

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 a Merry Christmas, a Blessed and a Joyful New Year 2019! We thank God for all the blessings on our Congregation and we wait to see in faith and hope what He has in store for us in 2019. May God be praised!

GENERAL CHAPTER XX (FEBRUARY 01 – 13, 2019)



37 DAYS TO GO

at MSFS PROVINCIAL HOUSE,
GUWAHATI, INDIA

Christmas invites us to take time from busy schedule to visit the divine babe in the manger and reflect on our life and apostolate in the light of God becoming human and entering into human history.

1. How did God step into human history in Bethlehem?

The Son of God physically appeared in human history as helpless, homeless, and poorest of the poor. St. Luke tells us: “In a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes” Luke. 2: 12. The shepherds were the first ones to receive the message that the Son of God entered into human history. They were the first ones to see the Good News that became flesh. God sent the message about Jesus' birth, first of all, to people on the periphery, the poor and the rejected.

Shepherds were almost like the outcasts in the society at the time of Jesus. They lived a difficult life, spending their time in the countryside, sleeping outdoors, but protecting their sheep. They were not well- educated, not well-mannered, not wealthy, and not important people. But they were the ones to receive the Good News for the first time. This is how God acted at the birth of Jesus. God acted in human history by entering into the periphery of Bethlehem.

2. Why is Pope Francis speaking so much about going to the periphery?

Pope Francis follows up on the way God has acted in human history. During the Christmas vigil mass last year, Holy Father urged Roman Catholics not to ignore the plight of millions of migrants 'driven from their land'. They are like Mary and Joseph who traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem but found no place to stay. Defense of migrants and homeless poor is the trademark of Francis' papacy.

Church celebrates 33rd Sunday of the Ordinary time as the World Day of the Poor. This year, on November 18th, after celebrating mass with the poor at St. Peter's Basilica, Holy Father shared lunch with 1500 homeless people. On his 82nd birthday he hosted a party for sick children. Pope Francis regularly visits the peripheries of Rome; the poor suburbs, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, prisons, facilities for migrants and refugees. He often talks about the need for the Church to move to what he calls the peripheries and margins. This is how God acted on first Christmas night. This is how Jesus invites us to continue the mission of the Church. Today, Pope Francis is energizing the Church to embrace the periphery and margins.

3. How is “embracing the periphery” resonating in our Congregation today?

- At the brink of our General Chapter 2019, it is relevant to ask, what does it mean for MSFS to embrace the periphery? How is Pope Francis' call echoing in our consecrated and missionary life? This call to embrace the periphery is a Christo-centric call. The word 'periphery' does not appear in the Scriptures at all. However, the Bible is replete with the theme of periphery. God calls those who believe in him to 'go forth'. God called Abraham to set out for a new land. “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12: 1-3). God called Moses: “Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people out of Egypt” (Exodus 3: 17). God called Jeremiah: To whomever I send you, you shall go” (Jeremiah 1:7). Jesus commissioned his apostles: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations” Mathew 28:19). The call to leave security and comfort behind and to 'go forth' to the peripheries of human experience is the mission of the Church today.

- The word “peripheries”, popularized by Pope Francis, gives us a window into the Holy Father’s vision for the modern world and his vision for the mission of the Church. He convinced his fellow cardinals with his powerful words at the conclave (2013) to select him as the Pope. He said: “The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.”
- The peripheries are geographical and sociological. We see these places in the map where people live in neglect, poverty, exploitation, and injustice. These are the places we are ashamed of entering into. These are places we do not like to go or even resist to go when asked. These are places where people are wounded and feel their life has no meaning. These are existential peripheries where men and women are caught up in the web of sin and addiction. These are places that are de-Christianized and where there is no one to bring Jesus and his mercy. These peripheries are growing and this is our mission territory today. Of course, we have parishes, schools, and ministries in the peripheries. But we can do better and we are called to do more. This is the challenge of Christmas.
- For us, Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, embracing the periphery is part of our history and heritage. In St. Francis de Sales, we have a saint who volunteered into the periphery of Chablais. No one offered to go except Francis, the newly ordained priest, to work in the difficult mission. We should not be surprised that there will not be volunteers or there will be resistance to go to the difficult missions and the peripheries. Fr. Mermier realized the difference between pastors and missionaries. He resigned from his parochial ministry to go the periphery of the diocese with his ministry of renewal of faith. For him, the greatest poverty is not to know God, not to experience his tender mercy and His beautiful plan of love for our lives. He initiated Parish Mission Preaching and he valued the vocation of a missionary in esteem. He said: “Who can understand the excellence of the vocation of a missionary. ... A religious congregation is necessary to form the missionaries”. That was the birth of our Congregation.
- Will we go to the peripheries where we are most needed? That's what God did at Christmas. What would it take for us to place the geographical and sociological periphery at the center of our apostolates? Are we doing enough for the people in the periphery in our Provinces and Congregation? Can we do more and better? What is our commitment to the poor, people in the periphery and the margins? These are questions to be reflected upon and acted upon also in our General Chapter. In these matters of commitment to the periphery, pronouncement of principles and mere action plans of the Congress/Chapter serve very little purpose.

DECISIONS, NEWS, AND EVENTS

1. PREPARATION FOR THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Members of the Pre-Capitular Commission are working hard on all the details of the General Chapter that is scheduled to begin from February 01, 2019. Let us continue to pray for this congregational event.

2. Fr. BENNY KOOTTANAL:

After having consulted with the confreres of Southwest India Province and with the consent of the General Council, I am glad to appoint Fr. Benny Koottanal as the Provincial Superior of Southwest India Province for a second term with effect from January 24, 2019. Good wishes and prayers!

3. Fr. MANOJARACKAL

Fr. Manoj is appointed the Delegation Superior of Chad Cameroon Mission for a term of three years with effect from September 29, 2018. Good wishes and prayers!

4. FR. EMILE MAYORAZ

Fr. Mayoraz is transferred to an assisted living facility, Les Bonnesfontaines, not far from our community in Bonlieu. He is adjusting well to the new environment and keeping stable health. We hold him close to our prayers.

5. NEW MISSION IN MALAWI

Three of our confreres from Southeast India Province, **Fr. Soosai Raj, Fr. Anantharaj, and Fr. Nelson**, are already in Karonga diocese preparing to take up Livingstonia mission in March 2019. **Fr. Arockia Doss, Fr. Berin, and Fr. Sathish Kumar** are working in East Africa Province, immersing themselves into African culture and life, but will join the Malawi mission later. Four scholastics, Bros. Winner, Jerald, Adaikalam, and Marshal will undergo their formation program in Tanzania and will also join Malawi mission in future. God bless our young missionaries!

6. NEW MISSION IN ECUADOR

Fr. Melky Fernandes, Fr. John Kennedy, and Fr. Adaikalarajan from Pune Province will be leaving for Ecuador on January 08, 2019 to launch into the new mission in the Apostolic Vicariate of Esmeraldas, Ecuador. God bless our new mission and the pioneers into Ecuador, a gateway to the Spanish-speaking world!

7. MSFS TO FLORES ISLAND, INDONESIA

At the invitation of Bishop of Larantuka, Bishop Fransiscus Kopang Kung, Fr. Thomas Perumalil and Fr. Ananda Prasad, along with Fr. Chinnappa Reddy, the Provincial, made an exploratory visit to Larantuka, in Flores Island. Bishop has cordially welcomed the MSFS offering two parishes with special focus on family apostolate and youth animation. Provincial has positively responded to take up the mission early 2019. God bless our mission in Indonesia!



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MSFS takes the Church to the periphery!
MSFS - MASSAI MISSION,
pioneered by Fr. Mathew Chavelil,
brings Jesus to the people.

The Son of God entered into
human history as helpless, homeless,
poor - poorest of the poor.
God entered into the periphery in Bethlehem.



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND BLESSED 2019!

LIVE JESUS

Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS, Superior General, Rome

Requesting your prayers for the General Chapter 2019.

Fraternally in Christ,

Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General



In a Christmas sermon, Francis de Sales remarked:

“What else have we to say except that the mystery of Our Lord's Nativity is also the mystery of the Visitation. Just as the most holy Virgin was to visit her cousin Elizabeth, we, too, must go very often to visit the Divine Babe lying in the manger. There we shall learn from the sovereign Pastor of shepherds to direct, to govern and to put our flocks in order in such a way that they will be pleasing to His goodness. But as the shepherds doubtless did not go to Him without bringing Him some little lambs, we must not go there empty-handed, either. We must bring Him something. What can we bring to this Divine Shepherd more pleasing than the little lamb which is our love and which is the principal part of our spiritual flock? For love is the first. This special gift is the grace which helps us to attain what would otherwise be impossible for us: the joy and happiness of glory. Thus, in the darkness of the night Our Lord was born and appeared to us as an infant lying in a manger...” (Sermons for Advent and Christmas, p. 53)