



CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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

My dear Confreres:

I greet you in the joy of the risen Lord whose resurrection contains the vital power that permeates this world. We see around us darkness, injustice, persecution, violence, killings, cruelty, and indifference. We are challenged to find our hope in the Easter message that something new always springs to life and produces fruit sooner or later. We are to remind ourselves that our God is able to turn our Good Fridays into Easter Sundays.

1. **‘WE ARE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES’**

The post-resurrection experience of the disciples was a missionary experience. The disciples of Jesus are no longer stuck in Galilee but they get scattered all over the world, proclaiming the good news of the resurrection and new life in Christ Jesus. *“... Anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries” but rather that we are always “missionary disciples” (**Evangelii Gaudium**).* How do you see yourself as a missionary disciple?

2. **OUR CONSECRATED LIFE FOR MISSION**

Our celebration of Year 2015 as Year of Consecrated Life for Mission is opening up new approaches and efforts in all the Provinces and Units of our Congregation for an effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom. *“If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our conscience, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and goal in life” (**Evangelii Gaudium**).* Let us search our hearts and minds for what we truly care about.

3. DO OUR DECISIONS – AT INDIVIDUAL, LOCAL COMMUNITY, PROVINCE COMMUNITY AND CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL – REVEAL WHO WE ARE AND OUR CHARISM?

Our value system underlies every decision we make individually or collectively. When a Province's or Congregation's policies are dominated by economic considerations then those responsible for the decisions, whether aware of it or not, are caught up in idolatry. The highest good has become the economy, profit, comforts, security, and money. The policy has no regard for the sacred, the charism, the mission, the poor, and the infinite worth of every human being. As human beings we all do worship and the choice for us - as Jesus put it - is God or mammon. Spirituality is concerned with this choice we make every day. In every decision, we choose God or mammon. How can we find in our individual and collective decisions missionary opportunities to live our charism and spirituality as given by Fr. Mermier and St. Francis de Sales?

4. RESOURCE-BASE ON FR. MERMIER IN THE YEAR FOR MISSION

Fr. Noel Rebello, General Secretary for Formation, - in collaboration with the Inter Province Team of Animators from the Indian Provinces - has compiled inputs on the twelve themes of the Year of Consecrated Life for Mission, Fr. Mermier on Mary, Mission Year Monthly Recollections, Pope Francis on various themes of Consecrated Life and Mission, and MSFS Year of Consecrated Life and Mission and its Objectives (PowerPoint Presentation).

A **Mermier Heritage Week** is in plan at the Inter Province Level in India sometime during the Year 2015. I encourage all the Provinces to make use of the services of the Animators for on-going formation on our missionary life, charism and mission of the Congregation. On behalf of the entire Congregation, I thank Fr. Noel and his collaborators for their research and contributions by providing us valuable materials for our use. I invite Major Superiors and Superiors of Mission Units to make use of the materials in your Provinces and communities.

5. LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE, ARUSHA

Students of LCI are affiliated to DeSales University in Allentown, Pennsylvania, USA and they will receive Bachelor's Degree from DeSales University from Year 2016. On March 11, 2015 Dr. Brian M. Kane wrote from De Sales University:

“I am pleased to inform you, and the staff at the Lumen Christi Institute, that the Middle State Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), our accrediting body, has approved the addition of LCI to our accreditation, effective 15 June 2015. After that date, we may enroll the Students of LCI in DeSales University”.

I congratulate the Staff and Students of LCI for their hard work and achievement. I place on record the efforts and enthusiasm of **Fr. Thomas Kochalumchuvattil**, the Dean and the Rector, who persistently worked on the details of the Project.

6. ADMINISTRATOR OF ENGLISH PROVINCE

Fr. Terry McGrath appointed the Administrator of the English Province with effect from January 25, 2015 for a period of 6 months. **Fr. Sunny Paul** will serve as the Advisor to the Administrator. The appointment of the Administrator is in the context of further discernment for the vision and mission of the Province.

7. NEW BASE FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT IN SECUNDERABAD

It has been a long cherished desire to have a base for the General Secretariat in India. Different options were tried out with advantages and disadvantages. However, the need to have a permanent base for the General Secretaries with office facilities, boarding and lodging, resource center, community house for the General Curia, and a common house for small group meetings at the Congregational level, remained strong. We are blessed by God to have found an affordable house in Secunderabad, a city well connected and accessible to all the Provinces almost from an equal distance. The deal is in progress, God-willing, the registration will take place soon. God's delays are not denials. I thank **Fr. George Parampukattil**, General Secretary for Education, who has been instrumental in identifying this beautiful house and in working on the deal and registration.

8. SUPERIOR GENERAL'S VISITATION TO GAH AND FRANCO-SWISS PROVINCE

I begin my visitation to our confreres in Austria, Germany, Holland, and Switzerland and then to the Franco-Swiss Province from April 10 – May 09, 2015. I thank **Fr. Silvester** for planning the visitation in GAH in such a way that I am able to meet our confreres in GAH personally and in Local Communities. Visitation to the confreres in Franco Swiss Province will conclude with a meeting of the Confreres of the Province in Major Apostolates with the General Curia followed by the meeting of the Provincial Curia with the General Curia. I thank **Fr. Yves Carron**, the Provincial, for making arrangements for the visitation and for the series of meetings in Annecy in May 2015.

9. WUG MEETING AND SEVENTH GENERAL CURIA MEETING IN ANNECY

Major Superiors of Western Provinces, USA, Brazil, and Coordinator of GAH will meet with the General Curia in Annecy from May 12 – 15 to report, to evaluate and to plan out the Major Apostolates in the Provinces in the spirit of the General Chapter 2013. The meeting will explore the possibilities of thinking congregationally and of sharing available human resources for global mission. The Seventh General Curia Meeting will follow immediately after the WUG meeting from May 16 – 21, 2015.

10. CONGREGATIONAL RETREAT 2014-2015: FOLLOW UP

We have almost succeeded to make the Congregational Retreat available to all the confreres in the Congregation. The retreat was well received by the majority of confreres who have responded positively to the outcome of the retreat. There are confreres who have not still participated in this Congregational exercise. I

strongly appeal to their MSFS-ness to have this retreat experience as a sign of belongingness to the Congregation and its vision for the future at your earliest convenience. If not possible to join a group, you are requested to do a directed retreat with anyone of the retreat team.

The suggestions and shared thoughts gathered in the small group-sharing during the retreat are collated and it will be studied by the retreat team to provide a follow up for the Congregational retreat. I thank **Fr. Agnelo Fernandes, Fr. P. M. Joseph, and Fr. John Karondukadavil** for the excellent ministry rendered to the confreres in the Congregation. I appreciate their willingness to work together for a follow up to the retreat. My sincere appreciation and thanks go to the members of the General Curia and other Confreres who have animated the retreat in different Provinces and Units.

11. 'MSFS PROFILES: CORE IDENTITY OF A FRANSALIAN IN MINISTRY'

This booklet, soon to be released, is the outcome of a series of dialogue and discernment on what is really important to us. General Chapter 2013 proposed to evolve and implement the Profile of a 'MSFS Parish' and 'MSFS Parish Priest'. We have worked out a PROFILE not only for MSFS Parish and Pastor but also for MSFS FORMATORS, MSFS EDUCATORS, MSFS IN SOCIAL AND INNOVATIVE MINISTRY and MSFS STEWARDS. What is expected of me by the Congregation and the Church in and through given-ministry in the mission of the Lord? How can I be faithful and productive in my ministry of the Lord without compromising on what matters most? Profiles can help us in answering these questions.

We should not set up our profiles based on what others think or what we ourselves think we should be doing. Our profiles for various pastoral ministries should spring from our values based on the Good News, our Constitutions, our charism and our spirituality. **MSFS PROFILES**, provided in the booklet, give us a visual perspective of our ministry so that we can catch the vision and keep that vision. These profiles, I believe, will help every MSFS to share and live the vision of the Church and the charism of our Founder and grow into our core identity. I thank all the Province Forums for their contribution and the General Secretaries and General Bursar for their animation to evolve the PROFILE. My special thanks go to **Fr. Jayseelan**, General Secretary for Social Apostolate Innovative Ministries, and **Fr. Tom Kanat** for the presentation of the booklet.

12. PRAYERFUL TRIBUTE TO BRO. LAZARUS KARAKUNNEL (84) WHO HAS GONE TO HIS ETERNAL REWARD ON MARCH 29, 2015

13. REPORT ON THE VISITATION OF SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE ENGLISH PROVINCE (JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 01, 2015)

A. DYNAMICS

I had the opportunity to meet with **fifteen confreres** of whom **eight** are members of the Province and **seven** are confreres (**2 confreres at the service of the mission of the Province plus 5 confreres studying while engaged in pastoral ministry belonging to their own respective Provinces in India**) serving in different parishes. Besides personal meeting, we had 5 days of Congregational retreat with 11 participants. The retired confreres could not be present due to health reasons. Retreat was a great opportunity to live together, pray together, discern together, and deepen our belongingness to the Congregation through intense reflection and salesian devotions. The group work and sharing during the retreat helped us in our soul-searching to realize the need for a vision and direction for the Province community. Some of the confreres shared their concerns and suggestions through personal sharing while some confreres gave in writing what they think as urgent need for the Province community.

B. HIGHLIGHTS

- An opportunity to meet with all the confreres including the three retired confreres, and one confrere on leave of absence
- Celebrating the Eucharist with the Confreres and spending time before the blessed sacrament during the retreat days
- Connecting and exploring with confreres ways of building up the Province in the true spirit of the MSFS constitutions, General Directory, and in the spirit of the directives of the General Chapter
- Listening to the valuable suggestions of confreres for the future, who spoke with clarity and power, based on their vast experience and interest in the mission of the Congregation
- Using the group work during the retreat days for grappling with our MSFS identity as a Province community and grounding ourselves in our identity through sharing in the Founder's charism and living the Patron's spirituality
- Our retired confreres expressed their contentment and satisfaction over their accomplishments and struggles and they cherish the memories of their ministry

C. BLESSINGS OF THE PROVINCE

- MSFS had a glorious past in English Province with great men who made a deep spiritual impact in the Church and in the hearts of People
- The historical parishes of the MSFS in England and the life witnesses and contributions of the Missionaries still remain glowing in the hearts of senior citizens of the parishes

- The opening of the American Mission by the English Province paved the way for the USA Vice Province
- The present Confreres of the Province still feel hopeful and challenged to offer their best to the People of God in England
- MSFS charism is relevant in the English soil and is the need of the hour for the Catholic Church in England (preaching parish mission and retreat ministry for renewal of faith are identified as relevant ministries)
- Confreres feel determined to continue their ministries in the historical MSFS parishes
- Desire to continue as a Province and give another concerted effort to move on with a clear vision and goal
- Most of the Confreres are appreciated by the people of the parish and the Bishops of the dioceses for their ministries and leadership in the Parishes
- Though small, the Province continues to radiate MSFS charism in a unique way

D. SETBACK IN THE PROVINCE

- Indifference to principles of religious and community life, lack of Local Community with a Local Superior, and no regular community meetings for a long period of time have led to the present style of functioning and disunity
- The Province needs to apply the norms and principles of religious life as laid down in the Constitutions and General Directory instead of haggling with conflicts and personal differences and failures
- Confreres caught up in parochial ministry seem to hide MSFS ness and Charism of the Founder in the busy-ness of the Parish life without quality time for MSFS way of life
- One Confrere is already incardinated to a Diocese while another confrere is seeking exclaustation in view of incardination
- Two confreres are not yet regularized in their status as one is under leave of absence for a consecutive period of 3 years while another confrere is staying outside community without any juridical status
- Sudden departure of young confreres in the Province and loss of Hampton Hill Parish have weakened the morale of the Province community
- Province does not have a Financial Accountability Structure in place resulting in non – transparency and lack of mutual trust; the consequences are disturbing. The situation needs immediate attention
- Lack of understanding and clarity for the English Province about those confreres from other Provinces studying and engaged in pastoral ministry in the Province territory
- Lack of connectivity and belongingness for the members to the Province and to the Congregation, and the Province is not supported financially by the earning confreres as per the norms and principles agreed upon

- A general feeling that Province is not growing and Confreres are not growing in their call and identity
- Confreres expressed that they do not have anything of their own to project their MSFS identity and visibility
- Past wounds and hurts standing on the way to fraternity and community spirit
- Lack of direction and vision for the Province has resulted in Province maintenance rather than Province growth
- Sense of moving in a circle and not reaching anywhere, and an experience of no growth as a Province and as MSFS

E. A ROADMAP FOR ONWARD JOURNEY

Our focus is clear: to be grounded in our MSFS identity by living the principles and directives given to us in our Rule of Life that we all have professed to live by in our religious life. Make no mistake that struggling to live with our identity as MSFS is what life and growth are all about for us. No amount of personal accomplishments and skills can insulate us from these challenges. We shall not pretend that there is a quick fix to our present day challenges. We shall not take up the responsibility to make things better but take up the responsibility to do our best by trusting in the divine Providence and abundant grace promised to us. The appointment of the Administrator and Advisor and their ministry of leadership to the Province in dialogue with the remaining Confreres and the General Administration will help us, I believe, focus on short term planning without any long-term cost.

My proposals for the Province till WUG and G C Meeting in May 2015 are:

- **Constitute at least 3 or 4 Local Communities with Local Superiors who will animate community life and religious life of the confreres as per the directives in the MSFS Constitutions and General Directory**
- **Make sure that all confreres (permanent and short term) are members of Local communities as per our Constitutions with a Local Superior**
- **Local Communities are to be established with the approval of the Superior General and his Council**
- **Administrator shall ensure regular Community Meetings organized by Local Superior with an agenda of evaluation of religious life, community life, and presentation of the financial statement by each confrere/Local Community**
- **Formulate an ENGLAND VISION 2018 for the next 3 years and present the vision to the General Administration**

- **Invite confreres from other Provinces who will share and contribute to that vision of the Province in consultation with the Superior General and his Council**
- **MSFS charism is to be re-captured and re-lived; not by just administering parishes alone but by engaging in renewal of Christian life through parish mission, retreat ministry, and ministry to disseminate Salesian Spirituality**
- **Set up at the earliest a Financial Accountability Structure for Transparency (FAST)and get every Province member on board with the new system followed up by a monitoring mechanism by the Administrator and Advisor**
- **Get 2 confreres for immediate help of the Province lest we lose our historical parishes**

F. CONCLUSION

My time in the English Province has been a time of blessing and renewal for me. I experienced the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit throughout my stay with confreres and time spent with them, and during my travels within the Province consisting of two countries of England and Ireland. The retreat days were days of bonding and spiritual re-charging. I thank Father Terry McGrath, the Administrator, for his warm hospitality and patient availability to drive me around in the cold weather. More miles on his car! Thanks to Fr. Bosco in the Provincial House community for his cheerful availability and Fransalian hospitality. I thank Fr. Martin Griffin in Ireland for his accompaniment and hospitality during my stay in Dublin. I thank all of you my confreres for your hospitality and warm welcome and frank sharing. I acknowledge and appreciate our senior confreres and veterans, Fr. Gerard Gill, Fr. Sean Fleury, and Fr. Bernard Caszo for their committed service to the Congregation and to the Church through the Province.

Let me conclude my report with the words of Pope Francis:

‘Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out’.

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS

Superior General, ROME

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

APRIL 12, 2015