



A CALL TO ACTION

Reflections and Orientations from the 47th General Chapter

Introduction

The 47th General Chapter of the Passionist Congregation was held from 6th to 27th October 2018. Its chosen theme was 'Renewing our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope'.

This document presents the Chapter's principal reflections on its theme, and the orientations for the Renewal programme that it proposes should now be developed throughout the Congregation.

The Chapter recognises that laying out a comprehensive **Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission** has to take account of all the many elements and activities and expressions of our life and work - all that flows from our **Charism of the *Memoria Passionis***, our dedication to the Passion. And a Plan that is common to the whole Congregation, with specific measurable actions that can be evaluated, has to be developed through a process in which all are involved. Moreover, shaping a realistic rather than merely theoretical Plan means making a start *now* on the things that *urgently* need attention, as well as foreseeing what has to be done over time.

The Chapter, from the reports it received and the sharing among the capitulars, identified three priority areas for action:

- our **Communal Life**
- our **Formation – Initial and Ongoing**, and
- the revitalisation of the **Configurations**, which are our principal **Structures of Solidarity**.

Together, these are the elements and the perspectives that primarily caught the attention of the 47th General Chapter.

In this light, the Chapter asked the Superior General and his Council to undertake the ongoing task of promoting and facilitating a dynamic planning process over the next three years, and to encourage involvement in it by all the members through their Provinces and Configurations.

The Chapter suggests that, resulting from this, a Congregation-wide Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission be presented for ratification by the next General Synod in 2021. Its inauguration thereafter will crown our celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Congregation (2020-2022).

In this document, the Chapter presents reflections (principles and guidelines) for this work of planning:

1. We outline, first of all, what we have learned about our Mission from our sharing; this represents the **GOAL** that our proposed Plan for Renewal seeks to achieve.
2. Secondly, we reflect on our Community Life, Formation and the Revitalisation of Configurations, as **OBJECTIVES** we need to meet in order to reach our goal, together with the **ACTION** needed to achieve them.
3. Thirdly, we share our reflections on our Charism, the Spirit's gift that is our **MOTIVATING FORCE**, the source and fountain of everything in our Life and Mission as Passionist religious, and the **INSPIRATION** of our Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission.

The **Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission** that we develop should also ensure that all the Congregation's economic and administrative resources are at its service.

Part 1: **PASSIONIST MISSION IN THE CHURCH AND WORLD TODAY**

Our life is our Mission (by witness), our Mission is our life (by action).
(Superior General's Report to the 47th General Chapter)

Three foundational features that the Chapter insisted on are:

- The close connection between our Mission and our Community Life; this has been a marked characteristic of our Congregation from its beginnings.
- The integral connection between our Mission and our Charism; renewing our Mission must build upon our dedication to Jesus in his Passion and to the crucified of today.
- The need for continual discernment of our Mission in light of the Signs of our Times and the Gospel of the Passion; we have to respond to the needs of our world today.

We propose as elements for our GOALS in Mission:

- 1. Strengthening our Charismatic identity, especially in places where its vitality has been diminished:**
 - a) We believe firmly in the power and strength of our Charism, the gift of Remembrance of the Passion which we received from the Holy Spirit.
 - b) We believe the Spirit calls us today to be bold in promoting this remembrance in new ways and new places and to confront a new forgetfulness of God in the Church and the world.
- 2. Living our Mission as a gift both given and received: we both evangelise and are evangelised:**
 - a) Our Mission today as Passionists calls for the witness of vulnerable love, in the context of a Church which is called to a new humility.
 - b) We must be prepared to move beyond ways that are comforting, because they are familiar, but which no longer give life.
 - c) We feel the need to recommit ourselves to our Mission in collaboration now with Laity in a renewed Charismatic presence in the Church and world.
- 3. Our Congregational response to the 'existential peripheries':**
 - a) We believe our response begins in listening – to the world, to the cry of the poor and to the voices of our own brothers in Community; our Plan should unfold a strategy of listening in which we all have a role to play.
 - b) We can be more sensitive to the needs of others, be more welcoming and open; we must live in a more human way.
 - c) We rejoice in the many ways the Passionist Mission is alive in the world today.
 - d) At the same time, we are challenged to respond to new needs characteristic of our times, especially those that arise at the existential as well as geographic peripheries which Pope Francis alerts us to - migrants, refugees, the wounded Earth and the new challenges arising on the 'digital continent'.
- 4. Our Congregational response to Inter-Cultural Society:**
 - a) The Congregation today is itself newly multi-cultural; this presents us with challenges and opportunities. Our embrace of inter-culturality is today a prophetic gesture. We have to build solidarity and communion continuously.
 - b) Our communities need to be welcoming and open to this inter-cultural reality.
 - c) As society changes we need to change; our vitality depends on our Mission to others just as much as on our Community Life.

d) We need better collaboration between the Configurations to create harmony and provide help where it is needed.

We propose as elements for our planned ACTION in Mission:

1. Proclaiming the Gospel of the Passion by:

- i) Proclaiming the Word of the Cross in all our preaching.
- ii) Helping people meditate on the Passion and on their experience of the Cross (lectio divina).
- iii) Entering into a new evangelisation and being open to its various forms.
- iv) Celebrating the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist.
- v) Articulating the criteria and methodology for specifically Passionist apostolic action.

2. Developing our outreach by:

- i) Having compassion and empathy for the people of God entrusted to us.
- ii) Each Community exploring the existential peripheries closest to them and integrating an appropriate response within the Community apostolic project. Each Major Superior should support this study of the peripheries and resource the local communities in their responses.
- iii) Using new mediums of art, music, symbol, image, etc.
- iv) Developing and extending our presence in the digital world.
- vi) Evangelising by attraction – the witness of our Community life as part of a Church that is always looking outwards.

Part 2: PASSIONIST COMMUNITY LIFE

When we speak about ‘Renewing our Mission’ it is primarily about renewing ourselves. (Superior General’s Report to the 47th General Chapter)

The General Chapter gave close attention to renewing Passionist Community Life. Our Constitutions present us with the historical and existential reason for our foundation in the Church:

Saint Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all. (Constitutions, #1)

The Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation and its Rule, and entrusted us with a Mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate. (Constitutions, #2)

We are called to a life in Community, but always in the Missionary dimension. As the Superior General stated in his Report to the Chapter: *'Our Mission is integrally connected with our life in Community ... as two sides of the same coin. Our life is our Mission (by witness), our Mission is our life (by action).'* The Community Life desired by Saint Paul of the Cross - and also by ourselves - cannot be closed in on itself or be self-referential, but must participate in the Mission of the universal Church according to the Charism we have received.

Community Life, therefore, is a primary dimension of our apostolate.

We propose as elements for our OBJECTIVES in Community Life:

- 1. Shaping our Community Life as a 'Covenant' which expresses the true heart of our lives together:**
 - a) We recognise our life together as the catalyst of our renewal and where we are accountable.
 - b) We acknowledge that the animation of Community Life depends on all members, not just one person.
 - c) We work to create a welcoming environment
- 2. Making our Community Life a 'school of prayer':**
 - a) Ensuring our relationship with God is the centre of everything we do.
 - b) Through commitment to the experience of prayer, contemplation, silence.
- 3. Making our Community Life a 'school of humanity':**
 - a) We promote a spirit of dialogue and tolerance, sacrifice and patience – creating something that is humanly liveable.
 - b) We practice understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation - integrating all aspects of our life in common.

We propose as elements for our planned ACTION in Community Life:

- 1. In daily life by:**
 - i) Communities establishing the times of praying together.
 - ii) Communities establishing the times of meeting together.
 - iii) Openly addressing the many problems and challenges that face us in the practice of Community: individualism, limited and closed mentality, inability to live Community life, the difficulty of relationships with the confreres, disagreement with the authorities and the negative impact of living too much in the digital world.

2. Planning our communal life by:

- i) Each Community making an assessment of itself every year, and planning the development of the Community project on an annual basis.
- ii) Each community regularly reviewing the evolution of their life.
- iii) Providing training for local superiors.
- iv) Major Superiors drawing up a statement (letter) for catechesis on life in Community.

Part 3: FORMATION – INITIAL AND ONGOING

The essential aim of all our Formation – initial and ongoing – is that it becomes for each of us ‘a process of progressive assumption of the sentiments of Christ’.

(Quoting *Vita Consecrata*, A. Cencini, address to the 47th General Chapter)

Real Ongoing Formation (lifelong learning) ... takes place every day and in every moment. (A. Cencini, address to the 47th General Chapter)

In addressing the topic of Formation, the General Chapter discerned a great need in the Congregation today to give attention not only to Initial Formation but also Ongoing Formation - at both the ‘ordinary’ level (i.e. day to day learning) and the ‘extraordinary’ level (i.e. specific courses, seminars etc.). Planning for this is needed by both General and Provincial governance.

The challenge to each religious is to reflect, meditate, live, testify and proclaim our Passionist Charism. It is a challenge that requires every member of the Congregation to be open to growth at the level of his own humanity (psychologically, spiritually, theologically and socially), to be committed to lifelong learning, and to be open to reading and responding to the Signs of the Times. This is what A. Cencini referred to as ‘docibilitas’, a fundamental openness and docility for learning throughout one’s life.

We propose as elements for our OBJECTIVES in Formation:

1. Creating a Community culture of awareness of Ongoing Formation - that does not end in a particular place or time or stage of life:

- a) Establishing a Congregational, Province and Community mind-set of lifelong learning, of continuous Formation.
- b) Establishing and adhering to goals of continuous Formation and lifelong learning which each religious sets for himself.

- c) Providing well-resourced personnel to lead Ongoing Formation - both 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'.

2. Making Initial Formation an effective priority at all levels in the Congregation:

- a) Ensuring that our students (and members of the Congregation) receive adequate Formation for the reality of pastoral life in today's world.
- b) Special attention to be given to the challenges of students transitioning from the Formation Community to life in the apostolic communities.
- c) Ensuring that Initial Formation is led by well-prepared personnel.

3. Being especially attentive to the area of safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults:

- a) Attending to safeguarding in all its forms, as an integral part of Passionist life and Mission today.
- b) Developing an understanding of the need to create safe environments.
- c) Every Entity taking responsibility for ensuring adequate Formation of all the religious in this area.

We propose as elements for ACTION in Formation:

1. The preparation and implementation of a General Plan of Formation:

- i) The Plan will be drawn up by the Formation Commission, together with the Secretary for Formation, after wide consultation.
- ii) The Plan will assist formators, as the vital and responsible agents for the conduct of Initial Formation, in their preparation for and ongoing education in this ministry.
- iii) Implementation of the Plan will entail developing programmes, meetings and seminars at the various levels (Provinces, Configurations, General Administration).

2. Developing Ongoing Formation:

- i) Resources to be prepared by the Formation Commission, together with the Secretary for Formation (programmes, exercises, etc. for use at various levels - in Communities, Provinces, Configurations).
- ii) Providing adequate assistance for those responsible for co-ordinating Ongoing Formation in each of the Entities.
- iii) Ensuring that Ongoing Formation is developed in the context of and as part of the Community project.
- iv) Major Superiors ensure that Formation for safeguarding takes place within each entity and that it corresponds to the civil and ecclesial norms of those countries in which we live and work.

Part 4: REVITALISING THE CONFIGURATIONS AS OUR PRINCIPAL STRUCTURES OF SOLIDARITY

Over the journey of our restructuring process, the Congregation discerned collaboration in solidarity as an important way of being for the future.

(Superior General's Report to the 47th General Chapter)

The Configurations are principally organised to promote dialogue and cooperation between the different parts of the Congregation, and to foster initiatives and common action for the life and Mission of the Congregation.

(46th General Chapter Document, quoted by the Superior General in his Report)

The Configurations that the Congregation established over recent years in the process of restructuring are now in a particular phase of development; therefore, an assessment and evaluation of them and what they have achieved thus far is one of the principal means to revitalise them.

Among the challenges of revitalisation is rising above a 'province only' mentality, and beginning to work within the diversity of cultures, languages and experiences that the Configurations represent. What we discerned in the Chapter is a call to focus our response here on the Missionary dimension of our Passionist life rather than think only of our fragility.

We propose as elements for our OBJECTIVES for Configurations & Solidarity:

- 1. Re-emphasising the call to greater and deeper solidarity in guiding and nourishing the Configurations' revitalisation.**
 - a) Re-presenting this focus in the three areas of Formation, Personnel and Finance, and taking account also of action on JPIC, especially the need to care for the planet as 'our common home'.
 - b) Discerning the concrete forms of solidarity within these areas which are appropriate to the different local and regional needs within Configurations.
 - c) Developing and consolidating the structures of the Configurations in order for them to be effective as the means of Congregational solidarity.
- 2. Extending the vision of Congregational solidarity to the inter-Configurational level appropriate to today's globalised world.**

- a) Opening a dialogue and a sharing of resources across Configurations aimed at extending the Congregation's international solidarity.
- b) Encouraging and developing inter-Configurational projects.

We propose as elements for ACTION for Configurations & Solidarity:

1. At Configuration level:

- i) Each Configurations makes an assessment of itself, reviewing what has been achieved and what is needed for its revitalisation.
- ii) Configurations develop concrete ways of engaging in the issues of JPIC and environmental sustainability.
- iii) Configurations take an active part in establishing the goals and objectives of our post-Chapter Charism-based Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission, taking account of their lived experience.

2. At inter-Configuration level:

- i) Meetings and consultations between Configurations to identify needs and opportunities for inter-Configurational solidarity in Formation, Personnel, Finance and JPIC.
- ii) The Configuration Presidents and the Extended General Council monitor and coordinate the inter-Configurational developments.

Part 5: THE CHARISM OF THE *MEMORIA PASSIONIS*

It is time now for us to focus on the Charismatic testimony of our Mission – the reason for our existence as a Congregation. (Superior General's Report to the General Chapter)

The Charism of the *Memoria Passionis* is what gives us the fundamental rationale of our Plan for the Renewal of our Passionist Mission. The Chapter, from its reflection on our Charism, which was deep and personally engaging, offers the Congregation these summary points:

The Charism as the Holy Spirit's gift opens us to the grace of God in contemplation, prayer, and silence. We are enabled to understand more deeply the fullness of the love of God, so that our life can be re-inspired, and we may offer ourselves totally to the Crucified.

This is our starting point - Jesus Crucified. The Passion of Jesus Christ is 'the greatest expression of the love of God'. This is the Memory of the Passion that we seek to keep alive in ourselves and in others.

Jesus in his Passion also invites us to serve the crucified ones of today, while, at the same time, he speaks to us through each of these crucified ones. Thus, the logos of the Crucified (Jn. 1:1) becomes the manifestation of the Father's passion for humanity. Our Passionist communities, called to be schools of prayer, become the means to communicate to others the new hope that our Charism proclaims.

We embrace the Crucified more confidently from the perspective of our personal limitations and sufferings, sharing in the suffering endured today by the Church, sharing with suffering humanity, and the suffering earth. The Charism nourishes and renews our Community, and it challenges us to respond to all human suffering from the heart of the Paschal mystery. In our life in Community we seek a deeper insight into the meaning of God's love to share with others.

The many aspects of today's life that we encounter are enlightened by the Passion of Christ, which gives prophetic sense to situations of poverty, lack of solidarity, struggle for justice, respect for others, defence of creation, the capacity to dialogue with other religions, etc. We believe and maintain that the Passion of Christ which penetrates every age, culture and locality can never be obsolete, or disconnected, or out of place.

The *Memoria Passionis* expresses the very essence of who we are. It inspires our response and adaptation to changing times, and calls us to conversion in our own lives and to bring about the necessary transformation of the structures of our Congregation.

OUR DREAM FOR OUR CONGREGATION

We want to continue in the footsteps of our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross, who first received the Charism of the *Memoria Passionis*. This is the light by which the Passionist Congregations discerns its Life, Mission and Apostolate. Our vocation has its origins in the mystery of this Charism which God gives us. Thus, we go forward, recalling the past with gratitude, living the present moment in a prophetic way, and facing the future with hope.

The Charism continues to nourish each one of us, and all the members of the Passionist Family when we 'remain always close to Christ crucified and his suffering people' (Message of Pope Francis to the Chapter).

This was a General Chapter in which many new voices were present. It was one in which the majority of the Capitulars took part for the first time. The brothers shared their hopes and dreams and expressed their deep desire for an authentic renewal of our Mission which would be accompanied by a renewal of ourselves.

The General Chapter believes that the renewal of Community Life, the strengthening of our Formation process and efforts to revitalise our Configurations will give us the strength to pursue the renewal of the Mission entrusted to us by the Church - that is, to keep alive in the Church and in the world 'the memory of God's love flowing from the Cross'. (Message of Pope Francis to the Chapter)