

# CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



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

## **GENERAL CHAPTER XX**

**(FEBRUARY 01 - 13, 2019)**



257 DAYS TO GO

**at MSFS PROVINCIAL HOUSE,  
GUWAHATI, INDIA**

My dear Confreres:

I wish you a Happy Feast of Pentecost! The Paschal Mystery of Christ is brought to completion, fifty days after Easter Sunday, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and their followers.

On the day of Pentecost, we celebrate the birthday of the Church and of ours as well, as we are the body of Christ. We celebrate the beginning of the apostles' ministry 'to make disciples of all nations'. The heart of the great missionary commission of Christ is to 'make disciples' (Mt 28:19 – 20). The Holy Spirit builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church. 'The Holy Spirit enables us to turn to God in every situation, producing the fruit of holiness in our life' (*Gaudete et Exsultate no.15*).

## 1. FRANCIS AND FRANCIS: 'CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD'

**Pope Francis**, often called as a man of Vatican II, offers us inspirations on how to live our call to holiness in his apostolic exhortation, "*Gaudete et Exsultate*" (*Rejoice and be Glad*): *On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. **St. Francis de Sales**, in many ways, is said to have anticipated the deliberations and decisions of Second Vatican Council, with keen and progressive insights. He had taught that everyone, without exception, is called to be holy. As we read through *Gaudete et Exsultate (GE)*, we will see several connections and intersections between the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and the five chapters of *GE*. Both 'FRANCIS AND FRANCIS' offer us an opportunity to renew our efforts at growing in holiness in order to serve others. I invite us to spend some time to read and study *GE* in the context of our spirituality and our growth in holiness.

## II. 'HOLINESS DOES NOT MAKE YOU LESS HUMAN'

**Pope Francis**: The mission of every Christian is to grow in holiness in his or her own way. 'Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. This is not the case. We are called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves'. "*Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace*" (*GE 34*). "*This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures*" (*GE 16*).

**SFS**: In his *Intorduction to the Devout Life*, **Francis** offers profound guidance for the person living in the midst of the world and wishing to pursue a holy life. De Sales felt that all people, in all walks of life, are called by God to a devout life. He taught that living a devout and holy life was not only possible but practical. The genius of SFS was to realize that all are called to holiness (to grow in communion with God), each of us according to our individual position and state of life. The central theme of De Sales spirituality is devout humanism, spirituality of the heart, always respectful of humanity. The small gestures of holiness mentioned by Pope Francie mirror what SFS speaks about our own spiritual life 'as simply doing all we do out of the love of God'.

## III. TWO ENEMIES TO HOLINESS

**Holy Father** speaks of two enemies to holiness; they are the modern manifestations of two old heresies – **Gnosticism and Pelagianism**. The temptation to reduce Christian holiness to a set of abstract ideas detached from the flesh (modern Gnosticism) makes individuals "*incapable of touching Christ's suffering flesh in other, locked up as they are in an encyclopaedia of abstraction*" (*GE. 37*). The temptation to reduce salvation and holiness to our own power, success, and outward actions (modern Pelagianism) which lead individuals to feel "*superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style*" (*GE. 49*). *GE* alerts us of the dangers of these two temptations stating that knowledge and intellectual accomplishments should not eclipse our devotion (on the Gnostic side), and holiness must always be rooted in the Divine Life/Grace and not on our merits (on the Pelagian side).

**SFS** speaks of an exterior display of spirituality without inner transformation as an enemy of holiness.

The pursuit of holiness should transform our attitudes. This inner transformation of heart should ultimately point us toward being holy in the sense that God alone is sufficient for me and that I belong to Him completely and exclusively. When we discover that we belong to no one except to God and that only God's love can satisfy the deepest longings of our heart, we are on the road to holiness. SFS once wrote a letter to an exasperated and depressed soul who sought his holy counsel: *'God wants your misery to be the throne of His mercy. He desires that your powerlessness be the seat of His omnipotence'*.

#### IV. ROADMAP TO HOLINESS

**Pope Francis:** Holiness does not just involve prayer, but also by how much our life has been transformed and lived out in the light of mercy. *"Mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel"* (GE 97). Holiness therefore is 'being poor at heart, reacting with meekness and humility, knowing how to mourn with others, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love, sowing peace all round us, accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems'.

SFS is known for his pastoral method of *compassion toward sinners*. The *'little virtues'* of patience, humility, gentleness, simplicity, honesty, and hospitality are powerful salesian means to grow in holiness. Humility, which SFS acclaimed as the virtue of all virtues, seems to be taken up by Pope Francis with great importance when he says: *"If you are unable to suffer and offer up a few humiliations, you are not humble and you are not on the path to holiness. The holiness that God bestows on his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son. He is the way. Humiliation makes you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ"* (GE 118).

#### V. OUR JOURNEY IN COMMUNITY AS AN EXPRESSION OF HOLINESS

Pope Francis, while speaking of different expressions of holiness, mentions community life. In this **Year of Local Community 2018**, we are making conscious efforts to renew our sense of community life. Saint John of the Cross told one of his followers: *"You are living with others in order to be fashioned and tried"*.

Let me share with you what a Provincial once shared with me about the state of a religious community. He visited a religious community that had little life. It lacked energy in its liturgy. There was no common meal, no common prayer, and no common re-creation. Each one seemed to be busy with his own gadgets and engaged in his own 'ministry'. Ministries were not growing in that community. Apostolates maintained their status quo. Common meeting was practically non-existent. What to do with such a religious community? was the frustration of the Provincial. Where there is no striving for holiness, there is destruction, deterioration, and eventually spiritual death. The road to holiness is challenging.

#### VI. LEARNINGS FROM GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE FOR OUR GROWTH IN HOLINESS:

- *"Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others. ... Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth (GE 141)*
- *A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan (GE 145)*
- *Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community (GE 142)*
- *Living in community means living in such a way that others can access me and influence my life and that I can get "out of myself" and serve the lives of others.*

# DECISIONS – NEWS – EVENTS

## 1. YEAR OF LOCAL COMMUNITY – 2018

In this Year of Local Community, all the Provinces and administrative units in the Congregation have prepared a calendar of events for various programs to strengthen community life. All the Local Communities are to celebrate **October 24, 2018, the Day of the Foundation of the Congregation, as Community Day**. The day is to be marked with consecration of the community and other meaningful celebrations.

**Units of Fransalian Associates in all the Provinces** should be instructed to organize their community day either separately or in collaboration with the religious community of the MSFS

## 2. PREPARATION FOR GENERAL CHAPTER 2019

We are preparing for our 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter 2019 with special prayers and through our study and discussion of the Reflection Papers and Proposals in the Local Community and Apostolic Community. I appreciate your valuable proposals and suggestions for our deliberations in the General Chapter.

## 3. REGIONAL SUPERIOR OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

**Fr. Baiju Mundackal** is appointed the Regional Superior of the Southern African Region of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales under the Northeast India Province with effect from May 28, 2018

## 4. Fr. BABYCHAN ARACKATHARA

On behalf of the General Administration, I sincerely thank Fr. Babychan for his leadership and animation of the confreres in the Region during the past 6 years.

## 5. DELEGATION OF CHAD – CAMEROUN

Chad Cameroun Mission is established into a Delegation of the Southwest India Province in Africa. The Delegation will come into existence on the day Delegation Superior takes charge of his office

## 6. DELEGATION SUPERIOR OF THE PHILIPPINES

**Fr. Jose Kumbloickal** is appointed the Delegation Superior of the Philippines Delegation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales under the Southwest India Province with effect from June 03, 2018.

## 7. Fr. GINU PATHIYAKAM

On behalf of the General Administration, I sincerely thank Fr. Ginu for his leadership in animating the Delegation and in building up the Delegation especially with Formation Houses and a full-fledged formation program.

## 8. MSFS IN ECUADOR

At the invitation of Bishop Eugenio Arellano, Vicar Apostolic of Esmeraldas, an MSFS team from Pune Province, **Fr. Melchiades Fernandes, Fr. A. John Kennedy, and Fr. Adaikala Rajan, together with Fr. Jayseelan, Provincial of Pune Province**, will travel to Esmeraldas in Ecuador to explore and to establish an MSFS community there. I thank **Fr. Joseph Mullakkara** in Atlanta who will assist our confreres. I appreciate the efforts of Fr. Jayseelan, the Provincial, and his Administration for their initiative to venture into the Spanish speaking South American mission land. God bless our pioneering team!

## 9. MSFS IN MALAWI - AFRICA

Responding to the long time invitation from **Rt. Rev. Martin Anwel Mtumbuka**, the Bishop of Karonga diocese, Southeast India Province is making adequate preparations to open a new MSFS mission in Malawi. Two priest-confreeres and five scholastics have volunteered for the new mission and four new priests are designated to the African Mission this year. **Fr. Soosai Raj and Bro. L. Winner Raj** are already in the East Africa Province preparing for the new mission. I thank **Fr. Igancimuthu, the Provincial, and his Administration** for their initiative to take Southeast India Province to Malawi where we can implant the charism of our Congregation. God bless our pioneers!

## 10. MSFS IN SCHLANDERS, ITALY

At the invitation of the Capuchins in Schlanders, in the diocese of Bolzano in German speaking part of Italy, we will be opening a new MSFS community in their monastery, handed over to us. The monastery is given to the MSFS for use and possession for a stipulated period in view of full ownership in the future. The mission-vision of the Community is to provide a spiritual space for the faithful in their faith journey and to disseminate the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales. The Center will also be a Resource Center for the Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales with the possibilities for parish and pastoral ministry in the diocese of Bolzano. **Fr. Mathew Kozhuppakalam, Fr. Joseph Thazhathukunnel, and Fr. Johnson Pathiyil** will form the Local Community with assigned ministries. I thank **Fr. Kozhuppakalam** for his efforts to initiate a community-based ministry in Schlanders. God bless our new community!

## 11. MSFS MISSION IN INDONESIA

**Fr. George Parampukattil**, General Councilor, is currently in Indonesia to explore the possibility of launching our MSFS presence in the island of Flores, Indonesia, a predominantly Catholic island. He will visit with the Bishops of Ende and Larantuka dioceses and visit the Seminary of Divine Word Missionaries. We are grateful to the SVDs for their support and collaboration extended to us. I thank **Fr. Parampukattil** for undertaking this significant missionary journey to Indonesia, an island known for vocations to priesthood and religious life.

## 12. FRANSALIAN EDUCATION POLICY AND GUIDELINES – 2018

The new *Fransalian Education Policy and Guidelines 2018* was released at the conclusion of the Year of Education 2017 – 2018 in Hyderabad at the MSFS Education Conference organized by Fransalian Education Forum - Regional. I appreciate the hard work of **Fr. George Parampukattil**, the General Secretary for Education, and **his team** for preparing a common education policy and guidelines for the apostolate of education.

## 13. FRANSALIAN GRADED AND INTEGRAL FORMATION

The new document, *Fransalian Formation: Program of Studies, Syllabus, Curriculum*, is ready for use in the formation houses at different stages of formation. This Program aims at graded and integral formation (focus on formation of the heart) for the successive stages of formation beginning with vocation promotion. The detailed syllabus and curriculum for the orientation stage will be introduced in all the Formation Houses from this academic year 2018 – 2019. I thank **Fr. Noel Rebello**, the General Secretary for Formation, and **his entire team** for the enormous mission accomplished.

## 14. SALESIAN PROGRAM ANNECY (SPA) 2018

**SPA 2018** begins from **September 15 – October 31, 2018 in Annecy** and we have seven confreres participating from seven Provinces. After attending the Salesian Seminar in IIS Bangalore, confreres will have ten-day intensive orientation program animated by the

participants of SPA 2017 and coordinated by **Fr. Isaac John** at Nagpur Provincial House. I thank **Fr. Thumma Mariadas**, the Assistant General, for coordinating the dynamics of the Program and **Fr. Yves Carron** and his team for their inspiring ministry to our confreres.

#### **15. DE SALES AND MERMIER RESOURCE CENTER**

**DSM** Center in Hyderabad publishes literature on the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, Fr. Mermier, and on the heritage of the Congregation. **Fr. Joseph Thazhathukunnel and Fr. Suresh Babu** offer salesian animation program to the formation communities and Province communities especially on the Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales. You are welcome to invite them for animation program in the communities and Provinces. **DSM** Hyderabad is a Center where we collect all the published and unpublished books, theses, and other materials written by individual confreres in our Resource Center. **Please cooperate to provide a copy of your book, thesis, and/or any written material.**

#### **16. MISSION DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**

**MDO** of the Congregation is organizing a two - day meeting of Province **MDO** representatives on September 22 – 23, 2018 in Hyderabad. This meeting will evaluate the functioning of the Province **NGOs** and **MDOs** and will focus on the possibilities of the **MDO** in resource mobilization for the missions. The Province **MDO** representatives are: **Fr. Jaganathan Gnanadurai (Brazil), Fr. Boban Jose (Franco- Swiss), Fr. Jose Erianickal (East Africa Province), Fr. Jacob Karamakuzhyil (Nagpur), Fr. A. Nelson (Pune), Fr. Selvaraj (Southeast), Fr. Thomas Cherukat (Southwest), Fr. K.V.S. Prasad (Vizag), Fr. Saji Puthiyakulangara (Northeast), Fr. Joseph Mullakara (USA Vice Province).**

I appreciate the initiatives and efforts of **Fr. Thomas Chozhithara, the Director of MDO** in organizing this important meeting.

#### **17. FRANSALIAN ASSOCIATES**

**Fr. J. L. Ravi Kumar (Vizag), Fr. John Carvalho (Nagpur), Fr. Mario D'souza (Pune), Fr. Sudeep Paul (Southwest India) Fr. George Poovathunkal (Northeastast India), Fr. Sheen P. Singh (Southeast India), Fr. R. Sebastian Williams (East Africa), and Fr. Jose Freitas (Brazil) are appointed Province Coordinators of Fransalian Associates.** I request the Coordinators to officially constitute **FRANSALIAN ASSOCIATES** and prepare them for the Community Day on October 24, 2018.

#### **18. JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSIONERS**

**Fr. Saji George Puthiakulangara (Northeast India), Fr. R. Sebastian Williams (East Africa), Fr. G. John Paul (Pune), Fr. K.V.S Prasad (Vizag), Fr. P. Bosco (Nagpur), Fr. A. Jerome (Southwest India), Fr. Ignaci Muthu (Southeast India), and Fr. Benedict Anthonysamy (Brazil) are appointed J&P Commissioners.** **Fr. Agnelo Fernandes**, the General Secretary for Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries, will be guiding them through the upcoming meeting of the Commissioners.

#### **19. VICE PROMOTERS FOR THE CAUSE OF FR. MERMIER**

**Fr. Suresh Babu (Vizag), Fr. Issac John (Nagpur), Fr. Mario D'souza (Pune), Fr. Sudeep Paul (Southwest India) Fr. Francis PM (North east India), Fr. Sheen P. Singh (Southeast India), Fr. R. Sebastian Williams (East Africa), and Fr. Agnaldo Costa (Brazil) are appointed Vice - Promoters for the Cause of Fr. Mermier from the Provinces.** I request the Vice Promoters to print the prayer card for the cause of Fr. Mermier in the local languages used in the Provinces and distribute them for the use of the faithful. A word of introduction to the Local Bishop on this matter will be important.

## 20. PRAYERFUL TRIBUTE TO OUR CONFRERES

- Fr. André KIEFFER (95), of Franco-Suisse province, died on January 08, 2018
- Fr. O. V. ZACHERIAS (92) of Southwest India Province, died on January 09, 2018.
- His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. K. MARIADAS, (82), of Visakhapatnam Province, died on February 26, 2018
- Fr. S. PILAVENDRAN (44), of Southeast India province died on March 22, 2018
- Fr. Thomas ILLIKKATTIL (73) of Southwest India Province died on March 24, 2018
- Bro. Jacob VATTACHIRA, (84) of Vizag Province, died on April 09, 2018

*Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord,  
May perpetual light shine upon them, May they rest in peace!*

### PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT:

*O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.*

United with you in Christ, our Lord, and in St. Francis de Sales!

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvilil, MSFS  
Superior General

**“Do everything calmly and peacefully.  
Do as much as you can as well as you can.  
Strive to see God in all things without exception,  
and consent to His will joyously.  
Do everything for God, uniting yourself  
to Him in word and in deed.  
Walk very simply with the Cross of the Lord  
and be at peace with yourself”.**



**ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**