

**XXVII GENERAL CHAPTER
RESOURCES FOR PHASE 2.1:**

**LISTENING AND DISCERNMENT
IN COMMUNITIES**



**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

A CALL TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREPARING IN COMMUNION

INTRODUCTION

In the light of the ecclesial experience of the Synod on Synodality – which invites us to live faithfully in communion, participation and mission – and drawing on the insights highlighted at the Meeting of Superiors in Sri Lanka with the General Government (2026) – which calls for deeper listening, greater shared responsibility and authentic discernment throughout the Congregation – we are called to prepare the XXVII General Chapter with sensitivity, depth and commitment.

The aim is to open-up a shared spiritual journey that enables the renewal of our identity, strengthens our communion and revitalises our mission. A journey that cannot be limited, therefore, to the essential gathering of information for the preparation of the various Chapter documents, but which aims to open up ‘spaces of life’ (shared experiences through the methodology of ‘conversation in the Spirit’) that allow us to discern, in communion, God’s will for each individual, for each community and for the whole Congregation in each of the cultural contexts where it carries out its missionary work.

Embarking on this journey requires, according to *‘Phase 2: Listening and Discernment in the Communities’* of the

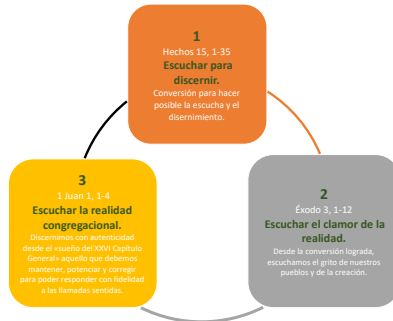
Methodology Guide, that we first avail ourselves (by setting aside quality time) for personal reflection (a time of preparation); secondly, for communal meditation and prayer (a community retreat); and finally, to engage in ‘conversation in the Spirit’. This is the central phase of the entire process. It is within the local communities that the broadest participation takes place and where the primary listening to the Spirit unfolds.

The materials we offer are intended to help you fulfil this beautiful and demanding task. The aim is that, within community projects, we should plan three meaningful ‘meetings’ leading to a ‘conversation in the Spirit’ in order to discern God’s will for our lives.

The first meeting (Phase 2.1), **‘Listening to Discern’**, is inspired by the biblical passage Acts 15:1–35 and seeks to prepare the heart (inner conversion) to listen to reality, to others and to God. It also invites a community-based pedagogical conversion aimed at familiarising ourselves with the proposed method (spiritual conversation), internalising the required attitudes and moving forward with a shared purpose. The results are to be compiled and submitted via a Google form by 30 September 2026. These contributions will help to identify the kind of culture of listening that currently characterises the Congregation (a template for compiling the data is provided in the appendix to the Methodology Guide for the preparation of the XXVII General Chapter).

The second meeting (Phase 2.2), ***‘Listening to the cry of reality’***, is inspired by the biblical passage Exodus 3:1–12 and seeks to broaden the horizon of discernment. Recognising a God who hears the cry of his people, communities are invited to listen to their people with a compassionate and missionary heart. Laypeople, religious and others – especially those whose voices are often least heard – are encouraged to participate in order to enrich the discernment process. Each community is to submit its responses (a maximum of five per question) via a Google form by 10 November 2026. A team from the Major Organism will draw up a summary by 5 December 2026, whilst the facilitation team will ensure the quality and integrity of the process.

The third meeting (Phase 2.3), ***‘Listening to the Reality of the Congregation’***, is informed by the biblical icon of 1 John 1:1–4 and seeks to evaluate congregational life in the light of the ‘dream’ of the previous General Chapter, in order to discern what to retain, strengthen or correct, and thus respond creatively to God’s call. Participants are invited to take a critical yet hopeful look, recognising both what needs transformation and the seeds of life that are present. The results will be submitted via a Google form by 30 November 2026 and will serve as the basis for a Synthesis Document on the Congregational Reality, which will bring together contributions from all levels in preparation for the Chapter.



All the material provided, with its two key components — personal reflection and the community retreat — is intended to help us prepare our contributions to the ‘conversation in the Spirit’. As you know, this involves sharing the inner promptings we have experienced during both our personal reflection and the community retreat.

To help us identify and clearly express these promptings, the texts suggested for personal reflection and the community retreat are accompanied by a number of questions. We should approach these flexibly: it is not necessary to answer them all, but rather to let them guide us as we prepare to take part in the ‘conversation in the Spirit’.

In this ‘conversation in the Spirit’, the aim is not to answer questions, but to share our lived experience. The four questions provided in the guide for this stage are intended to help organise the points of convergence, tensions and recurring insights (the fifth step of the conversation) and also to structure the summary (the sixth step) which must be submitted by the specified date.

I

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Spirituality and attentive listening

1. Our times and their calls.

We are living not merely in an age of change, but in a true **'turning point in history'**. Consequently, we are experiencing a crisis — and also a purification — of many of humanity's achievements, which, whilst valuable, no longer seem to fully respond to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Faced with this crisis, two temptations emerge that threaten to shut off the possibilities opened up by the present. The first is **nostalgia for the past**, which turns what has already been lived into a paralysing burden and blocks new paths of life. The second is the escape into **illusory dreams of the future** which, by avoiding the real effort to transform reality, lead to despair or cynicism. Both the past, when treated as an absolute, and the imagined future can hinder fidelity to the present as a theological space.

The present times therefore demand a profound **spirituality capable of contemplating God in history** and, precisely for that reason, of recognising the concrete face of every person threatened by indifference, exclusion or reduced to an instrument. This is not an introspective or escapist spirituality,

but an incarnate one: if the Word became flesh, no human flesh can be left outside a believer's attention.

This spirituality must rediscover the **patience of attentiveness**. In a culture marked by acceleration, constant distraction and the capture of the gaze (excessive screens), paying attention becomes a moral act. Those who pay attention recognise that the other is not a piece of data, a profile or a statistical variable, but an irreducible presence. Paying attention involves safeguarding the conditions of the encounter: silence, listening, memory, patient conversation, responsible judgement and the ability to pause in the face of another's suffering without immediately reducing it to a calculation or a management issue.

Likewise, this spirituality demands **that we strip words of their power**, for no true encounter is possible if language remains steeped in aggression, lies or suspicion. It is about remaining open to compassion, mercy and forgiveness, both on a personal and a communal level. Where technological logic tends to optimise processes, this spirituality reminds us that a person can never be reduced to the result they produce or the data that represents them. Where power seeks to homogenise, this spirituality learns to recognise diversity as a blessing. Where cynicism resigns itself to the rule of force, it insists that history remains open to conversion, care and justice.

For this reason, this spirituality calls for a commitment to **intersubjective dialogue**. It is not simply a matter of talking more, but of learning to listen better; of making space for the

other's voice and of sustaining processes capable of transforming fruitless confrontation into shared construction.

2. Not just hearing, but listening.

In a world saturated with noise, messages and words, authentic listening can become a revolutionary and liberating act. It does not consist merely in hearing, but in listening with presence, with an open heart and a willingness to allow ourselves to be shaped by what reality says, by what the other says and by what the Other says. In this sense, listening points to obedience — ob-audire—: stepping outside one's own will and interests to walk the discerned path of communion.

We should never forget that, in the mystical dimension of our charismatic vocation, listening is not merely a means of attaining truths, increasing knowledge or enhancing our access to information... for it is not merely a matter of being informed, but of being formed, shaped by the will of God revealed through Christ Jesus. Listening is, above all, a form of radical presence; a radical way of being and existing, which will always demand openness to otherness and which, for that reason, will dispose our lives to openness to the revelation of the sacred.

3. Not passivity, but respectful attention.

We live, however, in a culture that values speaking more highly than listening. Immediate opinion, quick replies and instant solutions predominate. Listening, on the other hand, demands

a pause. Listening means halting the spontaneous flow of feelings, thoughts, judgements and responses in order to cordially welcome what otherness offers. It involves taking the risk of opening oneself to difference, even when it unsettles us and calls into question what we hold dear, what we know or what we have achieved.

Listening therefore demands the **discipline of generosity**. It involves renouncing one's own ego, the desire to be right, to control, or to be understood before understanding others. It is not passivity, but active, respectful attention; an inner demand that compels us to overcome selfishness.

That is why true listening must be accompanied by a sensitive awareness of one's own inner life: why do I feel the urge to interrupt? What prevents me from opening-up to those who are different? What wounds are stirred up when I hear something I do not understand or do not agree with? In this way, listening takes shape in the humility that makes true self-knowledge possible. To know oneself truly is to live truly, and this is humility. St Teresa of Ávila expressed this clearly: *'Self-knowledge is a great thing; and so I would wish, even were I to fly to heaven, that you should never lose it'* (*The Way of Perfection*, 39, 5).

The self-knowledge that springs from authentic listening does not consist in obsessively scrutinising oneself or in belittling oneself, but in recognising oneself truthfully in the face of otherness and, from there, in the presence of God: with one's own poverty, limitations, wounds and unfulfilled desires, but

also with the dignity that defines us and with the action of grace that is always freely given. When we truly know ourselves, we cease to shape our lives according to appearances, self-sufficiency or narcissistic self-assertion.

Herein lies the **missionary dimension of attentive listening**. To truly listen means to perceive one's own suffering and that of others, for pain needs to be heard in order to heal in the warmth of fellowship. Helping those whom God places on our path to see things in a new light and to move forward with hope is a sign of redemption. Compassionate listening recognises, affirms and strengthens the dignity of God's children.

When we listen attentively, life is enriched and we can perceive its signs as calls to renew our faithfulness. Then, the whole of reality becomes sacramental: a story of salvation. The present—not nostalgia for the past nor illusory dreams of the future—thus calls us to the gentleness of daily martyrdom: the surrender of one's life in the ordinary, gentleness of conscience and heart, and the opening up of spaces for God.

The saints show that authentic listening is also a form of '**not knowing**' that opens the way to true faithfulness. It involves stripping ourselves of labels, diagnoses and certainties. In this letting go—which St John of the Cross would express as not wishing to possess, cling to or treat anything created as absolute—lies a large part of our witness to faithfulness: remaining free for God and for others.

That is why attentive listening goes beyond words. It consists of listening to silence: that which is not named, but is felt; that which is not explained, but is revealed. It is not always a matter of filling a void, explaining or giving advice, but of simply being present. In that shared presence, God can speak freely.

'And Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart' (Lk 2:19). Attentive listening springs from the heart, and as we listen, the heart learns to treasure and await God's surprising revelation. The heart is not alienating emotionalism, but a living source of compassion, shared humanity and a desire for love; it is the sacred space where God speaks and longs for our dialogue with him and our service to his plan of salvation.

II COMMUNITY RETREAT

Biblical icon:

Acts 15:1–35 (The Council of Jerusalem, an example of communal discernment in the light of the Spirit).

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, just as you gathered your Church in Jerusalem to discern the workings of your Spirit, we ask you to open our hearts and dispose us to listen together with humility and depth during this Chapter.

May your Holy Spirit be the true protagonist of our gatherings, guiding us to build an authentic culture of discernment, where every voice is welcomed, every experience is valued and every decision arises from an attentive silence to your will.

Enable us to move beyond our certainties and prejudices, so that, like the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, we may 'do what seems best to the Holy Spirit and to us' (*Acts 15:28*), always walking in truth and communion.

Objective:

To approach the General Chapter with a heart open to listening and discernment, deepening the quality of our listening and fostering a true culture of discernment.

1. Biblical key: ‘We have decided, the Holy Spirit and we...’ (Acts 15:28)

The Council of Jerusalem is not merely an event of the past: it is a living model of how the Christian community, guided by the Spirit, addresses its conflicts and walks in communion.

As is well known, the passage belongs to the missionary section of Acts (chapters 13–28) and is structured in four stages: the **initial conflict** over the circumcision of the Gentiles, the **assembly in Jerusalem** with its debates, the **apostolic decree** and, finally, its **joyful reception in Antioch**.

The conflict is not merely cultural: it strikes at the very heart of evangelical faithfulness — is the Law binding on followers of Christ? — and threatens the unity of the community. The answer does not come from grand rational arguments or ideological debates, but from **listening to lived experiences**: Paul and Barnabas recount what God has done through them; Peter shares his encounter with Cornelius; James discerns the presence of the Spirit in all this, confirming it with Scripture. The result is a decree that balances **unity and diversity**: *‘we have decided, together with the Holy Spirit’*.

Beyond the historical, exegetical or theological debate surrounding Luke’s account, the text provides an **enduring framework** for community life:

- The community seeks **unity in diversity**, not uniformity that leads to polarisation.
- **Conflict is not swept under the carpet** but is addressed by sharing experiences as possible signs of God's will.
- **Scripture illuminates** communal discernment.
- Decisions maintain the **fruitful tension** between unity and diversity.
- The sign that the decision comes from God is the **joy** it generates, not the existence of winners and losers.

And now, for personal reflection:

- **On the quality of our listening**

At the Council, the community did not debate ideologies: they listened to lived experiences.

Are we capable of truly listening to the experiences of others — especially those that make us uncomfortable or contradict our own way of seeing things — as possible signs of the Spirit's action, or do we shut ourselves away in our own certainties before the other person has even finished speaking?

- **On how we handle conflict**

Conflict was not swept under the carpet: it was faced with courage and without polarisation.

Do we, as a community, tend to silence or sidestep conflicts in order to maintain a superficial peace, or do we have the courage to name them and face them

together without falling into the logic of winners and losers?

- **On discernment in the light of the Word**

James did not impose his own judgement: he referred to Scripture for discernment.

Does the Word of God truly lie at the heart of our community decision-making processes, or are we guided primarily by considerations of effectiveness, majorities or personal affinities?

- **On the fruits of our decisions**

The sign that the decision came from God was the joy of the community, not the victory of some over others.

What fruits do our communal decisions bear: joy, unity and a greater missionary zeal, or weariness, division and withdrawal into ourselves?

2. Key narrative: 'When the Spirit speaks'

That day, the community was wounded. It was not the first time that an argument had threatened to tear apart what had taken so much effort to build. Harsh, charged words: *'Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved.'* And on the other side, the tense silence of those who had seen with their own eyes how the Spirit acted freely, without asking anyone's permission, amongst people who did not even know the Law.

But someone proposed something simple yet revolutionary: **to sit down and listen**. Not to debate in order to win. To listen.

Paul and Barnabas began to speak. Not with brilliant arguments or scholarly quotations. They spoke of dusty roads, of doors that opened unexpectedly, of the faces of people whom no one had expected and who, nevertheless, welcomed the Good News with a joy that could only come from God. *'This is what we have seen. This is what we have experienced.'*

Peter spoke next. And he, too, recounted his story. He recalled that day at Cornelius's house, when he realised, almost in amazement, that **God shows no partiality**. That the Spirit does not ask where you come from before resting upon you.

The room gradually fell silent. Not the awkward silence of confrontation, but the fertile silence of those experiencing something profound.

Then James spoke calmly. He did not impose his own view. He did not settle the matter with authority. He simply pointed to Scripture and said: *'This is in accordance with the prophets.'* As if he had discovered that the path they were treading had already been laid out from ancient times.

And together, slowly, they wove a decision. Not a perfect one. Not a definitive one. But **an honest, fair and feasible**

one. A decision that safeguarded unity without stifling diversity. One that called for what was necessary without burdening them with the unnecessary.

And now, for personal reflection:

- **On the wounds we carry**

‘That day, the community was wounded...’

Is there at this moment some unspoken wound in our community, some tension we are avoiding because we fear it might ‘end badly’? What is stopping us from sitting down, as they did, simply to listen?

- **On the way we make decisions**

“Not to debate. Not to win. To listen.”

When our community faces a conflict or has to make an important decision, from what perspective do we approach it: from a genuine desire to listen to others’ experiences and discern together, or from a need to impose our views, persuade others or defend our position?

- **About the fruits we recognise**

‘There were no victors celebrating their victory. There were no vanquished leaving with a bitter heart.’

Can we recall any decision taken in our community that has brought about true shared joy? What made that possible? And if we find it hard to recall, what does that tell us about the way we walk together?

And don't forget: 'the clearest sign that the Spirit was present was not the perfection of the decision, but the joy it left in everyone's heart'

3. Appreciative focus: identifying the good seeds we need to nurture.

Before we turn to the question of what we need to change, the text from Acts 15 **invites us to do something more difficult and beautiful:** to look with gratitude and honesty at what is already alive amongst us.

Because the Council of Jerusalem did not begin with a programme. It began with a silent and courageous question: *where is God at work in what we are experiencing?*

That is why, before judging, before proposing, before deciding, we need to pause and tell our story.

I suggest you take a careful, simple and concrete look: think of your community. Think of its recent history. Think of the people in it. Think of the moments it has shared. And look, with clear eyes and a grateful heart:

Where have we experienced the Spirit at work beyond our plans and control? Which person, which encounter, which unexpected moment surprised us with God's closeness?

Where have we managed to truly listen to one another, overcoming our differences, without anyone having to sacrifice their dignity in order to achieve peace?

What decision, taken together, brought genuine joy and gave us more energy to continue walking faithfully?

Which face, which story, which testimony from someone in our community has told us, without words, that the Gospel remains a living and transforming Good News?

And do not forget: these seeds are not our own achievements. They are gifts of the Spirit that are already sprouting amongst you, perhaps without us having named them yet. Naming them is the first act of discernment. Caring for them is the first act of faithfulness. Sharing them is the first act of mission.

4. Key to transformation: Allowing ourselves to be transformed by what we hear.

There is a conversion that nobody teaches us to undertake and yet which the Spirit continually asks of us: **the conversion of listening.**

It is not about listening in order to reply. It is not about listening in order to refute. It is not about listening to confirm what we already think. **It is about listening in order to allow ourselves to be changed.**

That is what happened in Jerusalem. Peter entered that assembly as the man he always had been, with his own

history, his convictions, his way of understanding faithfulness to God. But earlier, at Cornelius's house, something had broken him inside. He had listened. He had seen. And what he had heard and seen compelled him to say aloud what he found so hard to admit: *'I realise that God shows no partiality.'*

That statement did not come from a study. It came from an experience that transformed him. And that personal transformation became a gift for the whole community.

For this is how the Spirit works:

- What transforms you **also transforms those whom God has placed by your side.**
- What heals within you **also heals something in those around you.**
- What you dare to 'sell' in order to gain freedom **paves the way to freedom for the whole community.**

And, from here, the final two questions:

Are we capable of allowing ourselves to be challenged by the experience of others, even if it contradicts our most deeply held convictions?

Is our community a place where personal transformations are welcomed as gifts, or do we view them with suspicion because they threaten the established order?

III

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

And now, drawing on what we have meditated upon – during our time of personal reflection – and what we have prayed for – during the community retreat – we warmly prepare our contribution for the first round of the spiritual conversation. This is the first round in which we all have to speak. Afterwards, if we dare to listen and feel, the flow of the conversation will open us up to God’s surprise.

The aim is to share the experience we have had. Not, at this initial stage, to answer specific questions

Following this sharing of experiences, the Methodology Guide suggests some questions to help us prepare for the moment of discernment and the final synthesis:

- Have we ever felt truly listened to? What attitudes on the part of the listeners made us feel that way?
- How do we view our own ability to listen? What are our strengths? In which areas do we need to grow?
- How do we respond to the differences that exist within the community (in opinions, cultures, sensibilities, theological viewpoints, etc.)? Do these differences help to build fraternal communion? How do we experience this?

- How do we discern, as a community, God's call to pastoral conversion? Is listening to reality part of this process? What do we still need to strengthen?

The results of the discernment and the final synthesis (not personal opinions) will be compiled and submitted via a Google form by 30 September. These contributions will help to identify the kind of culture of listening that currently characterises the Congregation. (A template for compiling this information is provided in the appendix to the Methodology Guide for the preparation of the XXVII General Chapter.)

Diagram

1 Acts 15: 1-35 Listen to discern

Conversion to make possible listening and discernment

2 1 John 1: 1-4 Listen to the congregational reality

We discern with authenticity from the dream of the XXVI General Chapter that which we must keep, enable and correct to be able to respond with fidelity to the acknowledged calls

3 Exodus 3: 1-12 Listen to the clamour of the reality

From the conversion achieved, we listen to the cry of our peoples and of creation

