

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)



184 DAYS TO GO

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

My dear Confreres:

Grace and peace to all of you!

As we are coming close to our 20th Ordinary General Chapter 2019, I invite us to reflect on this 'most important event in the life of the Congregation'.

1. AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

“The General Chapter is the supreme legislative and teaching authority in the Congregation” (MSFS Const. no. 191). General Chapters, before Vatican II, were often Chapters for the election of the Superior General and the Curia. Since Vatican II, General Chapter of a Religious Congregation is one of the principal means of **RENEWAL**. “It functions as an agent of systematic planning for the effective carrying out of the **mission of the Church, in willing obedience to her teachings and fidelity to the Charism of our Congregation**” (MSFS Const. no. 191).

Pope Paul VI, in his address to the General Chapters of Religious Congregation on May 23, 1964, stated: “... *the principal task of the General Chapter is, as time goes on, to keep intact those norms of the Religious family which were set up by its Founder and Lawgiver. ... For Religious Institutes will flourish and prosper so long as the integral spirit of their Founder continues to inspire their rule of life and apostolic works, as well as the actions and lives of their members*”.

- General Chapter reviews how members live the norms and charism set in motion by our Founder
- General Chapter calls us to be faithful to the spirit and vision of the Founder
- Growth of the Congregation is to be evaluated in relation to our fidelity to the spirit and charism of the Founder

2. FIDELITY TO THE CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER

Renewal of our consecrated life, as Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, depends on our fidelity to the spiritual heritage of our Congregation, fidelity to our Founder and his vision, and fidelity to our CHARISM.

What is MSFS Charism? Our Charism is to live in a Religious Community in order to continue the missionary task of the Church and to live the spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales (Constitutions: Prologue no. C and Article 7). Therefore, our Charism indicates Community Life, Mission, MSFS ness, and Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, as the four basics of MSFS way of life. These basics have their source in our charism.

Father Mermier chose to express this CHARISM through the *Apostolate of Renewal of Christian Faith through Parish Mission Preaching, Apostolate Overseas and Pioneering Evangelization, and Apostolate of Education and Formation, especially of the young* (cf. MSFS Const. 22). We can call them our Foundational Apostolates because they were first chosen at the time of the foundation of the Congregation. Of all the foundational apostolates, the primordial apostolate is Parish Mission Preaching, which Fr. Mermier started in the context of his time in the post- French revolution period. **Our foundational apostolates are not our charism but they are means of expressing our charism.**

- Charism of our Founder gives us the FOUR BASICS of our MSFS way of life as consecrated religious
- How important is it to have a clear understanding of our charism?

3. CHARISM IS THE SOUL OF THE CONGREGATION

Fr. Peter Mermier, our Founder, launched into Parish Mission Preaching to renew the faith of the people, shattered by the French Revolution. Grippled by the spirituality and pastoral approach of St. Francis de Sales, Fr. Mermier founded the Religious Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, fully dedicated to mission and to form the missionaries. He believed that Parish Mission Preaching was the only way to reform the parishes and to renew the faith of the people.

Charism is a gift from the Holy Spirit to serve God's People and to build up and renew the Body of Christ. Our MSFS charism is a particular gift of the Spirit that inspired our Founder with a vision. He then gathered a band of preachers to help turn that vision into action. Our early history testifies that the primary and primordial apostolate of Preaching Parish Mission (PMP) is the base on which our Congregation stands to express our charism. Every effort at renewal of our consecrated life, through the General Chapter, can only be a return to our primary and primordial apostolate, and thus a re-foundation.

The charism of a Congregation is the source of its vitality, inspiration, and motivation.

- Charism is the lens through which we focus to serve the world and the mission of the Church
- Charism guides the Congregation as it makes decisions about its mission and its future.
- Charism involves the history of the Congregation, with its traditions, rule of life, apostolate, spirituality, and heritage, which makes it what it is.
- What does it mean today to return to the Basics?

4. 'MSFS, WAKE UP TO THE BASICS'

Vatican II invited Religious Congregations to resonate with the charism of the Founder and the spiritual heritage of the Congregation with hearts and minds open to the needs of the People. *Perfectae Caritatis*, one of the shortest documents of Vatican Council II, endorses the renewal of each religious institute through the members studying the original vision of the Founder/Foundress. “**MSFS, Wake up to the Basics**”, the theme of our upcoming General Chapter, echoes the call of Vatican Council II, “**Return to the Sources**”.

Our Returning to the Sources and our 'waking up to the Basics', with the rich legacy and heritage of our Founder and Founding Fathers, definitely take us to our primary and primordial apostolate for which Fr. Mermier founded the Congregation.

However, we see an imbalance between our primordial apostolate and our present apostolates. There is an imbalance between the number of confreres engaged in Parish Mission Preaching, Pioneering Overseas Evangelization, and the number of confreres engaged in Education and other apostolates. This situation obliges us to discern our basics with tough questions: Where we are going? And where do we want to go? These questions should help us place ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to move toward the reality of consecrated life, shaped and nurtured for us by Fr. Mermier.

- How is our charism inspiring our apostolates?
- How is the spirit of Fr. Mermier guiding our decisions?

5. RENEWAL THROUGH FIDELITY TO CHARISM

Yearning for a renewal will not necessarily transform us. Only renewed efforts to fidelity to the charism can do it. We cannot hold on to institutionalized apostolates, without a serious regard for fidelity to the charism of the Founder, while all the time declaring that we want something new to happen in our consecrated life or renewal to take place

Very often, Religious Congregations becomes rigid, institutionalized, insensitive, and impersonal. They urgently need to be revived, reformed, and renewed. When religious life becomes mechanical and institutionalized more than a spiritual movement, it is a warning that it has to shake off the institutional calcifications in order to continue evolving as a living movement. Any religious congregation flourishes when the spirit of the founder with his/her charism continues to motivate the apostolates and the lives of its members.

6. DANGER TODAY

Religious life is experiencing great changes right now. We cannot just look at the externals and say that our numbers are going up, our ministries are expanding, our institutions have multiplied, we are in almost 30 countries in the world, we have prestigious educational institutions, and so on. In the history of religious life without fidelity to the charism and vision of the Founder, these externals show worldly arrogance, gradual inertia, infectivity and finally decadence.

There was a time when priests and religious needed schools, colleges, hospitals, and social work projects to serve people in their needs. Service to the people of God, with the spirit of the Gospel and the charism of the founder, was the motivating force. Religious Congregations have done a good job in establishing institutions and institutionalized ministries. But times have changed. We are no more the same. Profit and Income seem to replace the charism and the proclamation of the Word.

God is inviting us to do something. One of the challenges in the General Chapter 2019 is to give enough time and space to discern and develop a vision in agreement with the charism and vision of the Founder, reading the signs of the times. This requires a contemplative attitude, not a calculative attitude that seeks profit, prestige, income, and comfort.

This is a discerning time. This is the call of the General Chapter. The dwindling number of vocations, increasing number of retiring confreres in the next 10 years, the increasing number of departures by way of dispensation, exclaustation, and excardination, and the declining number of ordinations every year, compel us to discern how to renew our apostolates and our life in fidelity to our charism.

DECISIONS, NEWS, AND EVENTS

FR. P. CHINNAPPA REDDY

After having consulted with the confreres of Visakhapatnam Province and with the consent of the General Council, I am glad to appoint Fr. P. Chinnappa Reddy as the Provincial of Visakhapatnam Province for a second term with effect from July 03, 2018.

PARISH MISSION PREACHING AND TRAINING PROGRAM

The third PMP Training Seminar will be held from November 12 – 17 at Charis Bhavan, Kerala. There will be a retreat on the “Charisms of the Holy Spirit” for 33 participants from different Provinces

MSFS PARISH MISSION PREACHING MANUAL

The final draft of the revised and adapted module for Parish Mission Preaching is ready to be published for implementation, *ad experimentum*. This module can be further adapted to the situation in Africa, USA, Australia, the Philippines and other countries, wherever MSFS are in ministry. On behalf of the entire Congregation, I place on record and congratulate the entire Committee, under the leadership of Fr. Agnelo Fernandes (General Secretary for Mission), consisting of Fr. Jean Paul Fournier, Fr. Jose Parappillil, Fr. Reji K. Mani, and Fr. A Jeyakumar for the excellent job in accomplishing a historic and ground breaking work for the foundational apostolate of the Congregation.

CONGREGATIONAL RETREAT IN PREPARATION FOR GC 2019

The Congregational Retreat 2017-18 has been presented to the entire Congregation in preparation for the General Chapter 2019. The retreat has been a powerful experience for the confreres. It is almost coming to an end. Please make sure you make use of this opportunity for renewal in the spirit of our Founder.

On behalf of the all the confreres, I thank Fr. Thumma Mariadas Reddy, the Assistant General, and the Core Team - consisting of Fr. Mario D'Souza, (Convener), Fr. Binu Edathumpambil, Fr. Francis Thadathil, Fr. Suresh Babu, Fr. Austin K.S., Fr. Joby Kurikilamkattu, and Fr. Stephen Avlu - for their organization, scheduling, and presentation of the retreat to all the administrative units of the Congregation.

PRE - SPIRITUALITY PROGRAM ANNECY (SPA) 2018

A ten-day Pre-SPA Orientation Program is organized for the 7 participants of the second batch of SPA at MSFS Provincial House in Nagpur. Fr. Isaac John and the participants of the last years' SPA will animate this preparatory Program.

JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSIONERS MEET

The commissioners of Justice and Peace Commission and other representatives from all the Provinces in India will meet at MSFS Provincial House, Trichy from August 25 – 28, 2018. This

meeting will work on the opportunities and possibilities for MSFS J&P Commission to commit ourselves as a Congregation/Province on matters of Justice and Peace, Integrity of Creation, and preferential option for the poor.

A FILM ON ST. FRANCIS DE SALES: 'ALL BY LOVE'

On the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis de Sales, the Parish of St. Francis de Sales in the Diocese of Annecy France (Francis' native place), produced a film on the story of his life in the very places it occurred. This contemporary stage performance, “**ALL BY LOVE**”, by the parishioners depicts the relevance of the salesian values in today's world. Congratulations to Fr. Viju and the Parish Community for this great performance.

Fr. Viju writes from Thorens: “We would like to propose you a maximum of 5 DVDs for free (including the film and the show). If you are interested in receiving more DVDs, please feel free to contact us. In any case, please email to stfrancoisdesalesthorens@gmail.com, and indicate the number of DVDs you would like to receive and your postal address”.

NEWLY PROFESSED CONFRERES

We are glad to have 58 newly professed confreres in the Congregation in 2018 from 6 novitiates. We welcome them all to the next stage of their formation. We thank God for them, pray for them, and congratulate them on their first religious profession. Welcome aboard!

I join all of you in gratitude for all the blessings of the Lord and the gift of light with which the Lord graciously enriches us in our journey as MSFS,

Live Jesus!

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General

Don't sow your desires in someone else's garden; just cultivate your own as best you can; don't long to be other than what you are, but desire to be thoroughly what you are. Direct your thoughts to being very good at that and to bearing the crosses, little or great, that you will find there. Believe me, this is the most important and least understood point to the spiritual life. We all love according to what is our taste; few people like what is according to their duty or to God's liking. What is the use of building castles in Spain when we have to live in France?



ST. FRANCIS DE SALES