

**XXVII GENERAL CHAPTER
RESOURCES FOR PHASE 2.3:**

**LISTENING TO THE REALITY
OF THE CONGREGATION**



**One Mission, One in Mission:
*Mystical and Prophetic Missionaries
on a Synodal Journey***

Claretian Missionaries - General Government

“One Mission, One in Mission: Mystical and Prophetic
Missionaries on a Synodal Journey”

*Methodological Guide for the preparation of the XXVII General
Chapter*

Rome, 2026

I

PERSONAL REFLECTION

LISTENING TO THE REALITY OF THE CONGREGATION WHAT REALITY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

What do we know about the reality of the Congregation?

The reality of the Congregation to which we must listen is a rich, varied and complex reality of people, communities, presences and projects throughout the world. These are situated in very diverse contexts – social, cultural, religious, ecclesial and economic.

We might ask ourselves:

- What do we know about this reality of the Congregation?
- How keen are we to find out more about it through the many resources available to us?

Often, focused as we are on our own little world, we find it difficult to broaden our perspective to encompass our organism as a whole, let alone the universality of the Congregation. That is why we run the risk of ‘listening’ to the reality of the Congregation based on a very vague, outdated or partial

understanding of it; sometimes even distorted by our own prejudices.

There are a number of resources at your disposal that can help you gain this knowledge and vision of the Congregation: the letters from Fr General, NUNC (t.ly/kAZwD), the Claret.org website, social media (@iclaret), and the videos of missionary projects from the various organisms (published to mark the 175th anniversary of the Foundation, t.ly/OiXYj)... We invite you to make use of some of these resources during these months leading up to the General Chapter.

An overview of the Congregation's current situation

To help you get a sense of the Congregation's current situation, in addition to what you may already know, this summary of what was shared by the major superiors at their meeting in Sri Lanka may be of assistance.

1. Demographic Overview

If we compare the figures as at 26 February 2026 with those at the end of 2022, we see a slight overall increase in numbers (from 2,977 members in 2022 to 2,993 in 2026), but a marked **regional disparity**: whilst Africa and Asia show vitality and expansion, Europe and the Americas are facing a decline in vocations and significant ageing.

2. Achievements during this six-year term

- **Spiritual and charismatic renewal**, inspired by the motto 'rooted and audacious'. The centrality of the Word of God and

our identity as 'missionary mystics' have been revitalised, strengthening our life of prayer through practices such as Eucharistic adoration, *Lectio Divina* and reading Claret's Autobiography.

- **Embracing synodality:** fostering a culture of listening and broader participation, including the laity, through the practice of 'conversations in the Spirit' and community discernment.
- **Missionary audacity on the peripheries:** Progress has been made in reaching out to social and geographical peripheries through new missions (South Sudan, Papua New Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville, Madagascar...) and projects for migrants and vulnerable people. Integral ecological awareness has grown in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the spirit of *Laudato Si'*.

3. Challenges

- **A decline in vocations and an ageing population**, which are creating a heavy pastoral burden and threatening the sustainability of the projects.
- **Individualism and clericalism**, which hinder teamwork, accountability and transparency in the management of assets.
- **Activism and spiritual strain**, which weaken the life of prayer and community rhythms, sometimes leading to 'burnout' and spiritual superficiality.
- **Slow progress in personal and community conversion and resistance to change**, to leaving 'comfort zones' or to adopting more participatory leadership methods.

4. Challenges and calls from the Spirit

- **Sustainability and formation:** We need to achieve financial self-sufficiency and professional resource management. We also need holistic formation that prepares missionaries for intercultural dialogue and social change.
- **Community Life and the Digital World:** The Spirit calls us to create ‘homes of fraternity’ that are signs of hope in the face of loneliness. Likewise, there is an urgent need to evangelise the ‘digital continent’ and social media with creativity.
- **Prophetic Mission:** The challenge is to consolidate genuine synodality, where shared mission is a deeply rooted charismatic choice and not merely a response to staff shortages

PREPARING TO ‘LISTEN’

We are called to ‘listen’ attentively to this reality in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to us. To do this, you need to feel that this ‘reality’ is your own, even if you are largely unaware of what is happening within it; your life, your vocation and your apostolic mission must be situated within this current of life that is the congregational community.

Faced with the reality of the Congregation, you might ask yourself:

- What feelings do the Congregation’s current situation, achievements, difficulties and challenges evoke in us? How do we see these reflected in our own community, Province, Delegation or mission platform?
- Let us recall an event, piece of news, experience or person from the Congregation that has made an impression on us in recent years.

II

COMMUNITY SPIRITUAL RETREAT

“WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD, WE PROCLAME TO YOU” (1 Jn 1:1–4)

Listening to the reality of the Congregation

In the previous stage, we opened ourselves to listening to the reality, and now we prepare to listen to the reality of the Congregation in order to respond to what the Spirit is asking of us at this moment in history.

Through our personal reflection, we have been able to consider what we know about the reality of the Congregation and how we feel we form part of it. Now it is a matter of ‘listening’ to that reality, and not merely having a good understanding of where the Congregation is established, what projects it carries out, or how our statistics are evolving... For the reality of the Congregation is not simply a set of structures, programmes, teams... but a charismatic reality brought about by the Spirit, a space where the Spirit continues to act and speak.

And the voice of the Spirit speaks to us through the various signs of faithfulness, vitality, generosity and the desire for renewal. But it also speaks through tensions and fragilities, weariness and resistance, because the Spirit does not abandon us in moments of weakness; rather, it is precisely in those moments

that the Spirit often opens up new paths for us or shows us where we need conversion.

We must listen to the living reality of the Congregation

- with **faith**, because we believe that the Lord continues to walk with us;
- with **hope**, because the Spirit continues to renew the Church and the Congregation within it;
- with **humility**, because we are aware of our weaknesses
- **together**, because we have been called to form a community of brothers.

Reflecting on the Congregational Vision

As a starting point and inspiration for this reflection on the reality of the Congregation, it is very fitting to refer to the 'Congregational Dream' bequeathed to us by the XXVI General Chapter (2021). It would be good to reread it at leisure (cf. QC 43).

*We dream of a pilgrim Congregation,
rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and in Claretian spirituality.
We dream like Claret of a Congregation that, following
the example of Mary,
treasures in its heart, fulfils and proclaims the Word of
God.*

*We dream of a Congregation of missionaries who share
our lives, diversity and resources
in communities shaped by the mission and ministries God
has entrusted to us. We encourage and accompany one
another, as brothers,*

*through mutual listening, without excluding anyone.
We dream of a Congregation, audacious and itinerant
Congregation that,
sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18; Acts 8:28, 39),
goes forth towards the peripheries, approaches the
youth, walks with them
and encourages them to respond to the call of God.
We dream of a Congregation that has as its starting point,
the biblical animation of all pastoral ministry (cf. VD, 73),
evangelises with all possible means in shared mission,
interreligious dialogue and the intelligent use
of the various forms of communication media.
We dream of a Congregation committed
to universal brotherhood (Fratelli tutti),
justice, peace and care for the common home (Laudato
si').
In a spirit of synodality, we collaborate with people of
different cultures,
ethnicities and religions for the transformation of the
world
in accordance with God's plan (cf. CC 46).
We dream of a Congregation prepared to respond to new
challenges
through an integral and continuing process of formation,
open to universal mission,
according to the spirit and charism of our Father Founder.*

This is not merely a theoretical programme, but a call from the Spirit, and it remains alive only when we are able to embody it in the everyday life of our communities and organisms. That is why we invite you to ask yourself:

- How has this Dream resonated within us over the years?
- Which aspects have challenged us the most?
- Which part of this Dream sets our hearts alight the most?
- Where do we experience the greatest gap between the Dream and the reality we live?
- Which aspects of the Dream should inspire us most as we look to the future?

Listening to the reality of the Congregation in the light of 1 John 1:1–4

1. Biblical key: 1 John 1:1–4

With this Dream as our backdrop, let us listen to the reality of our Congregation in the light of **1 John 1:1–4**. This text offers a model for what we wish to do: to express what we have experienced, what we have seen and felt together as a Congregation, and to discern what the Spirit is saying to us through it. Let these four verses open our hearts and teach us to look and listen.

‘What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the Word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and testify

to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. So, we tell you what we have seen and heard so that you may share in our fellowship; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete.

This is the opening of the First Letter of John, similar to the prologue of the Gospel. The author does not begin with a doctrine but with an **experience** he wishes to share in order to foster **fellowship** and **joy** among his readers. It is a letter born of life, and it is precisely for this reason that it is capable of bringing life to those who receive it.

2. Narrative key ‘What we have heard, seen and touched...’: *recalling lived history*

The author’s first gesture is surprisingly simple: **he recounts what he has experienced**. He neither analyses nor judges it. He simply narrates the experience of having touched, seen and heard the Word of Life. And by recounting it, he makes it present and accessible once more, both for himself and for others.

The **narrative key** to discerning the reality of the Congregation stems from this very gesture. Before evaluating, deciding or even praying about the future, we must recall and **recount what we have experienced**: the moments of grace, the failures, the people who have left their mark on us, the changes we may have faced with fear but which have turned out to be openings

of the Spirit, the crises that have purified us, the joys that have sustained us.

The four verbs used by the author (*heard, seen, contemplated, felt*) refer to four distinct forms of contact with the same reality, each of which brings different nuances. The same can be said of the Congregation: it is experienced and described differently by a brother who has spent fifty years on mission and a young brother who has just taken his vows; by someone working in a parish in a working-class neighbourhood and someone working in an educational institution.

The discernment that arises from listening to these narratives does not seek a uniform interpretation of reality, but rather the ***richness of shared memory***. The discernment we wish to undertake in this retreat is not fuelled solely by statistics and institutional analysis — though these are also necessary — but by ***life*** stories: concrete accounts of mission, fraternity, struggle and conversion. It is these stories, which the Spirit has been weaving into the fabric of the Congregation, that reveal to us the direction in which he is leading us.

It is therefore a matter of each of us reflecting on and sharing with our brothers in the community something of ‘what we have seen, heard, contemplated and experienced’ of the life of the Congregation over the last six years—a story from our own lives in which we have experienced the Congregation’s dream becoming a reality, even if in a small or fragile way, or where we encountered resistance. We are not looking for abstract ideas but **for facts, encounters, names, processes and real-life**

situations. Perhaps an experience of authentic fraternity, a shared missionary project; a brother's testimony; closeness to the poor; a deeply lived experience of interculturality; a mission that took you out of your comfort zone; an encounter that rekindled your faith...

- What situation, mission, community, service, encounter... has been for us a place where we saw the Dream come true, even if only in a small or fragile way?
- What specific stories from our communities or mission experiences have filled us with hope, made us feel that God was walking with us?
- What specific story from our Claretian life (recent or from the past) has touched us most deeply? What did we 'sense' of God in it?
- What moments in the recent history of our local community or the Congregation do we recognise as a clear working of the Spirit?

3. Appreciative key: 'Life was made manifest, and we have seen it': *recognising what the Spirit has already given us*

In verse 2, the author pauses in the narrative to make a statement of great theological depth: '**Life was made manifest**'. The initiative comes from Life itself—from God himself—who comes out to meet us. All we did was *to see it*, to ' ' to contemplate it. We cannot remain at a superficial level of observation. John speaks of 'contemplating', which means looking deeply, recognising God's presence, discovering seeds of the Kingdom... This is the heart of the appreciative approach to discernment: before asking ourselves what we lack or focusing on problems, we must pause to **recognise what the**

Spirit has already given us—the signs of life that bring growth, sometimes silently. Not as a way of escaping from a difficult reality — the author of the text also speaks in his letter of conflicts and divisions — but as a foundation of faith from which to look at reality with new eyes: eyes that can recognise the passage of God, who is sometimes hidden in the small and everyday things.

The **appreciative approach to discernment** stems from the conviction that every community, however impoverished it may be, carries within it ***seeds of life and grace*** that can serve as the starting point for renewal. This conviction has a deep theological basis in texts such as this one from John: Life is revealed, the Spirit is at work, and the gift always precedes the task.

Furthermore, John's text also speaks of witness: we perceive the life that has been revealed and ***'bear witness to it'***. In the Johannine tradition, *witness* is **life speaking for itself**. The witnesses have been transformed by their encounter with Life and for that very reason cannot remain silent. The appreciative approach to discernment also seeks **to identify these witnesses** within the Congregation: people, presences and works that are living witnesses to the fact that the Spirit is at work, that the mission remains possible, and that the Claretian charism still has a future.

The appreciative gaze teaches us to discover where the Spirit is already at work, to recognise the seeds of life:

- Which elements of the 'Dream' are already bearing fruit, however small or insignificant they may be?
- Where have we 'seen' in our recent Claretian life that 'Life was manifesting itself'? Which people, communities or projects have we regarded as clear gifts of the Spirit, signs of faithfulness, creativity, audacity or evangelical simplicity?
- Let us name three 'centres of life' in our community or organism — realities that are already alive and deserve to be nurtured — what are they?
- Which Claretian witness (living or deceased, near or far) has given us the certainty that the charism continues to bear fruit? What is it about their life that we desire for ourselves and for our community?
- What new forms of apostolic life are emerging, however small or fragile they may be, as signs of what the Spirit is building?

4. A key to transformation 'So that you too may be in communion with us... so that our joy may be complete' (1 Jn 1:4): the Spirit sends us beyond ourselves

The sharing of experience and the recognition of the gift do not remain within the closed circle of a few. Experience demands communication. The Life we have received asks to be given away: '**we proclaim it to you too**'. Authentic discernment of the Spirit never closes the community in on itself; *it always opens it up and sends it forth.*

The purpose of proclamation in John is **koinonia**, communion. It is proclaimed, not to expand the institution, but because the Spirit desires to extend the network of communion: the

horizontal, between brothers and sisters and between peoples, and the vertical, with the Father and the Son. And also ‘so that our **joy** may be complete’: the ultimate purpose of the whole process—of the narrative, the witness, the proclamation, the communion—is **joy**, the joy that endures even in the face of difficulty, because it springs from communion with the Father and the Son in the Spirit. It has nothing to do with superficial euphoria or naïve optimism.

In the spiritual tradition, joy is always a criterion for authentic discernment, for the presence of the Spirit. If the discernment of our retreat leads us towards choices that engender that joy, we can trust that we are following the voice of the Spirit. If, on the other hand, the choices we are considering give rise to fear, closed-mindedness or institutional pessimism, this may be a sign that our discernment is not yet mature.

We can link this purpose of the proclamation to the **transformative essence of our discernment**: it not only identifies what has been and assesses what is; it also **points towards what ought to be**. The Spirit, who speaks through history and through the gifts bestowed, also speaks from the horizon of the Kingdom: *what transformations does the mission demand today? To what personal and institutional conversions does the Spirit call us? What aspects of our way of living and acting must die so that new life may emerge?*

The transformative dimension of discernment is not, first and foremost, a planned strategy, but **obedience to the Spirit**. The very same Spirit who made Mary’s womb fruitful, who breathed

upon Claret, sending him out on his mission, and who guided his first companions along unexpected paths, is the One who today brings forth new forms of apostolic presence within the Congregation. That Spirit continues to call, to send forth, to transform, to invite us to conversion, to purify the charism and to open up new processes.

- What personal or communal transformation is the Spirit asking of us at this time, even if it is difficult for us or takes us out of our comfort zone?
- What fears or weariness, mental blocks or internal resistance are holding back our missionary vitality and preventing us from living with audacity, openness, creativity and inner freedom?
- What structures, roles or dynamics are in need of renewal or change?
- To which new audiences and frontiers is the Spirit calling the Congregation at this moment in history?

The three movements in a single gesture

Listening to the reality of the Congregation in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to us involves all three movements at once: the humility of the one who narrates, the gratitude of the one who contemplates, and the freedom of the one who allows themselves to be transformed. Those who merely narrate, without contemplating or being transformed, may become trapped in nostalgia. Those who merely contemplate what is given, without narrating reality or opening themselves to

transformation, may fall into complacency. Those who seek only transformation, without being rooted in memory and in the gift received, may confuse human volunteering with the movement of the Spirit.

III

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

WE PREPARE FOR THE 'CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

Drawing on our personal work and on what we have meditated on and prayed about during this retreat, each of us prepares our contribution to the conversation in the Spirit that we are going to have as a community.

We recall the basic attitudes of discernment (cf. Guide) and place ourselves in an atmosphere of prayer. The following prayer may help us:

*Lord Jesus, Word who existed from the beginning
and who became flesh in our history,
we ask you to enable us to listen.
To listen to our own story without fear and without
pretence;
to listen with gratitude to the gifts you have sown
within us;
to hear the call that your Spirit sends us from the
future.
Grant us the courage to recount what we have seen
and experienced together,
the good and what causes us pain,
what fills us with pride and what fills us with shame,
for you can bring new life out of everything.*

*Grant us the humility to recognise that Life
has already been revealed amongst us
and that your Spirit has not forsaken us.
Grant us the freedom to let ourselves be led wherever
you wish to take us.
And may it be that, at the end of this retreat and of
our discernment,
may our joy — yours and ours — be complete. Amen.*

Each of you should think about (and preferably write down) your initial contribution to the conversation, drawing on everything you have reflected on and prayed about, and using the questions below as a guide for our ‘conversation in the Spirit’:

1. What stories or experiences from our community or organism show that the Congregation’s Dream is becoming a reality? (You may include two or three examples in the report).
2. What challenges or difficulties seem to be hindering the realisation of this Dream in our community, organism or in the Congregation?
3. In what ways could we collaborate more closely with the Spirit to help this Dream grow and take shape in our community, in our organism and throughout the Congregation?

According to the planned timetable, the outcome of this phase should be submitted via the Google form **by 30 November**.

