

CIRCULAR LETTER
OF SUPERIOR GENERAL 2023

**OUR MISSIONARY
JOURNEY
ON THE SYNODAL PATH**

*“That all of them may be one, Father,
just as you are in me and I am in you.”*
(Jn 17:21)

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- [I] Fratelli Tutti: Living and journeying together with all humanity in our common home.
- [II] Fratelli Tutti: Our shared journey in the Church as people of God.
- [III] Fratelli Tutti: Our Going Forth as ‘Querida Congregación’.

Conclusion

Abbreviations

Dear brothers,

1. In the light of the discernment of the XXVI General Chapter, our Congregation has reinforced our commitment to share the hopes and joys, the sorrows and trials of the people, especially those of the poor, and join efforts with all who are striving to transform the world according to God's plan (cf. CC 46; QC 79). In this circular letter, I would like to reflect with you on how we can weave our missionary life within the project of God for humanity. In our fragmented world, communion with God and fraternity among humans constitute the most credible proclamation of the Gospel of love. Rooted in Jesus Christ and in Claretian spirituality, let us be a pilgrim Congregation joining with all others on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. In a pilgrimage, the very journey is as important as the destination.
2. Last year, the World Population Prospects 2022 released by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs projected that the world population would be 8 billion by 15 November 2022¹. Among them, Catholics amount to 1.3 billion². It is estimated that in 2021 about 134 million were born, and 69 million completed their pilgrimage on earth³. We are a tiny presence in the ocean of humanity, almost like a drop. To paraphrase Mother Theresa, we can

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/desa/world-population-reach-8-billion-15-november-2022>

² [https://www.worlddata.info/religions/catholics.php#:~:text=The%20Catholic%20churches%20form%20a,Latin%20Church%20\(Western%20Church\)](https://www.worlddata.info/religions/catholics.php#:~:text=The%20Catholic%20churches%20form%20a,Latin%20Church%20(Western%20Church).). (on 10 December 2022)

³ <https://ourworldindata.org/births-and-deaths>

say that if this drop were not there, the ocean would be less because of the missing drop⁴. The Holy Spirit has raised our Congregation in the Church and the world because we are part of the dream of God in his salvific plan for humanity. I like to compare ourselves in the body of the Church as a small artery close to the heart carrying vital energy to the various parts of the body. The challenge before us is to live up to God's trust in us, and His blessings showered upon us.

3. Our missionary endeavours, though small, become meaningful and fruitful when they are situated within the big picture of the mission of the Church and the still larger picture of God's saving action in the human world. In this process, we need to learn the art of weaving our life and mission to the local and global realities in a harmonious blend to avoid, on one hand, the danger of being encapsulated in narrow and banal concerns, and, on the other hand, losing sight of the life lived in its concreteness on the ground (cf. FT 142). In our fragmented world, fraternity born of God's love that shapes our communities and ministries paves the synodal path "which God expects of the Church of the third millennium"⁵. Let us do our part together in the symphony of God's love which the human family is invited to play in our times.
4. Since the XXVI General Chapter, the terms "Dream of God", "Synodal journey", "Rooted and Audacious", and "Seeds and Weeds" have become part of our common vocabulary. We

⁴ Cf. MOTHER THERESA. A Gift for God, 1975.

⁵ Pope Francis, Address on the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

Shall see that they do not turn out to be mere slogans but rather true expressions of what the Spirit of the Lord is evoking within the interior of our congregational community. I hope this letter will stimulate the reflection and praxis of our synodal journey and cultivate the necessary synodal spirituality to keep walking on the path of the Lord. The contents are divided into three parts. The first part deals with our journey with all humanity in our common home, the second part situates us in the Church and the third part deals with our journey forward as Claretians.

I. FRATELLI TUTTI: LIVING AND JOURNEYING TOGETHER WITH ALL HUMANITY IN OUR COMMON HOME

5. We can be truly missionaries only when we see ourselves as part of the large human family sharing the same human nature with its strengths, limitations, struggles and possibilities, and journeying together on this planet. The 8 billion people sojourning here on earth have 8 billion perspectives, personalities, interests, opinions and mode of conducting their lives. We have a wealth of differences among ourselves. How can we weave our Christian and Claretian identity into such a vast, complex and often contradictory realities of the world today, and walk forth together as one human family? In fact, most of what entails a human person is a shared humanity with others at different levels. Commonality and diversity mark every sphere of human life which offer us the basic materials for

a beautiful journey together. However, the vast diversity among humans taken apart from our common humanity and its destiny can be seen as a threat to life itself. Similarly, idealization of our shared human nature and destiny which ignores the gift of diversity builds only castles in the air. The Encyclical of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, with its call to universal fraternity and social friendship, offers us some important keys for our pilgrim journey with others in the world. Pope has written the encyclical in the context of the precarious situation of the co-habitation of humans in our progressively deteriorating common home owing to the lack of a culture of care and concern for human fraternity and the planet earth.

Our shared humanity

6. I would ask you to begin with the experience of your own life story. The family in which you were born offered the first environment of the diversity of genders, generations and individuals, but created an enduring shared sense of unity as a collective “we”; a safe home to unfold as a unique person. Most of us were born in socio-cultural contexts where we played, shared and grew with many agemates who were not of the same faith or ethnic group. I grew up in a context in which many of my friends and neighbours were not Christians. We celebrated our feasts and shared meals on important occasions, though there were also aspects that were reserved only for the “ingroups”. For example, the Hindus did not attend mass or receive communion just as the Catholics did not go to a temple to offer prayers. There was the bigger common space for all to bloom as well as the smaller space for each one to grow rooted.

7. The shared sense of human fraternity and social friendship was at times shattered when the collective sense of our “We” was fragmented by sectarian interests and power politics that fuelled the smaller “we”s pitting one against the other. Possibly, all of us have been raised in cultures that instilled the sense of superiority or inferiority of one’s own people as a village/town, country, tribe, or caste in comparison to other peoples. Some of us were brought up in contexts of poverty, communal discrimination, violence, and exploitation. There could be situations at home, in society or in school when you have had experiences of your self-respect being hurt, and your voice stifled. You may also have events of knowingly or unknowingly treating other persons without respect or failing to listen to their voice because they were different from you. Just as, a loving family is necessary for one to unfold as a person and be at home, we need a caring universal fraternity to make the world a common home for all peoples to live and flourish in dignity. It is both the work of grace and the task of the entire humanity to create a fraternal and just world, a welcoming tent for all pilgrims on the earth.

“Our Father”, a prayer for building the universal human family

8. Jesus inaugurated a new way of relating with God in contrast to all previous conceptions about God by teaching his disciples to call God “Abba” (cf. Mt 6:9, Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6). This is a revolutionary prayer which breaks many walls of separation in our relationships and builds bridges between this world and the world to come, between humans regarding sharing their daily bread, and between brothers hurting one another by seeking forgiveness. Jesus asks us to

pray for the gift of vigilance against the lure of temptations and the onslaught of evil that can shatter the bond of union with God and one another.

9. This prayer is transformative if we say it with a filial heart. If God is our dad in the visceral sense, then all of us are fundamentally children of God and brothers and sisters to one another before being anything else. Then the mendicant begging on the road, the hungry child in a slum, a small tribe in the amazon jungle, the young man addicted to drugs, a socially outcast group and similar wounded others are all our own brothers and sisters. What we do to another person is not a self-boosting generosity but an effort to restore fraternity. Our preferential attention to those in the peripheries is born from the Father's concern for his weak children. If someone dies of hunger in this bountiful planet, it is a shame on humanity. We know how terrible and painful it is to have a family member killed or violated, but it needs the Father's heart to feel the horror and pain of the destruction of human life in any form. Indeed, war and all forms of violence and murder among humans including abortion are a shame on humanity. We feel this shame naturally about our biological families if a brother fights for family property and manhandles another or if a brother has no means to live while another is a millionaire. When humans feel this shame collectively about war and destruction, and our hearts grieve at the pain of people on both ends of an armed conflict rather than celebrating the heroes of war and taking sides, we can be sure that the era of universal fraternity has dawned.

10. Jesus' prayer is realistic about human feuds and it invites us to make forgiveness and reconciliation a way of life and be vigilant against temptations and evil inclinations. Our relationship with God and one another is a single reality. That is why if we have something against one of the brothers, we need to reconcile before coming to the altar to offer a sacrifice (Cf. Mt 5:24). The evangelist John is very direct in asserting this connection when he says, "If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 Jn 1:20). The discovery of our fundamental identity as children of God impels us to look at each and every one as a child of God and hence a brother and sister to us. We shall be artisans of peace and reconciliation among the people of God and contribute towards building a culture of universal fraternity.

Faith in the Trinity, foundation for building authentic relationships

11. The unique God experience of us Christians is that of one God in three persons, the divine community. With a dualistic pattern of thinking, humans are unable to grasp the depth of this faith. Indeed, many human realities can be understood only in terms of triple factors. For example, a human relationship is necessarily an "I-you-we" reality. In language, we use first person, second person and third person speech representing three perspectives that complement one another. There are three dimensions in visual perspective. We speak of triads of truth-beauty-goodness in philosophy, *sat-cit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss) of eastern religions, electron-proton-neutron in physics. God as Trinity has much deeper meaning and consequences for our lives. As missionaries, we are convinced that "there already

exists in individuals and peoples an expectation, even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death” (EG 265). This is a foundation for a journey together with all humans as pilgrims here on earth.

12. Humans created in the image and likeness of God are born to love and realize themselves in the perfection of love. In short, the true nature of humans is love and the fragrance of love is joy. Where there is love there is joy. Unfortunately, love is a word used with different meanings ranging from selfish domination of another person to dying to oneself to give life to others. For us, love has a face, the face of Jesus Christ. Gazing at the face of Christ, we learn how to love. Our Founder constantly meditated on the life of Jesus to learn to love and serve others and to forgive enemies (Aut 221-222, 867).
13. Our faith in Triune God urges us to build community and universal fraternity by learning to love as God loves. God is Love and this Love is the eternal life-giving communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. God has created in us the desire and capacity to share in this Love and has destined us to become one with God in his Son through the Spirit. In authentic love, otherness is a condition for communion and never a threat. Loving and giving oneself flow from true inner freedom which can never be coerced. This love creates communion and joy in relationships, a pre-taste of the awaited ecstatic union and bliss in the world to come.

Encounter with Jesus makes all the difference

14. My novice master Fr. Franz Dirnberger cautioned us before our first profession that everything under the sun could take place in religious life too, but that we were to strive to follow the Lord at all times rather than go after “silly things”. He also added that it would be better to go back home if we were not ready to make our profession out of our free will. At the age of 18, I did not understand the depth of what he said, but his words made sense to me over the course of time.

15. We journey with our brothers and sisters as part of the human family and often discover among ourselves the best of human nature as well as the effects of our wounded nature. However, we are not helpless and hopeless before the brokenness of the human world. We have the light of the Word to understand the human dialectics and the balm of the Spirit of the Risen Lord to address the wounds and failures in us and others. Pope Francis makes it explicit as he says: “It is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything”. (EG 266). Life is entirely a new reality after encountering Jesus. Our vocation is the fruit of it.

16. Encountering Jesus has made all the difference in our lives. With him we find the way amid the confusions and calamities in the world. The Spirit of the Risen Lord teaches us to sift truth from falsehood and recognize the work of God and the presence of the Kingdom even as seeds in the horrible human conditions in this world. Discipleship of Jesus opens a treasure house of spiritual resources to draw from to refine and elevate the natural human tendencies and contribute to creating a just and fraternal world.
17. The world would be a fraternal home for all if vengeance gives way to forgiveness, anger to compassion, greed to care for all creation, manipulation and lies to honest search for truth and goodness. Then the world no longer would need firms that fabricate tanks, missiles and warships. The money spent in arms race would go to building roads, bridges, schools and hospitals and to strengthening the weak and healing the sick. Against all odds, we remain rooted in faith and love and keep hoping that a renewed world is possible as Isaiah foretold of the coming of a time when, “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles and there would be no more need for war” (cf. Is 2:4).
18. This vision of human fraternity may look unrealistic when we see the actual situation of the world today. Indeed, it is a clear indication that the way humans continue to organize ourselves and relate with one another does not work for the good of all, and that we need new ways to find creative solutions in the interest of all. The vision of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed and the path he showed towards it continue inviting humans to realize the Kingdom of God

amidst us. As for us, we know that Jesus is the way, the truth and life (cf. Jn 14:6).

Tensions and conflicts in human society and our communities

19. Even though God has blessed us and the planet with an abundance of resources, we come across poverty, war, domination, and exploitation in the way we organize and distribute these resources among us. It is difficult to make sense of the wars going on in the world today and the amount of destruction of lives and livelihood of people in those places with their global impact on human lives and our common home. The scenes of tanks shooting missiles, drones dropping bombs, destroyed cities and dead bodies appearing on TV these days are not a fiction. The failure to create a fraternal world is deadly and costly for humanity. The amount of money and talent invested by most countries to create sophisticated weapons to kill fellow-humans and destroy the planet is unbelievable! Before and behind the guns are human beings, brothers and sisters, who do not recognize the true face of the other. Once the label “enemy” is pasted on the face of a fellow pilgrim, any atrocity is given a free pass.

20. When it comes to us, the goodness and love that each of us has received all along our lives may not have healed our wounded and wounding part of human nature. We come across mini versions of hostility and conflict with lot of emotional costs in personal and social relationships, in families, religious communities and the society. Gossips and accusations take the place of missiles. From the outside, the differences may look silly and immature, but for those who

are in a hostile relationship, the conflict may be engulfing their whole being. It is sad to see the unproductive conflicts in some of our communities causing much erosion of energy and enthusiasm in those who fail to transform them into a growth moment. The “victim” narrative woven out of perceived or real limitations of others can generate aggressive tendencies capable of hurting others without feeling guilty.

21. It is hard to understand why humans indulge in war year after year even after two devastating world wars in the last century. Certainly, wars are not waged to bring peace on earth, but are often cultivated to cater to the financial and power interests of a few under the guise of noble claims⁶. It is difficult to understand how it is possible for even spiritual leaders to harbor and promote enduring hostilities at high costs as it is happening in some parts of the world. Pope Francis points to the roots of evil saying, “it has to do with human weakness, the proclivity to selfishness that is part of what the Christian tradition refers to as “concupiscence”, the human inclination to be concerned only with myself, my group, my own petty interests” (FT 166, cf. EG 263). At the core of most human problems is the worship of idols in different forms that appeal to human greed and cravings. The good news is that it can be overcome by grace. Awareness and acceptance of this tendency within us and refusing to project it on others open new possibilities for fraternal life amid difficulties.

⁶ Pope Francis laments the evil of war and its economic interests in *Laudato Si* no.57 and *Fratelli Tutti* nos. 188, 260 and 262.

Tensions in human relationships are normal and necessary

22. In the complexity of human life, holding many polarities in a healthy tension is essential to live a life of integrity. In this sense, tension is normal and has a role to play in our growth. Healthy humans have to keep the tension of balancing different polarities of life: physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal, doing and being, action and contemplation, theory and practice, relationship and task, whole and part, self and others... You may add many other polarities that you might be struggling with to this list. The question then is not one of siding with “either-or”, but a “both-and” for holding the two poles in balance. We need to have a larger holding space within for hosting these polarities which is possible only at a higher level of consciousness. With small mind and puny heart one would not be able to hold the gifts of both poles at the same time. Unless we undertake our spiritual evolution seriously, tensions will tilt the balance and incline us towards one-sided exaggeration of either spiritual or carnal, worldly or heavenly, relational or workaholic.... We are better humans as incarnated spiritual beings living in this world in the light of eternal values, being a part within a whole, enjoying good relationships and working together towards a goal. It is often symptomatic of spiritual or psychological imbalance when a person’s life swings between the two poles or is rigidly stuck to one pole without achieving a healthy balance. Conflicts and violence ensue when a person cannot accept and integrate the polarities and differences embedded in nature. For us, the life and teaching of Jesus offer the secret to reconciling every tension: the Father’s love for humanity in the Son.

Dealing with differences and toxic conflicts in human relationships

23. Diversity in creation is the handwork of God. The book of Genesis eloquently presents the creative process of the world in the creation story with a comment, “God saw that it is good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and after completing the creative process with the creation of humans in complementary genders, God said, “it is very good” (Gen 1: 31). Diversity is inherently good for life, and we are beneficiaries of it. Regarding humans, the primary polarity is that of male and female as partners, and their union (not fusion) serves to break the pain of isolation (Gen. 2: 18) and begets new life. The core identity of both male and female transcends their difference as both are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). The creation of the individual human has the inbuilt reality of being drawn from the clay (earthly element) infused by the breath of God (divine element) resulting in the creation of a human person (Gen 2:7).
24. The beauty of diversity in creation and polarity in human nature suffer a setback when the freedom of human beings takes a different turn in attempting to take the place of God. By wanting to be the measure of what is right and wrong and the ultimate end of everything (wanting to become like God), humans risk losing the very thing they have been enjoying. The perennial drama of humans in wanting to grasp for themselves what is pleasing to their eyes (choosing apparent good. cf. Gen 3:6) without taking into account the precepts of God (real good. cf. Gen 2:17) and accusing one another for

the mess created by the abuse of freedom and trust (cf. Gen 3:12-13) continues to be present in today's conflicts and wars, big or small. In almost all conflicts, accusing the other as the cause of evil and justifying oneself as an innocent victim are common narratives in which truth and lies are masked, and the search for the common good is ignored. We see the same insensitivity to the common good in a family feud, a civil strife or an infight of a religious community. When a difference is not perceived as a gift of another perspective, and polarities are not held in a creative balance, alterity will be perceived as a threat and may become an instrument to defend selfishness. Tensions arising from differences grow into conflicts of interest and become toxic polluting human fraternity and solidarity.

25. As the process leading to unhealthy conflicts begins in the realm freedom and responsibility of humans, any process towards construction of fraternity and care of creation has to begin in the proper use of freedom and responsible choices of humans.

Where do we begin as artisans of peace and reconciliation?

26. For enhancing universal fraternity, we need to start with ourselves fixing our own homes and our neighbourhoods. Our experience shows that it is possible to live joyful communities with persons of different cultures, countries, personalities, and ideas. The community in General Curia has missionaries of 15 nationalities. Many of our Major Organisms have members coming from dozens of cultures and nations. People ask if it is possible to live joyfully with such vast differences. To live fraternal life joyfully with

persons of different origins and personality traits, we need to have Christ in our midst. He enables us to open our minds and hearts and transcend the phobias and phobias that force one to settle in an ego-centric or ethno-centric small world. The Word of God teaches us the fundamental principles to guide our common journey with our brothers and sisters around us and contribute to universal brotherhood. We need to make them our own to walk the synodal path. Here are a few important affirmations rooted in our faith:

1. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and has inviolable dignity as a person. Hence, all are precious in the eyes of God and this intrinsic dignity remains even when one acts contrary to one's true identity.
2. God has created the world for the good of all humans. The organization and distribution of the resources of the world by human institutions (political, economic, social and religious) should see to it that every one is included and cared for.
3. The responsibility to care for our common home rests on all humans and the joint effort of all, especially those who are in decision-taking positions of power and authority.
4. Weaknesses, limitations, tendency to abuse freedom, and abdication of responsibility need to be taken seriously and addressed through proper education, support, healing and value-based processes of reconciliation.
5. Culture of care for humans and nature is to be fostered not by confrontation, but by respectful communication

and dialogue as well as collective effort of all starting with you and me.

27. There are good resources and programs to cultivate personal competencies and practices for communication, peacebuilding, listening, teamwork, navigating polarities, and discerning leadership, among others⁷. I would invite our missionaries to benefit from them to equip themselves as artisans of peace and fraternity.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

- How does your faith help you to make sense of the differences, contradictions, and violence that you encounter among people?
- How do you deal with tensions and conflicts within you and with others in the community or in the ministry?
- How can you and your community become better artisans of peace and promoters of care for the marginalized persons and our deteriorating common home?

⁷ For example, Marshal Rosenberg's Non-Violent communication, programs on Appreciative Inquiry, courses on Discerning Leadership, Claretian online program for interculturality. I have personally found them to be helpful.

II. FRATELLI TUTTI: OUR SHARED JOURNEY IN THE CHURCH AS PEOPLE OF GOD

28. The traditional image of the Church emphasizing the hierarchical dimension of the Church helps present her institutional nature but poorly portrays her inner nature and spiritual relationships. Through baptism, we become one body with different functions in the Church. Vatican II did not use the image of a pyramid but sought biblical images and metaphors to narrate the inner nature of the Church. The images used for the Church are the “sheepfold”, “cultivating land”, “building of God”, “mother”, “spouse”, the “body of Christ” and the “people of God”⁸. The most used term in *Lumen Gentium* is “people of God”⁹. The reflection of Vatican Council II on Church as the pilgrim people of God best expresses the synodal journey of the Church that we speak of. The synodal journey of our Congregation as envisaged XXVI General Chapter, captures the spirit of the Vatican council when we “dream of a pilgrim Congregation rooted in Jesus Christ and in Claretian spirituality” (QC 43).

⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 6-8.

⁹ In *LG*, the term “people of God” is used 41 times, while reference to “hierarchy” 25 times, to college 36 times, and the term “synod” (7 times) is used to refer to the ecumenical Council and not to the synodal nature of the Church.

29. Within the Church we are a smaller Congregation, but a significant presence in the various continents to proclaim the Gospel of joy with audacity. The Church is blessed with many charisms, gifts and orders which the Holy Spirit distributes in the Church to assist the pilgrim people of God in their journey. Often the structure of hierarchical authority occupied the main stage relegating the other charisms and roles as secondary. Only when the exercise of authority is understood as service to the people of God in the style of the Master that clericalism and abuse of power can be overcome. The clergy abuse and other scandals that humiliated the Church in the recent decades were a call to purify the “filth” in the Church¹⁰ and restore the authentic function of Holy Orders in the Church. It is in this context that the call of Pope Francis to the whole Church to walk the synodal path is significant.

A time to plead God’s mercy and forgiveness

30. The Church was humbled and discredited by the avalanche of scandals and abuses committed by her trusted children, mostly during the second half of last century, which exposed the systemic failures in preventing their occurrence. We should acknowledge that our religious profession does not render us immune to sin and selfishness. Therefore, it is important to have adequate mechanisms of vigilance in place to prevent any abuse from taking place in the Claretian environment. Together with the Church, we too plead for God’s mercy and forgiveness for we too have not been true

¹⁰ “Filth in the Church” was an expression Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (late Pope Benedict XVI) used in his Good Friday meditations during the Way of the Cross in the Colosseum in 2005.

to our vocation and have not often let the fire of God's love burn ardently in our hearts. At times we have forgotten that we are members of the mystical body of Christ, the Church, and have acted as if we were our own masters. We shall open ourselves to God's grace of forgiveness and reconciliation within us and with others recognizing our own vulnerability and welcome God's grace to make the necessary changes in our attitudes and actions.

Our place in the Church walking the synodal path

31. Our proper role as Claretian missionaries in the Church is the ministry of the Word through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity (cf. CC 46). We know that "in the Church, we are steadfast helpers of its Shepherds in the ministry of the Word by using all means possible to spread the Good News of God's Kingdom throughout the world" (CC 6). Our Congregation tried to do it faithfully in each epoch by walking closely with the whole Church in her renewal processes in adherence to the Magisterium. The General Chapters were occasions to identify and accept our limitations in order to renew ourselves and be true to our missionary call. We could identify the importance of the laity in the mission of the Church and enhance shared mission as our way of doing and living Mission. Following the footsteps of St. Claret, we found evangelization of evangelizers as vital for evangelization. Many initiatives in this regard, especially the Institutes of Consecrated life and Bible Schools, are significant ways to grow and walk forth together with our brothers and sisters as witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel.

Prophetic witnesses in the Church

32. As members of the mystical body of Christ, the Church, we have a special role as consecrated men and missionaries expressed in the prophetic character of our consecrated life (cf. VC 84). Our personal and community life is the first prophetic act (IPM 19). The prophetic spirit awakened by the Word of God is a double-edged sword which can pierce through the inner and outer realities in us and around us and expose the motivations behind the dramas taking place in the Church. St. Anthony Mary Claret in his notes on the first Vatican Council wrote his diagnosis of the illnesses of consecrated life in his day. For him, Religious Orders were lacking the spirit walk forth strong, and the remedy for it was to revive the fire of the spirit in them¹¹. We must keep our prophetic spirit alive to serve the Church as did our Founder in his days. We need to be alert to those tendencies that can weaken the missionary spirit. Here are a few:

1. The tendency to look at the Church through dualistic glasses that segregate people into categories such as liberal or traditional, pro or contra the reforms of Pope Francis, or gender or sexist ideological groups. As Claretians, we do not fit into ideological boxes as we belong to Christ and his Church. We seek to follow the Gospel values in communion with the magisterium of the Church.
2. The temptation of contemporary Gnosticism and neo-Pelagianism, which idolizes the subjective experience of reality, exalts faithless reason, and relativizes objective

¹¹ Cf. *Autobiography and complimentary writings*, p. 723.

truth and the need to conform to objective values and principles¹².

3. The viruses of clericalism and spiritual worldliness, which are corruptions of spiritual authority and misuse of material resources meant for ministering to the people of God and meeting the needs of the Church. It is important to distinguish priestly ministry from clericalism, sin from the sinner, and legitimate exercise of authority from abuse of authority.
4. The danger of identifying the synodal journey with the parliamentary model of political democracy perceived in opposition to the hierarchical and collegial dimensions of the Church. The synodal dimension is co-essential with the other two dimensions for the Church to be true to her vocation and mission.

33. The prophetic character of our consecrated life entails having the same sentiments of Christ (Phil 2:5) and the firmness and tenderness of the heart of Mary necessary to welcome and announce God's Word and denounce the different versions of evil in our midst.

The Synodal journey, a collective responsibility

34. The Synodal journey of the Church calls for the attitudes and practices that will help the whole people of God journeying together. I would identify a few important ones:

¹² Pope Francis enumerates these two dangers in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, nos 36-62.

1. We recognize the need for God's forgiveness and mercy for ourselves and ask for it ardently so that we become agents of healing and reconciliation among the People of God.
2. We appreciate all the charisms and states of life in the Church and network with them for the good of the whole Church. We value them for who they are regardless of numbers and visibility in the Church.
3. We enhance shared mission in all our platforms of evangelization and formation processes. We strive to do away with all vestiges of clericalism among us and live the true meaning of missionary life. We value, foster and accompany lay vocations in our Congregation.
4. We make efforts to recognize and affirm the legitimate role of women in the Church listening to their voices, welcoming their contributions and affirming the feminine face of the Church.
5. We cultivate the art of discernment in personal and community life and make it integral to all decision-making processes with all agents of evangelization involved in the ministry.
6. We carry out all our ministries drawing from the gift of our charism to enrich the local Church from the Claretian spiritual heritage.
7. We promote dialogue and collective action for the common good and the care of our common home with the people of other Christian denominations, religions and belief systems.

8. We exercise authority and leadership looking at Jesus' style of serving others. Governance in the Congregation at different levels (local, provincial and universal) has to be prepared to host diversity and carry out that ministry orchestrating the hierarchical, collegial, and synodal dimensions of the Church.
35. The image of the Church as a tent of meeting for the people on the journey (cf. Ex 33:7-10) with the call to enlarge its space, spreading out the tent cloths, lengthening the ropes and making firm its pegs (Is 54:2) is indeed very evocative. We shall find our own space and role in that tent according to our charism in welcoming and caring for the pilgrims.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN COMMUNITY

- How do you respond to the lay people when they point to the scandals in the Church and question the credibility of the Church? How does it challenge your own life as a missionary?
- What do you and your community do to contribute to restoring the credibility of the Church and help reveal her true nature?
- What images are evoked in you by the word "Church"? What is the story you find yourself narrating to others about the Church?
- How do you and your community benefit from the teachings of the magisterium of the Church? How does the call to synodal journey affect your life and ministry, and how do you participate in the *Laudato Si* project proposed by the Holy See?

III. FRATELLI TUTTI - OUR GOING FORTH AS “QUERIDA CONGREGACIÓN”

36. The XXVI General chapter exhortation “Querida Congregación” ends with an affirmation, “Our journey with Jesus continues....” (QC 98), Our brothers returned from that Chapter joyfully to their respective Organisms to communicate their experience and take the dream of God for the Congregation (QC 43) as our collective responsibility in the coming years. Following the synodal method of the General Chapter, the Major Organisms did their own process of the reception of its fruits through their collective discernment on how to make the dream of God for the Congregation come true in their respective contexts. Twenty of them did the process through Provincial Chapters or General Assemblies.
37. The General government did its homework with the Chapter exhortation in Vic in October 2021 to translate the designs and commitments into an action plan. The meeting of Major Superiors with General Government in Nairobi studied and enriched the action plan of General Government through our sharing and dialogue in September 2022. The major focus of the council meetings of the General Government in October 2022 was to finalize the action plan and to proceed with concrete action steps which require the collaborative effort of the whole Congregation to realize them. The council sessions of March 2023 looked into

the initial steps of the various initiatives and the work of commissions. The processes of the implementation of the action plan are going on. Providentially, the preparatory process in the Church for the Synod on the theme, *For a Synodal Church- Communion, Participation and Mission* affirms and qualifies our congregational journey in the same spirit.

Journeying at a time of epochal changes

38. We walk together as a missionary community in a global context characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA)¹³. As Pope Francis has pointed out, “today we are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change”¹⁴ which has a tremendous impact on human beings and the environment. These changes affect the life and mission of the Church as well as our Congregation. We experience serious challenges in vocations, formation of missionaries, ministries, and, more importantly, the missionary enthusiasm in the face of the challenges. We have started to decline in numbers after a stable period of two decades¹⁵. The competencies needed to navigate a ship in a calm sea will not work in a rough sea. Living with uncertainty in a context of constant changes, and planning for an unpredictable future are indeed uncomfortable unless

¹³ The acronym VUCA is often used to describe the contemporary situation in the literature on social change.

¹⁴ Cf. POPE FRANCIS. *Address to Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, 10 November 2015.

¹⁵ We were between 3,004-3,030 members during the last 20 years, and a decline is noted in the last two years. On 25 March 2023, we are 2945 members.

we develop the inner strength to be comfortable with the uncomfortable and learn the art of missioning in a VUCA world. We have much to learn from the early Christians who faced their unpredictable future by drawing from the foundations of Christian life: faith, hope, and love in the Risen Lord. The Church navigated devastating storms in the course of her history when her children held on to the same foundational values and were willing to give up privileges gathered on the way and became a sign of God's love in the world. Our Claretian history also offers valid lessons of fidelity and perseverance of our brothers during disturbing socio-political situations. Christian faith can bring out the best of us from the worst of human situations.

39. Paradoxically, this is also the time of new opportunities and creative responses to carry the ever-new wine of the Gospel in new wineskins and share it in the changing situations which require that we approach these changes with integral vision, discernment, courage, and flexibility and new ways of animation. Pope Francis uses the image of a polyhedron¹⁶, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness, to express a new vision of reality and the need for a new approach to safeguard unity and diversity at the same time.

Missionaries, rooted in Christ

40. Vatican II speaks of religious life as a seed that sprouts and grows into a tree that grows in the field of the Lord (cf. LG 43). Likewise, our Congregation has grown and flourished in

¹⁶ Cf. *EG* 236.

the Church, progressively realizing a future that our Founder dreamed of at the beginning as he said, “My spirit is for the whole world”¹⁷. To keep the tree of the Congregation fruitful, we need to do the necessary pruning, tilling the field, and nurture its roots to keep it robust. Without being rooted in the Lord, the source of our power and energy, none of our missionary efforts will have any real impact in the Church. I would like to offer some reflections to help remain rooted in Christ.

1) Taking care of our members and the roots of our missionary vocation

41. Each Claretian is a precious gift of God to the Congregation and a dear brother in our community (cf. CPR 49). We value and accompany each brother to be the best version of the missionary he could be with God’s grace. It is a joy for me to observe families with kids and the way they take care of their children. When one of them feels a gentle call of the Lord in his young age and the family allows him to join our charismatic family, we receive him with love and gratitude. The Congregation continues to look at him with the mother’s gaze and preoccupation and accompany him to have his vocation flower and bear fruits. At no time shall we lose this mother’s heart in taking care of our members which we learn from the tender love of the Heart of Mary. When a missionary chooses to leave the Congregation or when disciplinary actions become necessary to address infidelities and misconduct that hurt oneself and others, we shall pay attention to do it with love and respect for

¹⁷ *Epistolario Claretiano*, Vol I, 305.

the person of our brother, encouraging repentance and reconciliation (cf. CC 55).

42. On the part of our missionaries, the audacious cultivation of simple life, diligent care for their vocation and integral growth, due attention to their ongoing formation and genuine love for our beloved Congregation, are sure ways to become responsible sons. The first victim of the spiritual viruses that can afflict a missionary is he himself followed by his community and the people of God. In fact, anything a missionary allocates for himself more than what he actually needs for a simple life (goods, food, money etc.) acts against his own integral good in the course of time and diminishes his apostolic vitality and freedom. This principle is also valid for communities. It is sad to see competent persons in some contexts ruining their health and vitality on account of their indiscipline and unhealthy food habits, even at a younger age. Adequate self-care to keep good physical, mental and spiritual health is necessary to keep oneself fit for any audacious mission. When a missionary is anchored in God's unconditional love, the urge to seek consolation elsewhere will not take control of him. The Congregation offers ordinary and extraordinary means for the holistic health of the members, such as personal and community prayer, recollection, retreat, recreation, programs of ongoing formation and renewal (cf. CC chapter VIII, *Progressing in Missionary life*).

2) Fomenting new vocations

43. We know that our missionary vocation is a source of great joy and meaning for those who have received the call. The

Lord's call needs suitable environment to be heard and caring human agents to help discern and nurture it. Contact with a joyful and committed Claretian often evokes dormant desires to follow the call of God in a young man. Vocation is very often stimulated by the inner movement of attraction to a form of life which is exemplified in the life of known persons. Many of us have joined the Congregation because of the testimony of our brothers who lived simple and joyful lives and tirelessly served in the missions. Let us be men who care for relationships with the youth and accompany them with an authentic love for them and their purpose in life. The General Prefecture of Youth Ministry and Vocations is coordinating different activities to animate youth ministry and vocations such as the updating of the Claretian Vocation Directory, the celebration of the Claretian Vocations' Day, the accompaniment to the World Network of Young Claretians, the celebration of the World Youth Day, Claret Way, the Online Course for Referents of Youth and Vocations ministry, and the volunteering missionary experiences for the youth of the Claretian Family. However, let us keep in mind that, besides ardent prayer for vocations, the fragrance of a joyful Claretian life lived by our members, and our genuine relationship with the youth are important to evoke generous responses to God's call in the young people. Even if we may not see the results of our prayers and efforts immediately, "we know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when" and that "no single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted" (EG 279).

3) Availability to be sent in mission

44. The missionary availability of our members finds its roots in Christ whom the Father sent to us and the kenosis of the Lord in taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient unto death, even to the death on the cross (Phil 2:7-8). The apostles went to different parts of the world to announce the Good News as the Spirit guided them. Our Founder saw himself as part of the chain of missionary sending (cf. Aut 195). We shall cultivate a deep mission spirituality to foster the process of sending our missionaries to the various peripheries and in universal mission. We hope to send more missionaries with proper preparation in sending and receiving them across the Major Organisms.
45. Though there will be many limitations owing to the differences in language, culture, age and personal aptitudes, no one is a foreigner in the Congregation. All are sons in the Congregation and we create an environment for our brothers to be at home in the communities where they are assigned. We have very positive experience about sending and receiving our brothers when proper accompaniment is offered to them both by the sending and receiving organisms. We have also learned valid lessons from our failures and mistakes in dealing with cultural and ethnic differences. I am grateful for the efforts made by the Major Superiors, the communities, and the missionaries to learn and grow together in this regard. In certain situations, some missionaries are tempted to seek refuge in the diocesan form of life, mostly in western countries, without an adequate process of discernment. As I have indicated in a

previous letter¹⁸, it would be in keeping with an authentic discernment that a missionary sent in universal mission return to his home country and seek secularization there when he discovers that he never had a Claretian vocation.

4) Growing in Claretian Spirituality

46. We have beautiful and rich missionary heritage which our Founder lived and bequeathed to us. It is our responsibility to nourish our own lives from it to follow Christ and fulfill our part in the *Missio Dei* together with all other charisms and gifts of the Spirit. We are also responsible to preserve and renew the charism in the original spirit of the Founder and adapt to the changed conditions of our times (cf. PC 2). Our Constitutions renewed in the light of Vatican II indicate us the path we need to take to be authentic in our life and mission. The General Prefecture of Spirituality and Community Life will help deepen some of the instruments that our norms propose for strengthening our spirituality and community bonds such as the deepening of the Definition of a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Apostolic Prayer, discernment, spiritual accompaniment, examination of conscience, personal and community project, etc.

47. We have a providential event in 2024 which marks the 175th year of the foundation of our Congregation. We shall take it as an occasion to deepen our charismatic roots which is necessary to face the challenges of today. The General Prefecture of Spirituality and Community Life is preparing

¹⁸ Cf. M. VATTAMATTAM. Circular letter, “*My Spirit is for all the world, called and sent as missionaries in an intercultural world*”, 15 October 2019, no. 58.

for a Spirituality Congress on this occasion with the help of a commission. We intend to celebrate the event by involving all Claretians by making effective use of communication media.

5) Claretian spirituality center (CESC)

48. The Claretian Spirituality Center in Vic which takes care of investigation in Claretian Spirituality and spiritual animation especially through the Forge Program assists our missionaries to be rooted in Christ and in Claretian spirituality. When the General Government initiated a process to have the different spiritual offers to reach more missionaries, we found the great need to multiply resource persons with competencies and training to offer these services. We need more prepared Claretians to accompany our brothers in digging deeper to find the treasure within them and share it with others. In the meeting of Major Superiors with the General Government last year, the value of the Forge Program was highlighted, and it was strongly recommended for all Claretians completing 25 years of their first profession. The General Government is doing its best to make it possible to make the forge program more accessible to our brothers in different forms.

6) Formation for a transformative vocational journey

49. We give priority to the formative journey of all our missionaries throughout their lives. The General Plan of Formation (GPF) envisages a transformative and integrated formation process that endures all through our life. We shall create an integral and transforming formative spiritual culture in the Congregation that enables one to accept

his vulnerability and limitations and, with God's grace, to transform them into channels of grace and growth. God's ways with humans are not to make them superhuman but to make fragile humans as collaborators and co-creators for realizing God's dream for humanity.

50. We still need more qualified formators for initial formation for adequate accompaniment of the formandi. I want to thank the generosity of our formators who dedicate time and energy to accompany the formandi in their formative process in accordance with the guidelines of GPF. Their mission is akin to that of Jesus who spent most of his time with the twelve preparing them to carry on His mission. The General Prefecture of formation is preparing a Manual to offer tools for the practical application of the guidelines of the GPF.

7) Missionary community rooted in Christ

51. Both in the General Chapter in Nemi and in the meeting of Major Superiors in Nairobi, the challenges of community life were often discussed. Community is an important locus to celebrate the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst as it is the Lord's presence that brings the disciples together. In His absence, they were scattered. Rewarding community life is tremendously energizing while strained relationships in a community can drain missionary enthusiasm. I think the way to celebrate fraternal life in a community is to create the atmosphere necessary for honest conversations and the responsible practice of the various means that our Constitutions propose. Unfortunately, the project of *Claretian Community, Home and School of Communion*

available on our webpage was not benefitted by many Major Organisms due to its clash with other programs. I urge you to make use of them for your recollections and your ongoing formation.

52. As our communities are becoming more and more intercultural. It is indeed a great blessing for our Congregation. We have made significant progress in understanding and appreciating the beauty and wealth that the cultural differences among our members bring into our life and mission. However, we still need to deepen the spirituality of interculturality and improve our competencies for joyful intercultural living. I would recommend that all of us benefit from the new version of online course on Claretian interculturality made available by the General Government.
53. It is a cause of concern that many mission communities are made up of two missionaries mostly due to various practical reasons. In 1985 we were 2,931 Claretians in 378 communities missioning in 44 nations while in 2022, we were 2,963 Claretians living in 527 communities in 70 countries. You can imagine the impact of this change in our communities. Nuclear communities of two men suffer greatly when one of the members is sick or is in vacation and, worse still, when they go through a conflictual relationship. We shall make a concerted effort to care for community life with adequate support, even though the vast need of the Church for missionaries often demands many sacrifices from us.

8) Economy for mission

54. Our way of living simple lives and taking care of and sharing our temporal goods is also related to our way of living the

discipleship of Jesus who had the inner freedom to feast and fast at appropriate moments. We shall cultivate Jesus' attitude of inner freedom and detachment towards temporal goods and their optimal use for carrying on our missionary service. The culture of work and the care for the order and cleanliness of the house where we live are characteristic of our way of living. I am impressed by many brothers in our communities whose silent service of housekeeping and attention to the guests spread the fragrance of fraternity in the house. Laziness and easy-going culture are far from our Founder's vision of a son of the Heart of Mary. Hard work, simple life marked by healthy austerity, and economic transparency are factors that support the economic health of the Major Organisms while implementing the required long-term plan for their self-sustenance.

55. We experience the generosity of God through the culture of the sharing of goods that we practice in our Congregation. Our missionaries strive to live by their work and contribute to the community which in turns takes care of its members and contribute to the needs of their Major Organism. The same spirit of generous sharing by Major Organisms with the General Government helps the new growing organisms to achieve economic stability and missionary presence in the various peripheries. It also supports the specialization of our members for the various needs of the Congregation at the general level and that of the Major Organisms that need a helping hand. Our practice of the sharing of goods is helping us to create a eucharistic mystique in the Congregation that evokes gratitude for the gifts received, the wonder of multiplying them in sharing, and the responsible use of them for the common good.

56. The General Administration team with the economic council supervises and accompanies the Major organisms to responsibly discern and carry out the economic administration at the service of the Mission. The online course on Claretian economy offers an opportunity for all our missionaries to know the basic principles of the Claretian way of administering temporal goods.

9) The service of the exercise of authority “according to the heart of God”

57. All Claretians exercise authority, power and leadership in the different responsibilities they hold. It is pointed out that the organizational structure of the Church is conducive to power abuse because of the trust placed on the spiritual leadership of missionaries. Though there is no human system that cancels human inclination to sin and selfishness, we can create a culture of care, mutual accompaniment and timely fraternal correction which would prevent or limit abuse of power in Claretian contexts. Spiritual and psychological maturity, as well as competencies of listening and dialogue, are necessary for the proper exercise of power and authority in our communities and institutions.

58. Our local Superiors often shift their responsibility to the Provincial Government even on matters to be dealt with at the local level. It is not rare that the Major Superiors finish their terms tired and burnt out, and the members end up with their expectations frustrated. We need to create a culture that enables our missionaries who serve the brothers in positions of authority to enjoy giving themselves to their brothers. How wonderful it would be for them to feel

enriched by the contributions of their brothers through collective discernment and responsible decision-making in appropriate forums. The key to the exercise of the service of authority in the Congregation is this practice of discernment to know what God wants in each situation.

59. The General Government has organized four workshops on discerning leadership in all the continents in 2023 with the help of a team prepared for it with the expectation that the participants would multiply the program for other leaders in the Major Organisms.

Missionaries Audacious in Mission

60. Without roots, we cannot be audacious, and if we are rooted in the Lord we cannot keep the truth of the Gospel for ourselves and remain unaffected by the suffering of our brothers and sisters. The congregational dream invites us to welcome many audacious approaches in our ministries (cf. QC 43). Missionary audacity is not about captivating performance and show that attracts mobs, but rather a rooted audacity which listens and responds to God's call in each place. The designs and commitments formulated in the General Chapter require audacious approaches in mission. I would highlight a few important areas of audacious commitment.

1) Audacious servants of the Word

61. Though we have grown to love the Word of God and found that the missionary service of the Word is our special calling in the Church (cf. CC 46), the Word has not become the lamp for the feet of many missionaries. It calls for congregational

audacity to cherish the Word in our hearts like Mary and share the Word through the biblical animation of all pastoral ministry (cf. VD, 73). This is the key with which the entire congregation has been invited to live and proclaim the Word of God (cf. QC 72).

62. The General Prefecture of Bible Ministry and Communications is accompanying the Claretian Conferences to strengthen their biblical teams. Besides, well planned bible schools and bible study programs in each Major Organism with the collaboration of laity and religious can help people to discover and treasure God's Word.

2) Audacity to go forth to the various peripheries

63. Every missionary platform has its peripheries where the Lord invites us to be present. We need missionary sensitivity to identify the people who are kept at the margins and whose voices are not heard. We will find renewed enthusiasm if we start seeing our apostolates and pastoral structures from new perspectives discovered through dialogue with people who care for the mission and can collaborate. When we receive invitations to start missions in new and challenging contexts, we take into account the broad reality of our Congregation and the real need in those contexts so that we offer a realistic and discerned response.

64. Our collaborative mission with the Claretian sisters (RMI) in Madagascar has started with six missionaries. It is an audacious mission with a new paradigm of shared mission. Our missionaries have been learning the language and have just started the mission in Ankarana in Farafangana diocese.

They are also leaning to weave the differences among themselves and pool their gifts and talents for building up this mission in a very challenging context. We shall accompany them with our prayers and appreciation for their efforts.

3) Pastoral platforms of education and parishes

65. These two venues where most number of Claretians are missioning are wonderful places of encounter and formation of peoples. The question is how these platforms can better and boldly announce the Gospel. They offer opportunities for the trasversial dimensions (biblical animation, SOMI values, vocation ministry) of Claretian mission to give impetus to the mission. Wherever possible we work together with the Claretian family especially in education and youth ministry.

66. The General Prefecture of Apostolate is working to promote a common vision for education and parish ministry based on the recommendations of Pope Francis and the exigencies of our own charismatic gifts. A Claretian parish which does not enrich the local Church from our charism is impoverishing it by merely duplicating sacramental ministry, which any priest could do. Wherever we are, like our Founder, we should bring the light of Christ from our lived experience of the love of the Lord and His passion for humanity.

4) Solidarity and Mission (SoMi), a tent to care for the wounds of humanity and the creation

67. SoMi values have a lot to do with our life and mission. They impel us at personal and community levels to lead 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 (cf. QC 21, 83). The triple activities of SoMi, (Mission Procura, JPIC, and presence in United Nations) aim at working hand in hand to work for integral development of peoples in the missions. The General Prefect of Apostolate is working on articulating the vision of SoMi so as to facilitate the collaboration and united action of the three units.

68. Mission Procura has adequately consolidated its initial phase of establishing mission procures in the Major Organisms and has been organizing training programs for Project management for other Church personnel. About 94 Claretians and Claretian collaborators have received training. JPIC Secretariate works closely with the Union of Superiors General to implement the *Laudato Si* project of the Holy See and promote Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) in the Congregation with the respective JPIC offices in the Major Organisms. We shall continue to be active participants in the struggle for a more just and fraternal world and a healthy planet through our collective and courageous commitments. Our missionaries present as NGOs at United Nations offices in New York and Nairobi have done commendable work establishing a stable presence and coordinating some programs with JPIC Secretariate and Mission Procure and their counterparts at the ground level. As this is a new terrain, we make the path by walking it.

5) Evangelization in the Digital Continent

69. The digital world is a highly populated space where millions visit for information, studies entertainment, shopping,

gossiping, and meeting all kinds of human needs. Our brothers are also there for various reasons. The Spirit that moved Claret to be creative in his time impels us to be present in the Digital Continent with the Word of God to announce the joy of the Gospel. Many Claretians are present there in many innovative ways. The General Prefecture of Bible Ministry and Communications has formed the iClaret team in the General Curia to animate and coordinate the various initiatives at the general level and to encourage the Major Organisms to give attention to this space for evangelization.

70. The three characteristics of one's entry to the digital world - apparently anonymous, easily accessible, and financially affordable - make it an enchanting place for diversion and run the risk of addictions. Studies point out that the porn industry has prospered immensely in the digital world, which has enslaved millions in porn addictions, and that evangelizers are also not exempted¹⁹. Our life style allows us greater personal space to seek God and His Kingdom. But, if the missionary has not developed the passion for Christ and passion for humanity in his interior, he may fall for any allurements available at one click away in the digital world. We shall consider these realities in our community evaluations and ensure that we make intelligent use of the various forms of communication media for formation and mission. By forming more cyber missionaries (cf. QC 72c) and developing a Claretian vision for our media mission, we will be able to offer a qualified missionary service in the Digital Continent.

¹⁹ <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>

6) Daring initiatives at the service of Consecrated life

71. The six Claretian Institutes of Consecrated life are situated in different contexts and are in different levels of growth. Two of them, Claretianum in Rome and ITVR in Madrid, have completed 50 years of excellent ministry. Pope Francis gave an audience to Claretianum on 7 November 2022 and lauded Claretians for this service in the Church. Claretianum was given pontifical status as an Institute *ad instar facultatis* in the Lateran University in Rome on 19 January 2023. It has been a boost for our Institutes at a time they most needed it owing to the difficult times that Consecrated Life is going through. We should stay to offer our best together with other consecrated people. The vision for the future of these Institutes is to continue with the theological reflection keeping in mind the integral formation of Consecrated men and women offering interdisciplinary programs to enhance their life and mission. This would require greater collaboration and coordination among these centers and creative ways to respond to the real needs of the consecrated persons (cf. QC 70). A commission under the guidance of the Vicar General is studying the possibilities to improve our service through this platform of evangelization.

FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN COMMUNITY

- How do you keep your life and ministry rooted in Christ?
- What are the best practices that you should cultivate to be a missionary rooted in Christ and Claretian charism?
- What are the audacious steps that your community needs to take to offer credible missionary witness in your local Church?

CONCLUSION

72. The definition of a missionary son of the Heart of Mary which St. Anthony Mary Claret wanted all of us to imprint in our hearts (cf. CC 9) is the best description of rooted and audacious missionaries who walk forth as a pilgrim Congregation. When rooted in Christ, the heart of a missionary will be burning with God's love without burning out. Audacious missions flow from the inner fire of a missionary who is available and desirous of being sent to the various peripheries of human struggles. This is why we should do everything to keep the flame of our vocation alive all the time. It gives us the light to see with clarity the road to tread and to glimpse the missionary opportunities hidden in each place. Our brothers who go through sickness and the sufferings of old age are also audacious missionaries present in a different periphery living their mission fully in a new way by being in love and prayer even when their physical senses are unable to support. The second part of the definition describes the audacious nature of our missionary vocation. Nothing daunts a missionary. It pertains to our missionary nature to delight in privations, welcome work, embrace sacrifices, smile at slander, rejoice in all the torments and sorrows we suffer, and glory in the cross of Jesus Christ. We have numerous examples of Claretians who emulate this definition in their lives and invite us to be on fire with God's love. The program *Claretian Year* presents each day one example of life imbued with the spirit of Claret showing us a lived version of the definition of a Claretian missionary.

73. As sons of the Heart of Mary, we look at our Mother to learn the art of synodal journey. She accompanied her son and his disciples on their journey and reached the foot of the cross. She was present with the Apostles in the Cenacle to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. She continues to accompany the Church and the disciples of the Lord today. For this, she had to make the interior journey of discovering herself before God and offering herself to the salvific project of God which unfolded in her son Jesus Christ. We are privileged to be called sons of her heart. From her Immaculate Heart we imbibe the audacity to say a firm “fiat” to God’s call and the tenderness of heart to care for people and our common home. Let us walk together on the synodal path as brothers to one another (Fratelli Tutti) and generously give ourselves towards the realization of God’s beautiful Dream for humanity which Jesus called “the Kingdom of God”.

Mathew Vattamattam, CMF

Superior General

25 March 2023

ABBREVIATIONS

Aut	<i>Autobiography of St. Anthony Mary Claret</i>
CC	<i>Constitutions</i>
CPR	<i>The Claretian in the process of Congregational Renewal (1985, XX General Chapter)</i>
EG	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelii gaudium</i> (2013)
FT	Encyclical <i>Fratelli Tutti</i> (2020)
GPF	<i>General Plan of Formation</i> (2020)
IPM	<i>In Prophetic Mission (1997, XXII General Chapter)</i>
LG	Dogmatic Constitution <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (1964, II Vatican Council)
PC	Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life (1965, II Vatican Council)
QC	<i>Querida Congregación (2021, XXVI General Chapter)</i>
VC	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Vita consecrata</i> (1996)
VD	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Verbum Domini</i> (2010)



CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES
SONS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY