

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



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SUPERIOR GENERAL TO ALL THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

My dear Confreres:

I wish you the joy of the risen Lord who is always with us!

1. EASTER IS NOT MERELY THE END OF LENT...

but it is a season of joyfully running to others to share the Good News. Easter is a season of letting our faith be a source of joy for others who do not have the joy of having faith in the risen Lord, like the women did for the disciples on the Easter Sunday morning. During the season of Lent, the movement of growth was inward as we reflected on forgiveness, renunciation, self-denial and self-surrender, carrying the cross, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. During the season of Easter, the movement of growth is outward, joyfully sharing the Good News of resurrection and the joy of having the risen Lord with us always. Very soon, we will have the joy of the feast of the Pentecost where the risen Lord will fill in the gaps of our inadequacies with the wisdom and gifts of His Holy Spirit

In preparation for the General Chapter XX, let me share with you certain situations that are in dire need of evangelization and conversion. These are situations that we need to confront with our own lived experience and that of our Congregation.

2 “HEMORRHAGING” OF CONSECRATED MEN

One of the threats posed by those in consecrated life today, according to Pope Francis, is 'haemorrhaging' of consecrated men and women, which is weakening consecrated life and the Church herself. While discussing on the theme “Fidelity and Abandonment” Holy Father explored why the religious people leave their religious vocation, years after making their final profession, in the Congregation?

- In the context of quite a number of departures from our own Congregation in the recent times (in the forms of incardination, exclaustation, or for other reasons) it is important to reflect on this question. In this era of change, it is difficult for consecrated people to assume serious and definitive responsibilities. Holy Father speaks of our culture today as a 'provisional culture', which leads to living '*a la carte*' life, which is a 'slave to passion'. This culture always keeps the 'side doors' open to other possibilities and it feeds on consumerism forgetting the beauty of a simple and austere life. Everything is judged in terms of a self-realization/self-promotion, which is often extraneous to the values of the Gospel and spirit of religious life.
- Today, economic rules replace the rules of morality. The dictatorship of money and financial gains propose the vision of religious life. The logic of worldliness, the search for success, profit oriented and institutionalized ministries, easy money, and easy pleasure are said to be the seducing factors in religious life today. This culture must be evangelized to sustain the vocation of consecrated religious. **It is unfortunate that some confreres, after years of living as MSFS with their long years of formation for MSFS way of life, find that they feel called to diocesan way of life and they get incardinated to dioceses where they claim to feel self-fulfilment.**
- Pope highlighted a few serious situations within religious congregations today – routine, fatigue, the weight of managing structures, internal divisions, the search for power, a worldly manner of governing institutions, service of authority becoming authoritarianism - that destroy the prophetic mission and spirit of consecrated life. The centrality of Jesus, the spiritual attractiveness and the strength of the mission, beauty of following Christ, and radiating hope and joy are important practices to live consecrated life. He stressed on the importance of accompaniment and on going formation for the religious.
- “It is hard to remain faithful walking alone or walking with the guidance of brothers and sisters who are not able to listen carefully and patiently, or who lack adequate experience of consecrated life. We need brothers and sisters experienced in the ways of God. ...Many vocations are lost for lack of good leaders”

3. Fr. MERMIER ON 'SERIOUSNESS OF OUR VOCATION'

The context of this letter of Fr. Mermier was the occasion when three priests left the Congregation. Fr. Mermier wrote to the missionaries in India. The words of our Founder, as

reflected in his letter, dated July 03, 1852 reads:

“... I am afraid that there is lack of zeal for one's own sanctification and lack of love and esteem for the consecrated life and especially for the Congregation.

On the one hand, the priests have to understand above all the vocation, the holiness, and the dignity of the priest, the greatness, the tremendous elevation of the priesthood. On the other, they are to be aware of the dangers to which they are exposed, the difficulties they have to overcome, their responsibility and the account they have to render [to God]. Add to it the sad experience of a great number of the diocesan clergy: what a subject for reflection and what serious motives to take precautions for oneself both for the peace of one's own conscience as well as for the success of one's ministry”.

4. Fr. MERMIER ON COMMUNITY LIFE (letter continued)

‘Now the means, the secure harbor, is consecrated life, the community life of a religious congregation. There, surely, we are less in the world, less in contact with the world, less given over to the world. There we do not have the great concern and embarrassment of house keeping and of temporal affairs. There, at least partially, we are freed from the solicitations of parents and relatives; there we are less isolated, less abandoned to oneself. All this is quite true. It is evident, but we do not reflect or foresee at all. We think of the current difficulty (lit. inconvenience of the moment). We wish to live according to our freedom and lead a life, which gratifies our senses’.

(Selected Letters and Writings of Fr. PETER – MARIE MERMIER (1780 – 1862); Edited by Adrien Duval, MSFS and Translated by Antony Mookenthottam, MSFS, 2007, pp 132-133.

The words of our Founder and of Pope Francis help us understand how far we are from our goal and our spirit of religious life. We are confronted with the truth of priestly and religious life. Jesus says, “... and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). But the truth tends to make us miserable before it sets us free. It is true that sometimes God shows us the truth through our humiliations, depths of our emptiness, and sin so that we have nothing more to shock or humiliate us. But we are called to live with and walk with this emptiness and our sin to God.

5. THE HIDDEN TEMPTATION OF POWER

What weakens and destroys religious life today is said to be the temptation to power and to financial administration, leaving aside the most essential aspects of charism and consecrated life. One of the questions raised in the Union of Superiors General Conference was:

'What use is it to speak about loving poverty and our prophetic and missionary life, if this temptation to hold power and financial administration is the blood coursing through our veins?'

These are some of the observations discussed in the Meeting:

- It is becoming increasingly common to find religious men leaving aside the most essential aspects of their charism to involve themselves in the management and administration of institutions, projects, ventures etc.
- It is becoming increasingly common to find young religious who, as soon as they have completed their years and stages of formation, immediately ask about the post they will hold or the office they will occupy, resisting any assignment to missionary assignments
- It is still more worrying to see the clericalism of religious Congregations where to be a priest/religious is an honor and a status that has been achieved, which translates into authority, power, and includes access to financial resources that are to be handled, that can be used to help one's family, and so on.
- It is still more a difficult and serious situation that when religious men and women are ready to have lay dependents (who are accepted and submissive), they are not ready to really share the mission of the Congregation with lay people in a relationship of equality
- Not only is there not a decrease but an increase in many parts of the world of cases of religious men and women seeking to take control of institutions, to be the principal or the director of a school, to be the administrator (in order not to relinquish control over money on the pretext that lay people cannot be trusted), or parish-priests who have a deep-rooted conviction of being the owners of the parish...

'MSFS, Wake up to the Basics' is the call of the General Chapter XX. We will continue to challenge ourselves with the need to go back to our roots. We have no future without touching base with our roots. Our future is in being deeply rooted in our spirituality and in our missionary dynamism.

6. DECISIONS, NEWS, AND EVENTS

A. Cause of beatification re-opened

On the afternoon of the 24th January 2017, Mgr. Yves BOIVINEAU, Bishop of Annecy, presided over the solemn Eucharist of St Francis de Sales, at the beginning of which he declared that the process of the Cause of beatification of Servant of God Peter MERMIER has

been opened again.

Mass was attended by a large group of faithful, among them many Sisters of the Cross Chavanod (along with their Provincial, Sister Maryline DARBELLAY), many Sisters of St Joseph Annecy and some parishioners of St James' parish, comprising Chaumont, the birthplace of Fr. MERMIER. Fr. Eric TRABOULGA, the parish priest of St James, was among the concelebrants.

After communion, Fr. Yves CARRON MSFS, Provincial, gave a vote of thanks to the Bishop for re-opening the Cause, and for the Visitation community who generously permitted that the mortal remains of Fr. MERMIER be buried in the crypta (along with the remains of Bishop PJ REY). The translation of the relics took place exactly 10 years ago.« Eglised'Annecy » (diocesan magazine) and the diocesan website echoed this particular celebration. (Fr. Yves CARRON MSFS, Postulator)

B. Provincial Curia of Southeast India Province

- **Fr. A. Santhiyagu:** Admonitor cum Councillor for Formation
- **Fr. J. B. John Thadews:** Councillor for Education
- **Fr. D. Kanikkai Nathan:** Councillor for of Mission
- **Fr. D. Amirtha Rajan:** Councillor for Social & Innovative Ministries
- **Fr. M. Nicholas:** Provincial Bursar

Congratulations to the new Team!

C. Provincial Curia of Northeast India Province

- **Fr. Philip Thomas Kizhakumpurath:** Admonitir and Councilor for Mission
- **Fr. George Vettukattil:** Councilor for Formation
- **Fr. George Poovathunkal:** Councilor for Education
- **Fr. Saji Puthiyakulangara:** Councilor for Social and Innovative Ministries
- **Fr. Santhosh Chavaranal:** Provincial Bursar

Congratulations to the new Team!

D. Director of De Sales and Mermier Resource Center, Hyderabad

- **Fr. Joseoh Thazhathukunnel** is appointed the Director of the De Sales and Mermier Resource Center with effect from May 01, 2017

- **Fr. Baviri Suresh Babu** is appointed the Assistant Director of De Sales and Mermier Resource Center

E. General Secretariat for Social Apostolates and Innovative Ministries

To respond to the clarion call of the Year of Education and Social Apostolate, the General Secretariat for the Social Apostolates and Innovative Ministries has already initiated the process of re-constituting and strengthening the Commission for Justice and Peace (Regional-India). This commission consists of **Fr. Sushant Mantri (Executive Chariman), Fr. KVS Prasad and Fr. Bosco P. (Joint Secretaries), Fr. Ignacimuthu K., Fr. Jerome A., and Fr. Mathew Vazheparambil (Executive Members and Advisors)**.

The vision of the commission is to work towards the Protection and promotion of human dignity and ecology, with a special focus on the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

The General Secretariat for SAIM is working on:

- Developing a Desktop Software/Application for facilitating a common database for the Congregation
- Creating a Forum of the MSFS-NGOs for the purpose of the networking of ministries
- Create a support system for all the confreres working in the Social and Innovative Ministries, and
- Preparing a Directory of the MSFS Social Initiatives and Achievements as a resource book on the Social Thrust of our Congregation

F. General Secretariat for Education

The General Secretariat for Education proposes the following Plan of Action during this year of Education Apostolate:

- At least one unit of Fransalian Youth (Youth wing of Friends of Fransalians) will be introduced in any of the schools in every province.
- Pro-poor policy in admissions to schools and education (Disadvantaged students will be helped).
- Go green & Go clean: by planting trees in the school campus and fashioning a plastic free school campus.
- Teachers will be informed on Fransalian vision and mission of Education in order to make them sharers of our education apostolate.

- Remedial classes for the weak students in the vicinity of the school/Spoken English classes for government school students and awareness program on the ill effects of junk food.

G. New Publications

- **Fr. Binu Edathumparambil** has published his second book, 'I AM WHO I AM: UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF GOD'. Congratulations to Fr. Binu for this outstanding work!
- **Fr. Jose Karipadathu** has compiled and edited 'A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE MSFS OF NORTHEAST INDIA PROVINCE', sharing the amazing 40 year-mission history of Northeast India Province. Congratulations to Fr. Joseph Karipadathu for this herculean task!

H. Prayer Tribute to our Great Missionaries

- **Fr. Simon William Rodrigues**, 62 years, Pune Province, died on January 17, 2017.
- **Fr. Camile Meynet**, 82 years, France-Suisse Province, died on January 23, 2017
- **Fr. George Nellikunnel**, 97 years, Vizag province, died on January 26, 2017
- **Fr. Zacharias Mannukuzhumpil**, 93 years, Vizag Province, died on January 26, 2017
- **Fr. Ephrem Velamparambil**, 79 years, Vizag Province, died on January 29, 2017

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord! Let perpetual light shine upon our beloved brothers!

"WHEN ALL SHALL FAIL US, THEN GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US, AND THEN ALL WILL NOT FAIL US SINCE WE SHALL HAVE GOD"

St. Francis de Sales

United with you dear Confreres in the Risen Lord and in St. Francis de Sales,

Live Jesus!

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General