapter (cf. *TMHL* 37).

### 59 To ensure that the Word of God nurtures our mission in all its forms

1) We will transform our communities, formation centres and apostolates into “schools of the Word” following the guidelines of the Synod on the Word of God.

2) We will ensure that biblical animation and ministry brings life to our institutions, apostolic activities and evangelization.

3) We will give special attention to the accompaniment of people’s faith journey relying on the Word of God through spiritual exercises and other initiatives. We will see to it that their animation is done from the perspective of the community, as a team where possible, and make use of our spirituality centres.

### 60 To strengthen significantly our dedication to vocation ministry and the evangelization of future generations

1) We will thoroughly revise and update our pastoral projects, bolstering them with particular attention to the care of children, teenagers, young adults and their families. We will make the most of our presence in education and give priority to the marginalised, migrants, young adults, volunteers, etc. according to the local situation.

2) We will encourage in our missionaries, irrespective of their work or age, an openness to listening to and meeting with youth, thereby making our communities and apostolates more welcoming.

3) We commit ourselves to help our Major Institutes, communities and ministerial positions to provide an atmosphere where vocations can be nourished (cf. *DVC* 55), offering them regular aids so that pastoral ministry, carried out in shared mission, be a unifying characteristic of our mission and of the Christian communities that we serve.

4) We will pay special attention to ensure that missionary Brothers be included in our vocation ministry.

5) We will create initiatives for formation in pastoral ministry that directs and especially highlights the vocational process of invitation, accompaniment and discernment. We will do this in shared mission when possible.

6) We will take into account the importance of youth and vocation ministry during the time of formation, when making Province plans for specialised studies and in the creation of community projects.

7) We will remind ourselves that “the way we speak of our missionary life and live it is the best invitation to others to accept the Lord’s call” (*CC* 58).

### 61 To be creative and to improve our missionary activity

1) We will respond creatively with the most opportune, timely and efficacious means to the calls we have perceived (cf. No. 1-27), keeping in mind the context and urgencies of our mission and the history and tradition of our Congregation.

2) We will favour a lifestyle that lends credibility to our mission, one that is coherent and that foments virtues of humility, a simple and austere lifestyle, generosity, meekness, and hospitality. (cf. *CC* 39-45; *Aut*. 340-453).

3) We will encourage the creation of missionary teams which are specialised, creative and itinerant as one of our particular contributions to the mission of the Church.

4) We will assume as a Congregation a more efficacious, methodical and innovative use of information technology and the mass media for evangelization.

5) We will continue to arrange congregational encounters and workshops that offer a serious reflection on responding to the challenges of evangelization.

6) We will maintain the quality service the Congregation is providing to religious life in many and different contexts.

7) We will strengthen the quality service in the area of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

8) We will take measures to bolster the work of the General Mission Procure by providing more personnel and improving its structure.

# TO PASS ON THE FIRE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams” (Jl 3:1; Acts 2: 17)

62 We also feel the call of the Spirit to keep the Congregation flexible and disposed to the service of the Church and humanity and to pass on to future generations the vocational gift which we have received. For this we want to improve initial formation and to find structures of organization and economy which better serve the new demands of the mission and of formation. All of this urges us:

### 63 To improve the programme of initial formation giving special attention to the preparation and dedication of the formators

1) We will give special importance to the interiorisation of the fundamental values of consecrated life during initial formation. We especially stress the importance of personal accompaniment of the formandi, nourishing in them a disposition towards transparent dialogue regarding the various dimensions of their lives.

2) We are aware that “missionary formation is a matter of such grave concern that responsibility for it rests on the whole Congregation, the province and the formation community” (*CC* 76) and we will reinforce its objectives with the integrity of our lives.

3) We will improve the preparation of formators making use of the “School of the Heart of Mary” and developing other initiatives especially taking advantage of our centres of higher learning and what is available on the internet.

4) We will offer the formators the means and resources that they need, expecting that they give of themselves without reserve and perform their duties with utmost care (cf. *CC* 77).

5) We will continue to encourage the creation and consolidation of intercultural formation centres in each continent and the elaboration of the methods of operation and the multi-cultural composition of their formation teams.

6) We will emphatically encourage the learning of languages in our formation centres.

### 64 To continue the processes used in the revision of positions and restructuring of Major Institutes, encourging in all of us a sense of belonging to the Congregation.

1) We will move forward, accompanied and animated by the General Government, along the path already begun for the restructuring of Major Institutes.

2) We will plan each process of restructuring from the standpoint of a missionary project which attempts to give a response to the evangelical challenges of the area and take especially into account its cultural characteristics.

3) We will evaluate the experiences of restructuring that have already taken place in order to help those happening now and in the future.

4) We will support the revision of positions that allow us to distribute our efforts more effectively, to improve our presence in diverse places and to respond with creativity to new missionary challenges.

5) We will review the working of the inter-provincial Conferences so as to strengthen their positive elements and try to correct possible deficiencies.

6) We will cultivate a sense of missionary availability (cf. *CC* 11, 48) and congregational belonging so as to acquire a more universal view which goes beyond our own Major Institute (cf. No 24).

### 65 To live more intensively our personal and community life of poverty, the sharing of goods and the coordinated management of the Congregation’s resources

1) We will encourage vocational fidelity, both personal and communal, to apostolic poverty, such that our use of goods is characterised by austerity, solidarity, hard work and transparency.

2) We will increase the sharing of goods at all levels of the Congregation: from the person to the community, from the community to the Province or Delegation and from the Major Institute to the rest of the Congregation, keeping in mind that by doing so this augments our solidarity with the poor and the cause of justice.

3) We will facilitate effective management controls for the goods of the Congregation in each of our Major Institutes using, among other means, professional visits.

4) We will see that economes and administrators receive formation in accounting and in the criteria of the Congregation with regard to our vow of poverty and the administration of its goods. To carry this out we will use all the means available (the development of a manual and web page for economes, courses, etc.).

5) We will improve the management and coordination of the economy of the communities and Major Institutes using, when necessary, outside professionals.

6) We will study what means might be adopted to better coordinate the resources of the Congregation to make better use of dormant patrimony that may exist in some Provinces and Delegations. We will take advantage of the possibilities offered by the *Fundus* according to the needs of the mission and formation throughout the Congregation.

7) We will continue to study what type of health care might be available to those members of the Congregation who need it

8) We will see that needy Major Institutes prepare and put into action plans for economic development that will enable them to reach self-sufficiency (cf. *TMHL* 76.4). This process requires the accompaniment of the General Government as well as the active involvement of the Major Institute.

9) We will support programmes and projects of economic solidarity (ethical banking, responsible purchasing, fair trade, etc.) and, through our own example and that of our institutions, we will invite Christian communities to join them.

**CONTENTS**

 **INTRODUCTION 01**

**I The Call of God 02**

**In our World 02**

**In the Church 05**

**In the Congregation 06**

1. Called to strengthen the experience of God in our life 06
2. Called to live in continuous formation 07
3. Called to re-commit ourselves to the community 08
4. Called to invite others to embrace this vocation 09
5. Called to work apostolically in a renewed way 09
6. Called to continue revising our structures 10
7. Called to show our communion through a new economic model 11

**II The fire within us 12**

**A new name: Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary 13**

**A new family: Our Congregation 14**

**A new lifestyle: To be on fire with love 15**

**A new way: Disciples of Jesus today 15**

**A new sending: To set the whole world on fire 16**

**III ‘The love of Christ urges us on’** (2 Cor 5: 14) **Priorities 18**

**To rekindle the fire within us 18**

1. To give special attention to our experience of God and to the mystical dimension of our missionary vocation 18
2. To encourage those processes and means that help us to live each stage of our life as a moment of spiritual transformation 19
3. To renew the covenant which unites us in community, personally opting for it and fostering community relationships 20

**To set others ablaze 20**

1. To understand the mission from the perspective of love in its threefold outpouring: “missio Dei”, “missio inter gentes”, “shared mission” 20
2. To ensure that the Word of God nurtures our mission in all its forms 21
3. To strengthen significantly our dedication to vocation ministry and the evangelisation of future generations 21
4. To be creative and to improve our missionary activity 22

**To pass on the fire to future generations 22**

1. To improve the programme of initial formation giving special attention to the preparation and dedication of the formators 23
2. To continue the processes used in the revision of positions and restructuring of Organisms, encouraging in all of us a sense of belonging to the Congregation. 23
3. To live more intensely our personal and community life of poverty, the sharing of goods and the coordinated management of the Congregations resources 24

**Key to Abbreviations**

Aut Autobiography of St. Anthony Mary Claret

CC CMF Constitutions

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

CVD Claretian Vocation Directory

DCE Encyclical ‘Deus Caritas Est (2005)

Dir CMF Directory

EC Epistolario Claretiano

EE Escritos Espirituales

EN Exhortation ‘Evangelii Nunciandi’ (1975)

FLC Instruction ‘Fraternal Life in Community’ (1994)

GPF CMF General Plan of Formation

GS Constitution ‘Gaudium et Spes’

IPM In Prophetic Mission (1997)

MCT Mission of the Claretian Today (1979)

NMI Apostolic Letter ‘Novo Millennio Ineunte’ (2001)

SAfC Instruction ‘Starting Afresh from Christ’ (2002)

SAO Instruction ‘The Service of Authority and Obedience’ (2008)

SW Servants of the Word (1991)

SRS Encyclical ‘Sollicitudo Rei Socialis’ (1987)

TMHL That They May Have Life (2003)

VC Exhortation ‘Vita Consecrata’ (1996)

1. Pope Benedict XVI states that it is an ethical imperative for the universal Church to strive to eliminate world hunger which is usually dependent on a shortage of social resources rather than material ones. It is necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights for all human beings without distinction or discrimination. (cf. Caritas in Veritate, #27) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. According to 2008 estimates of The World Bank, 1.4 billion people in developing countries were living in extreme poverty in 2005. (cf. Anup Shah, *‘Poverty around the World’*, www.globalissues.org: Nov. 22 2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Cf. Documentation of the General Assembly of the UN, August 22, 2007 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Cf. Pope John Paul II, General Audience Address, January 17, 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Benedict XVI Message for the 43rd World Communications Day 2009 ‘New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship’ “These changes are particularly evident among those young people who have grown up with the new technologies and are at home in a digital world.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), *Spe Salvi* (2007), *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The celebration of the Synod of Bishops on *the Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church* (2005) and *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2008) have challenged us very deeply. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. “We cannot ignore that, at times, consecrated life has not seemed to have been held in its proper consideration. There have even been times when there was a lack of confidence in it”. (SAfC, 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Between 1991 and 1996 there were 480 first professions and 320 priestly ordinations. From 1997 to 2002: 664 and 300 respectively. From 2003 to 2008, 669 and 327. The number of novices, nevertheless, is not more: we have gone from 623 to 803 and to 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Cf. A. Bocos ‘The Missionary Brothers: a challenge to the life and mission of the Congregation, Rome 1997, no. 10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. It is in this sense that we understand the meaning of the adjective “new” which we use in the following sections: name, family, lifestyle, sending, way. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. According to the *Directory* we can say equally *definition, form, or memorial* (cf. n. 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. CC 9. Although there is no documentary proof, Fr. James Clotet testified that Claret used this for the first time in July 1849 during the spiritual exercises which he conducted for the newly born Congregation “to form us in the apostolic spirit which animated him”. Cf. *Vida edificante del Padre Claret, misionero y fundador*, ed. J. Bermejo, Madrid, PCL, 2000, p. 253).There exists two versions written by Claret himself. The first (cf. *EC II*, 349 – 352) is dated August 20, 1861, six days before receiving the mystical grace of conserving the sacred species. The second, somewhat briefer, which he included in his Autobiography finished in May 1862, just after having recounted the foundation of the Congregation (cf *Aut* 494). This can be indirectly corroborated by the testimony of Fr. Clotet. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Benedict XVI alluded to the definition in 2007 in his message on the occasion of the bicentenary of Claret, calling it “a programme of life” and “a self portrait of the very soul of the Founder”. Paul VI commented on it in his meeting with the General Chapter in 1973: “See here, presented before you, a whole programme of holiness, founded on the courageous renunciation of oneself, the fruit of its abundant evangelical vitality. It clearly shows you, with expressions of obvious Pauline enthusiasm, the good to which your personal and community life must aspire: the following and imitation of Christ spurred on by an ever present charity” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Cf. Pablo Vallier, *Spiritual practices for use by novices of the Congregation of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary through the disposition of Fr. Joseph Xifre, Superior General of the same Congregation.*  Madrid, printed by D. Luis Aquado, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Cf. *Jn* 3: 16; *1 Cor* 12: 31ff; 1 *Jn* 4: 7-21. In his first encyclical Benedict XVI said: “We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (*DCE* 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. When Jesus calls Cephas he gives him a new name which is a sign of his mission (cf *Jn* 1:42). And the same applies with other biblical figures called to a mission: Abram-Abraham (*Gn* 17:5), Sarah-Sara (*Gn* 17:15), Jacob-Israel (*Gn* 35:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Our official name is *Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* or *Claretian Missionaries* (cf *CC* 1; *Dir* 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. St. Anthony M. Claret, “Lights and Graces 1870”: *Autobiography and Complementary Writings*, Buenos Aires 2008, p. 828. Cf. *CC* 46; *SW* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Works II, p. 277-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. “For some time now, God in his infinite goodness has been favoring me with many telling insights when I am at prayer and arousing in me many desires to do and suffer for his greater honor and glory and the good of souls.” (Aut 761) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will dwell in him.” (Jn 14:23). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Cf. Jn 15:16-17: Johannine model of the mission. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. “When one feels deeply loved, one cannot participate in the mystery of love, who gives himself, by holding back and watching from afar. You must allow the flames that burn the sacrifice to catch fire in you. And to become love..... Continue to spend yourselves for the world, always conscious that the one measure of love is boundless love!” (John Paul II, Message to the World Congress of Consecrated Life, n7, 26 November 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Cf. Jer 5:14; 20:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. “The flame of love that the Spirit kindles in hearts is an incentive to questioning oneself constantly on humanity’s needs and how to respond to them”. (Benedict XVI, Letter to the Plenary of CICLSAL on 27th September 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Cf. Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue. ‘*Dialogue and Proclamation’*, (1991) no. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)