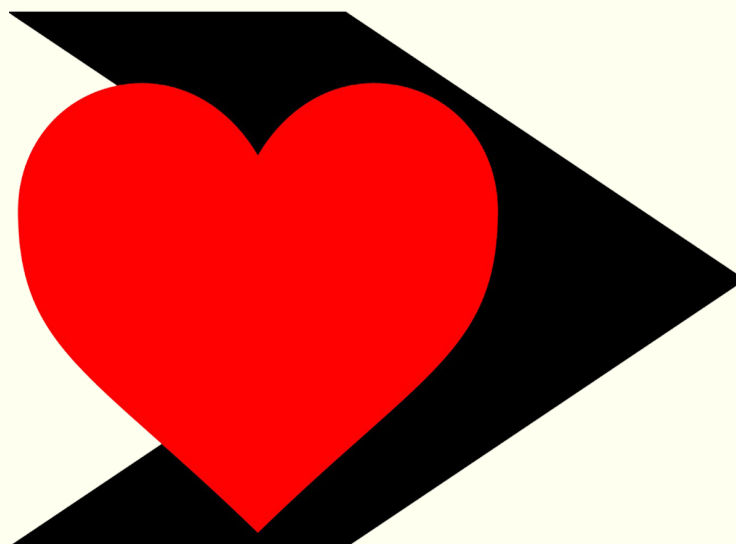


CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

QUERIDA CONGREGACIÓN

ROOTED IN CHRIST, AUDACIOUS IN MISSION



EXHORTATION OF THE XXVI GENERAL CHAPTER

ROME - 2021

Exhortation of the XXVI General Chapter of the Congregation of Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Claretian Missionaries), celebrated in Nemi (Italy) from 15 August to 11 September 2021.

(cf. Annales Congregationis, vol 75, fasc. 3, Septembri - Decembri, 2021)

“Querida Congregación”,
Be Rooted in Christ and Audacious in Mission!

ABBREVIATIONS

AUT	<i>Autobiography</i> of St. Anthony Mary Claret
CC	<i>Constitutions</i>
CESC	Claretian Spirituality Center
EG	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelii gaudium</i> (2013)
GPF	<i>General Plan of Formation 2020</i>
LS	Encyclical <i>Laudato si'</i> (2015)
MS	<i>Missionari Sumus</i> (2015, XXV General Chapter)
VD	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Verbum Domini</i> (2010)

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I. THOSE WHO CONTINUE “A GREAT WORK”

“While they were talking and debating these things, Jesus himself approached and began to accompany them” (Lk 24:15).

“Since it was his will to associate people with him in this saving work, he called together those he desired, appointed twelve of them to be with him, and sent them out to proclaim his message” (Constitutions 3).

[1] “Querida Congregación” (*Beloved Congregation*)¹ be rooted in Christ and audacious in mission!

[2] “*Today begins a great work,*” said our Father Founder. Surprised, Fr. Vilaró exclaimed: “how important could it be, since we are so young and so few?” One hundred and seventy-two years have passed. At the XXVI General Chapter we affirm that Claret’s dream is still alive among us² and in our charismatic family. We are a Congregation ‘for the whole world,’ intercultural, already present in the five continents and in the so-called “digital continent.”

[3] From 15 August to 11 September 2021, we celebrated our XXVI General Chapter at the *Ad Gentes* Centre in Nemi, Italy. We thank God that, in the midst of all the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, God has led us to carry it out in a climate of prayer, fraternity and discernment. The icon of the disciples of Emmaus helped us cast light on this dramatic moment in the history of humanity. Like them, we too have experienced the accompaniment of Jesus along a path of dialogue, listening and missionary enthusiasm. In communion with all those who suffer the consequences of the pandemic, we want to turn this crisis into an opportunity to live our vocation more authentically: rooted in Christ and audacious in mission.

[4] The XXVI General Chapter has been the fruit of a process began in January 2020 at the meeting of the Major Superiors with the General Government in Talagante (Chile) and continued in the four levels of conversations (local, zonal, provincial³ and continental) that we had held throughout the Congregation during

¹ “Beloved Congregation” is an expression used by Blessed Faustino Perez in the name of his companions of the martyr seminary of Barbastro in his well-known farewell letter to the Congregation of 13 August 1936. These words had been used by Fr Jose Xifre in the text he wrote to be read at his funeral, known as the *Last Farewell*: “My dearly beloved Congregation: I have loved you as much as possible until the end...” (Cervera, November 1899). Father Founder had already used a similar expression in a letter of 20 August 1861 sent to the Superior General of the Congregation.

² At the conclusion of this Chapter, we are more than three thousand Missionaries, present in 69 countries.

³ We use the term “provincial” to refer to Major Organisms: Provinces and Independent Delegations.

the pre-capitular stage. Alongside the weeds that weaken our missionary life, we have discovered seeds of life that the Spirit is sowing in our world and help us to embrace the future with hope. Both the motto (*Rooted and Audacious*) and the threefold approach (synodal, narrative and appreciative) were present throughout the whole process.

[5] This exhortation seeks to give back to the Congregation what we have discovered, dreamed, designed and the commitments we have taken on to continue walking together in the six-year period 2021-2027.

1. CONVERSATIONS FOR TRANSFORMATION

[6] The “conversations on the way” (418 conversations), held at local (252), zonal (131), provincial (30), and continental (5) levels, prepared the Chapter meeting. Within the unpredictable framework of the Covid-19 pandemic, we conversed with other people from our community and pastoral environments (Claretian Family, consecrated men and women, laity, persons of other confessions, religions, and beliefs).

[7] We shared in them:

[a] some stories *that have given us life* over the years and that are a true “narrative theology” of our charismatic identity;

[b] comments about *what weakens us*, understood as diseases or warning signs (weeds), *what demands our attention* (challenges), and *what gives us life* (seeds);

[c] conversations about *what makes us dream*, beginning with congregational dreams, our future and the advent that the Spirit prepares for us.

[8] The Chapter community, moved by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and the Word of God, has also walked the path of the “fifth conversation,”⁴ which, continued into a sort of “sixth conversation” with the universal Church in the meeting with Pope Francis. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we have experienced the generative and transformative power of our conversations along the way.⁵

[9] In an attitude of discernment, in the light of the Word and prayer, we have evaluated the three processes of transformation proposed to us by the XXV General Chapter.

⁴ Cf. *Conversations on the Road. Vademecum for the “fifth conversation”*. Rome, 2020, n.8. (Here after: *Conversations*).

⁵ Cf. *Conversations*, n. 4.

[a] *We confess* our weaknesses and infirmities or weeds and for them we have begged forgiveness and healing from our God and Father.⁶

[b] *We gratefully proclaim* the “superabundance of his grace” (*Rom 5:20*) over our Congregation, detected in our progress along the way, and in the seeds of life that have been germinating.

[c] *We envision* in the Spirit the dream of God and Claret for our Congregation.

[d] *We wish* to transform the dream into designs and commitments, so that by the year 2027 the theme “*Rooted in Christ and Audacious in Mission*” would be a reality within our charism.

2. “SEEDS OF LIFE” IN THE PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

[10] In our pre-capitular and Chapter conversations we have perceived signs of life, thanks to the Spirit of our Father and of our Mother and the different sources of light that guided us:

[a] *The Word of God* makes us more passionate each day. We have made progress in biblical pastoral ministry. We read the Word from the new keys that are offered to us today: biblical and theological research, the Word proclaimed in the Spirit and in human situations, especially those of the poorest, the oppressed and the desperate. Thus, the Word resounds as a powerful contemporary energy of transformation and denunciation

[b] *The pontificate of Pope Francis*: the Congregation has enthusiastically welcomed his holistic, timely and innovative magisterium.⁷

[c] *Congregational leadership*: Father General’s circulars,⁸ the orientations, and animations of the Consultors have guided and accompanied us in the three processes of transformation designed by the previous General Chapter.

[d] *Some congregational initiatives*: theological, biblical, pastoral and pedagogical formation centres for evangelisers; animation teams and formative meetings; pastoral initiatives and activities with children, youths and adults...

⁶ Cf. *Conversations*, nn.40-51. During the retreat at the beginning of the Chapter, Father General asked for forgiveness in the name of the whole Congregation.

⁷ Along with many of his actions, interventions and messages, we can highlight during this sexennium: the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (2020); the exhortations *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), *Christus Vivit* (2019), *Beloved Amazonia* (2020) and the apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2017).

⁸ “*Called to Shine the Joy of the Gospel in the World Today*” (2016), “*Missionaries to the End*” (2017), “*My Spirit is for the Whole World. Called and Sent as Missionaries to an In-tercultural World*” (2019), the “*Letter Announcing the XXVI General Chapter*” (2020), “*The Love of Christ Impels Us. Faithfulness to the Charism of our Founder Today*” (2020), the “*Letter of Convocation of the XXVI General Chapter*” (2021).

[e] *The unforeseen Covid-19* pandemic has taken us by surprise: we have suffered with all of humanity. It has paralysed us. It has forced us to cancel activities, rethink programmes and to discover new ways of resiliency and creativity, of missionary action and of community life. It has unmasked false securities urging us to centre on what is essential. It has made us aware of many other viruses that threaten humanity. It has caused much damage and at the same time awoken the best in many people. Even our General Chapter has been attentive to its lessons and inspirations and alert to its possible threats.

THE FIRST PROCESS: “A CONGREGATION GOING FORTH”

Seeds of Life

Moving out to the peripheries, places of dialogue, and biblical ministry (MS 42-45; 67)

[11] Our Congregation has been mobilised by the call to leave comfort zones and to establish itself in peripheries and, in new places of prophetic dialogue. It has also felt challenged to reach out to young people without waiting for them to come to us. These calls resounded with intensity in numerous meetings held in all of the Major Organisms and Conferences.

[a] Many of our communities and institutions have become involved in reaching out to the peripheries in every area (ecumenical, intellectual-academic, spiritual, educational, labour, cooperatives...).

[b] More and more missionaries, communities, and Major Organisms are placing the Word of God at the centre of their work and devoting themselves to biblical ministry. The number of groups and initiatives dedicated to listening to and deepening the Word of God is multiplying. Starting with initial formation, the spiritual life of many individuals and communities is increasingly inspired by the Word of God which is welcomed, contemplated, and contextualised.

Multiplication of evangelising leaders in the service of life (MS 67, 2.3)

[12] The growing conviction that “the mission comes from God” has led us to share in a wide variety of collaborative and shared ministries:

[a] Initiatives to multiply evangelising leaders from the stance of synodality and to care for their formation from a Claretian perspective: in educational centres, institutes of higher learning, parishes, social projects, spirituality centres, communication media.

[b] In collaboration with those who seek the transformation of the world and open to everyone in prophetic dialogue (*MS 53ff, 58ff*), we commit ourselves, more and more, to the defence and care of life and creation, to the accompaniment of families, to the defence of cultures and indigenous peoples.

[c] Throughout the six-year period, and especially during the pandemic, a wide range of solidarity actions have emerged. In places where the effects of climate change are most damaging to people, there were teams that became skilled in the prevention of natural disasters and training of the population to deal with these situations.

Shared mission (*MS 53-57*)

[13] Shared mission with other members of the Claretian Family in different areas and geographical zones is becoming more and more widespread. There are also many people who, without identifying themselves with any branch of our Family, feel strongly in tune with the spirit of Claret.

[a] There are Major Organisms that have specific centres established for the theological, biblical, pastoral, and pedagogical formation of evangelisers, mainly lay people, religious, catechists and/or non-ordained ministers, leaders of groups and movements, and animators of small Christian communities.

[b] Courses, programmes, in-person and online meetings have been organised and carried out in various areas (Youth and Vocation Ministry, Solidarity and Mission, Biblical Pastoral Ministry...).

[c] A majority of Provinces and Delegations have promoted formative meetings and other programmes (workshops, courses, seminars...) for the understanding and deepening of the latest ecclesial and congregational documents, as well as specific themes in different fields.

[d] The number of people formed who participate in the reflections and decisions of local and provincial teams and councils has increased in different areas. Clericalism is on the decline among us. There is more vitality in the mission and its activities and a greater richness of charisms and perspectives.

Service to consecrated life (*MS 67.3*)

[14] In accordance with the proposals of the XXV General Chapter (*MS 67.3*), we have further enhanced our longstanding tradition of service to consecrated life, expressed in a variety of ways (teaching and theological research, accompaniment, magazines and publications, animation services in the local churches...). Enlightened

and encouraged by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, we have launched a process to interconnect our six Institutes of Consecrated Life worldwide.

Communication (MS 67.7)

[15] The desire to proclaim the Gospel through the media, which has always been present in the Congregation, is particularly intensified today. The Claretians involved in this are making efforts to share resources and to coordinate projects.

[16] We are happy to affirm the intensification of coordination among Claretian publishers and the effort made by the General Government to ensure that the Congregation has people and teams prepared in this field.

Evangelisation of young people (MS 68)

[17] We have also gone out to meet young people, to walk with them and make it easier for them to hear the calls of Jesus. We have been inspired and encouraged in a special way by the Synod dedicated to young people, faith, and vocational discernment and by the post-synodal exhortation “*Christus vivit.*”

[18] The establishment of the prefecture for youth and vocations ministry has helped to promote some projects, to take steps to continue preparing the agents of evangelisation of young people and to live more intensely the Church’s journey in this field.

[19] We have strengthened the shared reflection and action with the Claretian Family. The youth network *Claret Way Global* is a beautiful fruit of that collaboration.

[20] In many places we have strengthened the relationship between the pastoral care of children and young people. We make a commitment to a more fraternal, just, and caring world that respects creation and have taken steps to promote a new vocational culture, although we need to give new impetus to both tasks.

Challenges

[21] In evaluating ourselves as a *Congregation going forth*, we also affirm that:

[a] There is a tendency among us to settle, a resistance to innovation and to the search for new evangelising responses. That is why every reform must begin with each one of us.

[b] We need to convince ourselves that issues of Solidarity and Mission have a lot to do with our life and mission.

[c] Our missionary audacity is held back by acedia and indifference. This is why we need to again walk the roads of Emmaus (*Lk* 24:13-35) and Jericho (*Lk* 10:25-37) in order to grow in enthusiasm and compassion.

[d] The criteria of “that is the way it has always been done” continues to have force among us and stops the process towards synodality,⁹ shared mission, and the necessary changes our fidelity demands.

THE SECOND PROCESS: “COMMUNITY OF WITNESSES AND MESSENGERS”

[22] As in any process, we have also discovered lights and shadows along the way.

Seeds of life

Missionary community

[23] The project “*The Claretian Community, Home and School of Communion*,” designed in response to the request of the XXV General Chapter (cf. *MS* 70.5), has begun to bear fruit and can be a great source of transformation.

[a] The cultural diversity of the members in our communities is increasing. It is a gift that requires intercultural preparation to welcome it. The evangelical and missionary fruits of this coexistence are many, as are the difficulties and misunderstandings that invite us to grow in welcome, readiness and communion. Encouraged by the General Government, we are grateful for the programmes and efforts made by all (individuals, the sending and receiving Major Organisms...) to promote welcome, integration and encounter, but we need to continue changing our attitudes.

[b] Some of the events we have shared during these years, such as the 150th anniversary of the death of Father Claret and of our arrival in America, the beatification of 109 Missionaries, the opening of new fronts and evangelising commitments, and the publication of *Claretian Year* have helped to foster a spirit of belonging and intensified the joy of living in fraternity.

[c] During the pandemic there have been many signs of fraternity, care and mutual service that have enriched the missionary community. The General Government has set a great example in trying to live what it invited others to embody, giving stimulating signs of teamwork and synodality.

⁹ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. (Vatican 2018).

[d] We have grown in responsibility, accountability and transparency.

[e] With the help of the Church, we are becoming more aware of the sacred value of human life and the need to better protect minors and people in vulnerable situations.

The service of government

[24] Many brothers at various levels (local, provincial, general) participate with responsibility in the service of government in the Congregation.

[a] We are appreciative of the service of the General Government and their collaborators, their approachability and closeness. We thank God for their generosity and efforts in the accompaniment of persons, the promotion of the creativity and innovation that the Spirit suggests in every context and place, and in discernment and action '*according to God's heart* (MS 72).

[b] During these six years, we have made an effort to explore new ways of celebrating chapters and assemblies (MS 72.3); we have paid special attention to discernment in the election process. We have made progress in giving more vitality to interprovincial conferences and intensified collaboration among Major Organisms.

[c] The Congregation has continued its process of reorganization and consolidation of Major Organisms during this six-year period (MS 72.4). Despite the difficulties, several processes have led to the birth of new Provinces and Delegations. Reorganisation, always aimed at qualifying missionary life and service, is substantial to our vocation and must be intensified where it is slow to become a reality. We also see with joy that the relationship with the other branches of the Claretian Family has intensified in many places and at the General level.

Lifestyle and management of goods

[25] The Congregation has made a great effort to progress towards the goals it had set for the six-year period: to increase in the sharing of goods, in solidarity, and to be an expression of a poor Church that evangelises the poor (MS 71).

[a] Most in the Congregation live with austerity and their lifestyle is as proposed in our Constitutions.

[b] The sharing of goods among Major Organisms has increased significantly, while within themselves there has been an increase in generosity and transparency.

[c] At the General level and in many Major Organisms, an effort has been made to offer good programmes for the formation of all Claretians, especially the economies, in matters of economy and administration.

[d] Quite a number of Major Organisms continue to take steps to manage their economy with prudence and to improve its supervision.

[e] The Congregation is committed to caring for the elderly and sick confreres and for the missionaries in initial formation.

Challenges

[26] Many individuals and communities continue to lament the frequency with which we put personal interests and comforts before common projects or the needs of others. We also find it difficult to share our talents and resources, and to work as a team. Our infidelities and the number of Missionaries leaving the Congregation are an invitation to live more authentically the Constitutions, to care for each other, and to continue to strengthen community life.

[27] We also discovered in ourselves a lack of discernment and an invitation to continue to grow in it and in our availability to serve the mission where and how it is most needed.

[28] To continue exercising the service of authority according to God's heart (*MS 72*), we need to strengthen the formation of superiors (local and provincial) and their respective councils.

[29] Despite the great strides we are making to live our economy in an evangelical way:

[a] The situation of hundreds of millions of people calls for drastic changes in our style of life and a strong exercise of solidarity.

[b] The response to the proposals made by the General Government to improve our formation in economy and administration has been insufficient.

[c] There remains a need for all Major Organisms to seriously anticipate their future, to plan for it and to grow in responsibility, accountability, transparency, and professionalism.

[d] Some communities, Provinces and Delegations do not give sufficient impetus to the review of their lifestyle and to regular evaluation of their budgets.

[e] Steps must continue to be taken to ensure that all Missionaries give proper attention to their health and receive the needed medical attention for their illnesses and during their senior years.

THE THIRD PROCESS: “MEN WHO ADORE GOD IN THE SPIRIT”

[30] Our XXV General Chapter framed this third process of transformation with a singularly Marian reference (cf. *MS 73*). Mary proclaims with her life the supremacy of God and shows us how to adore God in spirit and truth. She teaches us to listen to the Word, to keep it in our hearts, to configure ourselves with Jesus and sends us on mission to do what he tells us. The Congregation recognises itself as profoundly cordimarian and is very grateful for the presence of Mary in our life and mission.

Seeds of life

On a spiritual path

[31] There is always room for more authenticity and openness to the Spirit, but in recent years we *have joyfully moved forward in the path of the Lord* and sought to proclaim *with our life and mission the supremacy of God* (*MS 74*).

[a] We are happy to affirm that in the Congregation we are growing in an integral, not reductive, understanding of the spiritual life and its relationship with the care of creation, the concern for justice and the incarnated condition of the mission,

[b] In many individuals and communities there has been an effort to deepen and intensify the spirituality of adoration, although this has been expressed above all as Eucharistic adoration.

[c] The proposal of the General Government that has culminated in the *Claretian Year* has been of great help and has also served to enrich many lay people and individuals who share our journey. The same can be said of the numerous initiatives of spiritual growth (many linked to the Word) encouraged at a general level and from the Major Organisms, or sponsored by the Claretian Spirituality Center in Vic and the Forge Team. The consolidation of both teams and the intensification of their relationship promise very positive future experiences.

[d] We are very grateful for all the gifts that the Spirit gives us when we actively participate in the spiritual journey of a multitude of Christian communities and groups (also of other faiths and religions) with whom we share life, and for the

richness that popular spirituality brings us. There are countless such initiatives taking place around the world. The digital continent, with all its risks, has also opened-up many possibilities in this field.

In continuous formation

[32] Our vocation to missionary life demands an ever-greater identification with Jesus Christ and a constant progress, just as our Father Founder desired. This awareness is manifested in the careful process of drawing up the *General Plan of Formation*, promulgated in 2020.

[33] In initial formation, our Plan takes into account important dimensions for our missionary life: listening to, welcoming and proclaiming the Word; the care of our affective and sexual life; issues related to Solidarity and Mission; availability for the universal mission of the Congregation; attitudes that favour intercultural encounter; preparation for the apostolate in the media and the digital continent....

[34] We thank God for the formators and members of the formation communities of the Congregation, who have dedicated themselves to this ministry with dedication and generosity, and for the Major Organisms that have facilitated it.

[35] The School of the Heart of Mary has provided valuable services, even in this time of pandemic; likewise, our Provinces, Delegations and Conferences have offered similar initiatives.

[36] Our centres of higher education and institutes of consecrated life, with their publications, continue to make a highly qualitative contribution to the Church in this field.

[37] In recent years the Congregation has made a great effort to coordinate the specialisation of Missionaries according to the signs of the time and places.

Challenges

[38] Like remaining in one's comfort zone, individualism and indifference, idolatry continues to be a temptation that strongly besets us and to which we do not cease to succumb.

[39] We need to continue to enhance our profound experiences of encounter with the Lord in personal prayer and in moments of community and shared prayer. Once

again, the intense experience of the Eucharist and the dynamisms encouraged in our *Constitutions* show us their fruitful relevance.

[40] Participation in some of the intense experiences proposed by the Congregation, like *The Forge*, are still seen as something exceptional. We need to create a culture of spiritual renewal that helps us to take advantage of these experiences as dynamisms of growth along our missionary path.

[41] We need to pay more attention not only to the contents, but also to the processes so that initial formation may be truly integral and transforming, giving attention to the harmony of mind, heart and will. The need to prepare and qualify formators to accompany these processes continues to be a priority.

[42] In many parts of the Congregation, we have not yet succeeded in making ongoing formation a necessity in our missionary life.

II. WE COLLABORATE WITH OUR GOD: DREAM, DESIGNS, COMMITMENTS

“They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts filled with ardent yearning when he was talking to us on the road and explaining the Scriptures?’” (Lk 24:32).

“The aim of our Congregation is to seek in all things the glory of God, the sanctification of our members and the salvation of people throughout the world, in keeping with our missionary charism in the Church” (Constitutions 2).

1. THE CONGREGATIONAL DREAM

[43] The Congregation founded by Claret began as a great missionary dream amid many limitations. That small group in the cell of Vic is today a multicultural Congregation called to make Claret’s dream come true. Gathered in General Chapter, and moved by the same Spirit that inspired him and the first companions, and motivated by our motto “rooted and audacious,”

*We dream of a pilgrim Congregation,
rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and in Claretian spirituality.*

*We dream like Claret of a Congregation that,
following the example of Mary, treasures in its heart,
fulfils and proclaims the Word of God.*

*We dream of a Congregation of Missionaries who share our lives, diversity,
and resources in communities shaped by the mission
and ministries God has entrusted to us.*

*We encourage and accompany one another as brothers
through mutual listening, without excluding anyone.*

*We dream of a Congregation, audacious and itinerant,
that, sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18; Acts 8:28, 39)
goes forth towards the peripheries, approaches the youth, walks with them
and encourages them to respond to the call of God.*

*We dream of a Congregation that has as its starting point
the biblical animation of all pastoral ministry (cf. VD 73),
evangelises with all possible means in shared mission, interreligious dialogue,
and the intelligent use of the various forms of communication media.*

*We dream of a Congregation
committed to universal brotherhood (Fratelli tutti),
justice, peace and the care of the common home (Laudato si').
In a spirit of synodality, we collaborate with people of different cultures,
ethnicities and religions for the transformation of the world
in accord with God's plan (cf. CC 46).*

*We dream of a Congregation prepared to respond to new challenges
through an integral and continuing process of formation,
open to universal mission,
according to the spirit and charism
of our Father Founder.*

2. DREAM, DESIGN, AND COMMITMENTS

Dream and design 1

[44] *We dream of a pilgrim Congregation rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and in Claretian spirituality.*

[45] As we reach 2027...

[a] We have made progress in our spiritual pilgrimage among the People of God. We have cultivated our experience of God. We have strengthened our faith in Jesus Christ and grown in our capacity for discernment.

[b] We live in an increasingly synodal Church, where our Claretian identity as sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is easily perceived. We deepen our spirituality, enlightened by the *Constitutions*, aided by the many resources that the Congregation offers.

[c] Loved and called by God, grace makes us grow in integrity of life, openness, understanding and charity. In need of transformation, we help each other to live open to the Word and whole-heartedly we celebrate the Eucharist daily and spend time in adoration.

[d] We have grown in missionary spirit and intercultural fraternity. We are more numerous, and we are present in more places. The passion for God and for humanity defines us. Faithful to the mission we have received, we do not cling to any institution, ministry, mentality or legacy that prevents us from responding boldly to the urgent needs of the Church and the world.

We commit ourselves to...

[46] Deepen our knowledge of Jesus Christ in order to be configured with him, by studying, praying, sharing the Word, celebrating the Eucharist, adoring his Eucharistic presence, recognizing his presence in others and in creation and giving ourselves to the mission without fear of risks.

[47] Intensify the cordimarian dimension of our spirituality: confession of God, revolution of tenderness (*EG* 88, 288), hope of the peoples and dream of a new world. We will creatively practice the devotions of our tradition and of our peoples.

[48] Drink from the source of our Claretian spirituality in its origin and development, and recognise the person of Claret and his dream that God be known, loved, served

and praised. We will re-evaluate the meaningful presence of Claretian sites, the CESC and The Forge as spaces of inspiration and renewal.

[49] Pause, as pilgrims, during special moments of our life—quinquennium, middle age, the third age... (cf. *GPF* 509)— participating in suitable initiatives, offered by the Congregation, for personal evaluation, more intense contact with God and God's Word, and a new personal project that rekindles our missionary vocation and passion.

[50] Overcome our shadows and conflicts by cultivating an audacious spirituality like that proposed in the Definition of the Missionary (cf. *CC* 9); we will make use of appropriate healing, renewal programmes, and, above all, we will show compassion to the suffering of others and allow ourselves to be affected by it.

Dream and design 2

[51] *We dream like Claret of a Congregation that, following the example of Mary, treasures in its heart, fulfils and proclaims the Word of God.*

[52] As we reach 2027...

[a] Inspired by the witness of our Founder and the martyrs, the Word of God, of which we are listeners and servants (cf. *CC* 34, 46), is the light and the driving force of our missionary life.

[b] Following the example of our Mother, as children of her heart, we welcome the Word into our interior self, we deepen and incarnate it so as to allow ourselves to be transformed by it.

[c] With the people of God, our communities share the Word and enlightened by it, discern God's will for our lives and mission.

[d] As missionaries, we passionately preach the Gospel in a competent, up to date, and creative way, according to our diverse contexts.

We commit ourselves to...

[53] Devote quality time each day to take the Word to heart, in keeping with the liturgical year, and proclaim it with dedication in our pastoral services.

[54] Encourage and implement, as listeners and servants of the Word, ecclesial initiatives such as the Sunday of the Word of God and Bible Week and Month. We will practice *lectio divina* personally, communally and with the People of God.

[55] Take the preparation and delivery of homilies very seriously, according to the guidelines of the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (cf. EG 135-159).

Dream and design 3

[56] *We dream of a Congregation of Missionaries who share our lives, diversity, and resources in communities shaped by the mission and ministries God has entrusted to us. We encourage and accompany one another as brothers through mutual listening, without excluding anyone.*

[57] As we reach 2027...

[a] We have advanced along the path of interculturality and inter-generational living together. A culture of openness to diversity, hospitality, mutual care and respect and contribution to the common good has been consolidated.

[b] The service of authority at all levels is exercised in a synodal way: it promotes co-responsibility, fosters teamwork, respects and harmonizes differences.

[c] Our communities are living spaces: home, family, workshop, place of discernment, “a beehive” (cf. *Aut.* 608). The presence of Jesus makes our conversations meaningful, empathetic and transformative (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35; *Mt* 18:20). We accompany each other in our limitations and strengths and are able to reconcile our conflicts and attend more to the integral health of each Claretian.

[d] We feel that we are brothers to all in the common home. We share with one heart and one soul (cf. *Acts* 2:42; *John* 17:21-22), our skills, talents, ideas, resources collaborating with God’s mission. Our communities are supportive and austere, sharing their goods with generosity and a sense of Congregation and administering them with responsibility, accountability, and transparency.

We commit ourselves to...

[58] Exercise the service of authority in a synodal, responsible, and transparent way at all levels (congregational, provincial, and local). We will place special emphasis on the formation and accompaniment of Local Superiors and Major Organism Councils, making use of the digital possibilities at our disposal.

[59] Strengthen in the Congregation, in Major Organisms and in local communities, based on evangelical poverty, the attitudes of accountability, transparency, and co-responsibility in the administration and use of goods and continue increasing in the Congregation the sharing of goods.

[60] Promote and strengthen, right from initial formation, the empowerment of competent persons to assume economic, administrative and management responsibilities for projects and apostolates.

[61] Create and promote intergenerational and intercultural communities —rooted in the place of mission— fostering spaces of living together, genuine relations and fraternal life, appreciating, accepting, and celebrating the uniqueness of each person. We will develop and promote intercultural courses.

[62] Renew our community projects, in an attitude of discernment of God's will, emphasizing listening to his Word, the communal celebration of forgiveness, care for each member of the community, pastoral planning and recreation in common. We will continue our conversations along the way, conscious that the Lord accompanies us and makes them fruitful.

Dream and design 4

[63] *We dream of a Congregation, audacious and itinerant, that, sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4:18; Acts 8:28, 39) goes forth towards the peripheries, approaches the youth, walks with them, and encourages them to respond the call of God.*

[64] As we reach 2027...

[a] We find ourselves resituated in geographical, existential, social, and cultural peripheries. We maintain a constant discernment to detect and respond to emerging and unforeseen missionary needs.

[b] We are closer to those who do not know, ignore or reject the God whom Jesus reveals to us. In our apostolic positions we seek that God be known, loved, served and praised.

[c] Among young people and children, we act without prejudice, open to their newness and values, to their dreams of a better humanity. We give priority attention to impoverished children and youth. We offer them the witness of our life and a safe environment in which they grow up free and happy.

[d] We have positioned our educational institutions as a privileged platform to reach out to young people and many people without other educational opportunities. We meet their individual, social and spiritual needs.

[e] Our pastoral ministry increasingly encourages young people to become personally involved in the transformation of the world. Missionary volunteering by young people in the peripheries in which we find ourselves has also grown.

[f] The pastoral ministry of vocations that promotes the different forms of Christian life and, in particular, our missionary vocation, is becoming more and more consolidated.

We commit ourselves to...

[65] Discern in each Major Organism those areas where Jesus Christ is not known, and which peripheries require more urgent attention, and to respond in shared mission. In addition, to review our apostolates and to situate ourselves in the peripheries of each pastoral setting.

[66] Deepen the call of the Church for pastoral conversion of the parish communities and stress our charismatic contribution in those parishes entrusted to us.

[67] Make a commitment to young people and to promote pastoral initiatives and accompaniment at a congregational level and with the Claretian Family. We will open our communities to young people with opportunities for prayer, get-togethers, missionary volunteering, and work that will help them to get to know our life first-hand, to discern their vocation, and to commit themselves in the building of a better world.

[68] Strengthen in shared mission with the Claretian Family vocation ministry for our Congregation and accompany the new generations that they may discover God's call.

[69] Ensure that our educational institutions are centres of quality which, in collaboration with families, take great care in the formation of values, the transmission of the light of the Gospel, and attention to the most vulnerable. We will create safe environments, so that children, adolescents, and young adults grow up in freedom and responsibility.

[70] Promote the coordination of our centres of higher education and institutes of consecrated life in order to multiply evangelisers and to serve the people of God in a more qualified and effective way.

Dream and design 5

[71] *We dream of a Congregation that has as its starting point the biblical animation of all pastoral ministry (cf. VD, 73), evangelises with all possible means in shared mission, interreligious dialogue, and the intelligent use of the various forms of communication media.*

[72] As we reach 2027...

[a] A solid biblical preparation and a deep experience of the Word characterise all our Missionaries. A team promotes the biblical animation of the pastoral ministry in the whole Congregation.

[b] We evangelise with others and by all possible means. We are a Congregation known for its ability to work in shared mission.

[c] We are Missionaries in the digital continent, and we provide a qualified service there. The group of *cyber missionaries* formed by the General Government has been consolidated. We coordinate and make effective use of the communications media as places of encounter, formation and evangelisation.

We commit ourselves to...

[73] Create a team in each Conference to animate and coordinate our biblical pastoral ministry and to promote the biblical animation of all pastoral ministry under the coordination of the Prefecture of Biblical Pastoral Ministry and Communication.

[74] Give a biblical focus, with art and creativity, to all our pastoral activity.

[75] Offer biblical renewal programmes, suitable for use in retreats, courses and other initiatives for initial and ongoing formation which are also accessible as digital applications. For this we can make use of resources like the *Word Mission Project*.

[76] Create at the congregational level and in each Major Organism a communication and digital evangelisation plan that promotes and coordinates with responsibility and prudence quality evangelisation services.

[77] Reorganise, professionally, communication within the Congregation and digitise our documentary patrimony.

[78] Take significant steps to offer the agents of evangelisation and the People of God a good biblical, catechetical, and pastoral formation.

Dream and design 6

[79] *We dream of a Congregation committed to universal brotherhood (Fratelli tutti), justice, peace and the care of the common home (Laudato si'). In a spirit of synodality, we collaborate with people of different cultures, ethnicities and religions for the transformation of the world in accord with God's plan (cf. CC 46).*

[80] As we reach 2027...

[a] We are characterized by our respect and defence of every human being because we are all created in the image of God. We see ourselves as brothers to all, overcoming prejudices and barriers, recognising in a special way women who are major protagonists in ecclesial and social life. We collaborate with those who in different ways make the Kingdom of God present (cf. *CC* 46).

[b] The respect and protection of the integrity of creation have substantially transformed our lifestyle. We recognise and contemplate with gratitude the presence of the Trinity in all of creation (cf. *LS* 238-240). We care for our Sister Mother Earth (cf. *LS* 1) and denounce any kind of destructive exploitation.

[c] Striving for justice, building peace and caring for the common good have become hallmarks of our spirituality, formation and mission. In each Major Organism we have a wide network of groups that promote Solidarity and Mission. We have taken new steps in our mission at the United Nations (UN) and continue to collaborate with people and institutions that seek to transform the world in line with the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

We commit ourselves to...

[81] Consolidate the structure and objectives of Solidarity and Mission in each Major Organism within the overall project of the congregational framework in line with the social teaching of the Church and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) promoted by the United Nations, and to organise networking in each Conference.

[82] See that the objectives of *Laudato Si'* are present in our initial and ongoing formation programmes, as well as in the work of all apostolic platforms.

[83] Live at personal and community levels a simple and eco-friendly life, adopting attitudes and habits that help to protect and promote the common home as well as to raise a prophetic voice that denounces everything that threatens life.

[84] Prioritise our pastoral attention towards the most vulnerable groups to confront the throwaway culture, together with those who seek the transformation of the world.

[85] Promote effective programmes to educate, transform, and engage people in the struggle for human dignity and the transformation of the world, and to combat hunger, poverty, and all forms of injustice.

[86] Consolidate, together with other religious congregations, our presence at the UN as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), increasing its outreach to its presence in Nairobi and Geneva to better address the issues related to the environment and human rights.

Dream and design 7

[87] *We dream of a Congregation prepared to respond to new challenges through an integral and continuing process of formation, open to universal mission, according to the spirit and charism of our Father Founder.*

[88] As we reach 2027...

[a] Our *General Plan of Formation 2020* is known and applied in all parts of the Congregation. Thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, formation is a process of continuous and integral transformation that configures us to the person of Christ and sends us to universal mission in the style of Claret.

[b] Initiated as disciples of Jesus, our formandi integrate our charismatic roots throughout the three stages of initial formation (pre-novitiate, novitiate and post-novitiate). This formation is personalised, community-oriented, based on the processes of transformation, and with a clear option of inculturation for the mission.

[c] We have enough well-trained intercultural formators working in teams. They teach by their testimony of life, live the charism, take personalised care of each candidate, and respond creatively as a community to the ecclesial, social and planetary challenges of our times.

[d] We live the ongoing formation as a response to the challenges of God's kingdom in every time and place. It is an all-embracing process of renewal which covers all aspects of the person and reveals the profound nature of our vocation as fidelity to the mission and as a process of continual conversion (cf. *GPF* 463).

[e] Our specialisations respond to the needs of the mission today. We give a strong impulse to study, aware that, together with prayer, it constitutes one of the two feet of the Missionary. In this way, we have become more rooted in our charism and better prepared to dialogue, in a bold and effective way, with contemporary cultures.

We commit ourselves to...

[89] Update during the next three years the formation plan of each Major Organism according to the guidelines of the *General Plan of Formation*.

[90] Pay special attention to integral, personalised, and intercultural formation so that each missionary in formation is trained in at least two different contexts.

[91] Support an interdisciplinary initial formation that involves competent persons and is developed in collaboration with the Claretian Family wherever it is possible.

[92] Promote in all formative instances the vocation of the Missionary Brother as an integral and necessary part of the Claretian life and mission, and to reinforce his presence in our vocation ministry.

[93] Encourage an informed congregational reflection on our ordained ministry, to eliminate clericalism, support its ecclesial sense and highlight its missionary dimension.

[94] Nurture in all places and at all levels ongoing formation by making use of the programmes the Congregation offers and, attentive to the personal needs of everyone, those organised by other formation centres.

[95] Develop in each Major Organism a plan of specialisation to offer appropriate responses to the challenges of the mission. The General Government, in dialogue with the Major Organisms, will see to the specializations necessary for the mission of the Congregation.

III. ON THE WAY WITH JESUS AND MARY

“They immediately set out and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together. They were greeted by these words: ‘Yes, it is true, the Lord is risen! He has appeared to Simon!’ Then the two told what had happened on the road to Emmaus, and how Jesus had made himself known when he broke the bread with them. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood in their midst. He said to them, ‘Peace to you’ (Lk 24:33-36).

“We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have also received a calling like that of the Apostles and have been granted the gift to follow Christ in a communion of life and to go out into the whole world to proclaim the good news to every creature” (Constitutions 4).

[96] Like the disciples of Emmaus, enlightened by the Word and comforted by the Eucharist, we return to the communities to receive once again their confession of faith and share with them the experience lived in this “fifth conversation” that has been our XXVI General Chapter. In the Chapter discernment we have uncovered the seeds of life that the Spirit has sown in us, we have accepted God’s dream for the coming years, we have translated it into seven designs of life, and have committed ourselves to putting it into practice.

[97] The meeting with the Pope was like a “sixth conversation.” In it we also understood that if we want to be witnesses, we cannot stop being adorers. Our Congregation, just as consecrated life in general, *“requires audacity; it needs older members who resist the aging of life, and young people who resist the aging of the soul.”* In order to be rooted in Christ and to be audacious in mission, the Pope made us see God’s style: proximity, compassion, and tenderness. Since the pandemic has been able to plunge us into a state of languor and despair, he warned us: *“Do not lose your sense of humour; a sense of humour is a grace of joy, and joy is a dimension of holiness.”*

[98] The General Chapter continues into new conversations in the Conferences, Major Organisms, regions, and local communities. We are all called to continue dialoguing among ourselves and with those with whom we share the mission. In this way, guided by a synodal, narrative, and appreciative method, we will be able to synchronize with the dream of the Congregation for the coming years and make these agreed commitments our own. From the *Ad Gentes* Centre in Nemi, Italy, we invite you, beloved Congregation, to continue walking with audacity. Mary, the Mother who has been with us in the cenacle of the Chapter, will continue to accompany us. Our journey with Jesus continues....

O my God and my Father!
May I know you and make you known.
May I love you and make you loved.
May I serve you and make you served.
May I praise you
and make all creatures praise you.

My Father,
grant that all sinners may be converted,
all the just persevere in grace,
and all of us attain eternal glory.

Amen.



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ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS
OF THE XXVI GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CONGREGATION OF MISSIONARIES,
SONS OF THE IMMACULATE
HEART OF MARY

Clementine Hall
Thursday, September 9, 2021

Dear Brothers:

It is a great joy for me to welcome your General Chapter, truly, it is a joy. Missionary brothers from all over the world are participating, representing the almost three thousand Claretians who make up the Institute. Thank you for coming to this gathering. Thanks to Cardinal Aquilino Bocos Merino for his presence, and thanks to Sister Yolanda Kafka for her help. This woman can help a lot, I once said to her: "I'm told that you speak many languages," and she replied, "But I don't know if I speak the language of God." It paints her in a very good light.

I congratulate Fr Mathew Vattamattam, in whom the Chapter members renewed their confidence by re-electing him as Superior General. Along with him, I greet the brothers who have been elected to form the new government of the Institute. Who are they? May it be bearable for them. May the Spirit of the Lord be upon you at all times so that as Missionaries, you may proclaim the Good News to the poor (cf. *Lk* 4:19) and to all who hunger for the Word that saves (cf. *Is* 55:10-11).

The theme of the Chapter is "*Rooted and Audacious.*" Rooted in Jesus. This presupposes a life of prayer and contemplation that leads you to be able to say like Job: "*I knew you only by hearsay, but now my eyes have seen you*" (*Job* 42:5). And it is sad when we find consecrated women and men who know only by hearsay, and I often found myself outside in the examination of conscience realising that I did not let myself be sought out in prayer, in wasting time before the Lord, I did not let my eyes see him. This can help us. A life of prayer and contemplation that allows us to talk, as friends, face to face with the Lord (cf. *Ex* 33:11). A life of prayer and contemplation that allows you to contemplate the Mirror, which is Christ, in order to become yourselves a mirror for others. And this is yes, yes. "I have a lot to do, a lot of work to do." Look, the first thing you have to do is to look at the One who sent you to work and let Him look at you. "I'm bored, I'm bored all the time." Well, sort out the problems of boredom in prayer with whoever it is, but without prayer it's not going to work, so let's just admit it.

You are Missionaries: if you want your mission to be truly fruitful, you cannot separate mission from contemplation and a life of intimacy with the Lord. If you want to be witnesses, you cannot stop being adorers. Witnesses and adorers are two words that are at the heart of the Gospel: "*He called them to be with him and to send them out to preach*" (*Mk* 3:14). Two dimensions which nourish each other, one cannot exist without the other.

"*The son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a person on fire with love and burns wherever he goes,*" say your *Constitutions*, quoting Father Claret (CC 9). Let yourselves be

burned by the Lord, by his love, in such a way that you may be set on fire wherever you go, with the fire of divine love. May He be your only security. And this will enable you to be men of hope, of the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5), of the hope that knows no fear, because he knows that it is in our fragility that God's strength is revealed (cf. *2 Cor* 12:9). If we are never aware of our fragility and if we are the tarzans of the apostolate and the invincibles, God's strength will never be made manifest; the Lord will say to us: Well, sort it out yourself, and that's the way it will go. To quote once again from your *Constitutions*, I say to you, "*Do not be daunted by anything.*" This is what Jesus said, do not be afraid, be not afraid. Do not be afraid of your fragilities; how beautiful it is when a consecrated woman or man feels fragile because she or he feels the need to ask for help. Do not be afraid of them; be afraid, yes, of falling into spiritual "schizophrenia," into the spiritual worldliness that would lead you to trust only in your "chariots" and "horses," to trust in your own strength, to believe you are the best, to seek, at times obsessively, for well-being and power (cf. *Evangelii gaudium* 93). It is very difficult not to conform to worldly logic because the world invades us, doesn't it? And spiritual worldliness is tremendous, because it transforms you from the inside. I was very impressed when I read *Meditations on the Church* by Father de Lubac, the last four pages, where he deals with the drama of spiritual worldliness and he says this more or less —you look it up and you will get exactly what he says— it is the worst evil that can happen to the Church, worse even than the evils of the concubinous popes. Light-hearted, no? Beware of the spiritual worldliness that leads us to rely on forces, to believe we are the best, to obsessively seek welfare or power. Do not accommodate yourselves to this worldly logic that will see that the Gospel, that Jesus, will cease to be the guiding criterion of your lives and of your missionary choices. You cannot live with the spirit of the world and claim to serve the Lord. Orient your existence on the basis of the values of the Gospel. But never use the Gospel in an instrumental way as an ideology, but rather use it as a vademecum, allowing yourselves to be guided at all times by the options of the Gospel and by the ardent desire to "follow Jesus and imitate him in praying, in working, and in always seeking the glory of God and the salvation of souls." Thus, said Father Claret, base your life on Christ, and Saint Paul, who had based his life on Christ, could say: "*It is not I who live, it is Christ who lives in me*" (*Gal* 2:20).

This orientation will make you audacious in the mission, that missionary audacity as audacious was the mission of Father Claret and the first missionaries who joined him. Consecrated life requires audacity, it needs older people who resist the ageing of life, and young people who resist the ageing of the soul. To put it a little in everyday jargon, do not become settled.

This conviction will lead you to go forth, to set out on the road and go where no one else wants to go, where the light of the Gospel is needed, and to work side by side with the people. Your mission cannot be “from a distance,” but from nearness, proximity. Do not forget what God’s style is proximity, compassion and tenderness. This is how God has acted from the time he chose his people until today. Proximity, compassion and tenderness. In mission, we cannot be content to stand on the sidelines, to observe with curiosity from a distance. We can either stand aloof from reality or commit ourselves to change it. We have to choose. Following the example of Father Claret, you cannot be mere spectators of reality. Take part in it in order to transform the realities of sin that you meet on the way. And proximity, compassion and tenderness. Do not be passive in the face of the dramas that many of our contemporaries live, but rather play your part in the struggle for human dignity, play your part in the respect for the fundamental rights of the person. How can this be achieved? Let yourselves be touched by the Word of God and the signs of the times, and in the light of the Word and the signs of the times, reread your own history — it is important — reread your own charism, remembering that consecrated life is like water, if it does not flow, it stagnates. By remembering the deuteronomic memory of the past, replenish yourselves from the lymph of the charism. This will make your life a life of prophecy that will also make it possible to awaken and enlighten people.

May the Word and the signs of the times shake us out of so much apathy and so many fears which, if we are not attentive, prevent us from keeping up with the times and the circumstances that call for an audacious, courageous consecrated life, a religious life that is free and at the same time liberating, precisely from our own precariousness. Some say: “Father, this is too stoic, too austere,” don’t they, and from here appears the formulation a little bit of Father Rodriguez’s treatise on virtues, but it is not that, and in order not to fall into this dry austerity, please don’t lose your sense of humour. Know how to laugh in community, know how to make jokes, and laugh at the jokes told by others, do not lose your sense of humour, a sense of humour is a grace of joy, and joy is a dimension of holiness.

I hope, dear brothers, that this Chapter which you are about to conclude, and to which you condemned the General for the second time, will help you to focus on the essential: Jesus, to place your security in Him and only in Him who is all good, who is the supreme good, the true security. I think this could be one of the best fruits of this pandemic that has challenged so many of our false securities. I hope, too, that the Chapter has led you to concentrate on the essential elements that define consecrated life today: consecration, which values the relationship with God; fraternal life in community, which gives priority to an authentic relationship

with our brothers; and the mission, which leads you to go forth, to decentralise ourselves in order to go forth to meet others, particularly the poor, to bring Jesus to them.

I do not want to end without thanking you for all the apostolic work and all the reflection on consecrated life that you have carried out during these years. May you continue, and may the Spirit guide you in this noble task.

And from my heart I impart to all of you and to all the brothers and members of the Claretian family, my blessing. And please, I do ask you seriously, do not forget to pray for me. Because if I don't beg for prayers, I'm toast. Thank you.

