

## October Letter of the Superior General

Dear brothers:

The month of October in 2017 was, for us Claretians, a memorable time with the preparation for and the celebration of the Beatification of our 109 brothers in the Basilica of The Holy Family in Barcelona. The celebration was a beautiful event of affirmation for a missionary life lived at all costs until the end as exemplified by our beatified brothers in the midst of terrible trials. During the Beatification ceremony, the presence of numerous families related to the Martyrs, including a sister of one of them and Fr. Joan Sidera, a companion of many of the beatified, brought us in touch with the tangible reality of the Martyrs and their unique stories of fidelity to the very end. The whole celebration was an event of communion and collaboration at the universal and local levels of the Church and the Congregation. I thank the Province of Catalunya in a special way for organizing the event beautifully in close communication with the General Government. The online participation by thousands of people from various parts of the world strengthened our bond of communion in a new way.

After the celebration we shall not let the memory of our Martyrs recede to the pages of *Annales*. Their lives are part of our spiritual fecundity that renders us fruitful in the Church. Now that we have 184 Blessed Martyrs in the Congregation, the Holy See has allowed us to have a specific day for the Memorial of the Blessed Claretian Martyrs. The date fixed is February 1 (incidentally the day on which St. Claret was grievously stabbed in Holguin in Cuba in 1856). Thus, the Claretian feasts will be distributed around the year as follows:

- February 1: Memorial of the Blessed Claretian Martyrs.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday after Pentecost: Solemnity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- July 16: Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation).
- October 24: Solemnity of St. Anthony Mary Claret.

These feasts are occasions for us to be nourished from the well of our spiritual sources. Martyrdom is a gift given to some of us to witness to the Lord risking our very lives. However, each Claretian is called to holiness in and through his life and mission and to strive to be faithful until the end in the same missionary Spirit that animated our Founder and the Claretian Martyrs. We shall continue to thank the Lord for the fidelity of our Martyrs and ask for the grace to be faithful to our missionary vocation till the end.

### **The deliberations of the October session of the General Council**

This year the General Canonical Visits were in the young and growing Claretian missions in Africa. The General Council took time to review the reports of the visits. We are present in 17 countries in Africa constituting 6 Major Organisms (Cameroun, Congo, East Nigeria, Guinea Equatorial, St. Charles Lwanga and West Nigeria), one Dependent Delegation (Angola - São Tomé) and four missions (Cote d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso, Gabon, Mozambique and Zimbabwe). The visits gave us a general picture of the context and works of our missionaries in different parts of Africa. It is a joy to see them contributing to the Church and the society in Africa in shared mission and in close communion with the Bishops and other religious. A common element is the closeness to the people and the spiritual accompaniment of them through pastoral commitment. Though parish ministry is the predominant platform of our missionary service in Africa, the Major Organisms are making efforts to diversify our ministry in tune with our charism.

The General Government will have a joint meeting with the Governments of the Major Organisms and Coordinators of the Missions on November 20-27 in Nairobi, Kenya, to look to the future of our missionary presence and contribution in the continent of Africa.

### **On the First Process of Transformation**

As a Congregation going forth in mission, an important step forward is to strengthen our commitment to JPIC, Mission Procure and our presence at the UN by networking and collaborating as Solidarity and Mission while maintaining the specificity of each area. If we want to be truly in solidarity with the least of our brothers and sisters and accompany them in their journey towards wholeness, we need to develop greater awareness and commitment among the communities and the Major Organisms in close communion and communication with the Solidarity-Mission coordinators at the level of Conferences and General Government. We hope that with suitable and dedicated personnel at the level of Conferences and Organisms, we will be able to express our solidarity with the people at the peripheries more tangibly while we grow in reflection and action, formation and information, sharing of goods and resources “ad intra” and “ad extra”. Fr. Artur Teixeira, the General Prefect of Apostolate, with the other members of Solidarity and Mission Team, is working towards such a process of networking in the Congregation. MICLA held two important meetings in Cali and Medellin, Colombia, in September-October 2017, to coordinate its JPIC and Education ministry on this regard. Other Conferences need to foster and to strengthen their commitment in this field more intentionally.

Our presence at the United Nations, with the newly approved access as an NGO to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), demands also close communication and networking among the Claretians involved in various missionary initiatives of JPIC and allows free flow of information between the UN and the grassroots. We decided to keep focused on migrants, indigenous people, peace - reconciliation, and ecology.

The General Government, together with the Province of USA-Canada, takes care of our presence at the UN and it is coordinated by the General Prefecture of Apostolate with the collaboration of the Team of Solidarity and Mission in the Conferences and Major Organisms.

The Prefecture of Apostolate is organizing an encounter for Claretians who live and evangelize on the peripheries at the end of the online forum in pastoral-missionary and ecological conversion. We are also promoting an exchange program between the educators engaged in education ministry in Africa and those of the Province of Santiago in 2018-2019. In partnership with the Prefecture of Youth and Vocations Ministry, the Prefecture of the Apostolate is inviting our formation houses, schools, centers of high studies, parishes, missions and media, to nominate best JPIC practices to the Prefecture of the Apostolate to win the *Claret-Life* award set up to make known and encourage creative missionary initiatives in favor of those at the peripheries of society. We are inviting the Claretian Family too to participate in the award program.

Fr. Henry, General Coordinator of Publications, Bible Ministry and the Institute of Consecrated Life, held a meeting with the Claretian Publishers present at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October. Publishing ministry is facing many challenges in our times. As a ministry close to the heart of our Founder, Claretian publication ministry in various Major Organisms needs to work with a common vision and mutual support. A general meeting of the publishing houses of the Congregation is planned to be held in Bangalore from 10-17 February 2018. This, we hope, will help to strengthen the common vision of this platform for evangelization as well as encourage the upcoming publishing houses in the Congregation.

There are many initiatives of the Bible ministry in the Congregation. We are happy about this growth manifested in the establishment of bible schools in different parts of the Congregation, the bible congresses and the distribution of biblical materials. As servants of the Word, biblical ministry is integral to our missionary contribution to the Church. While bible ministry has a very visible development in America, it is slowly gaining ground in Asia and Africa. MICLA (ReBiClar) organized a formative encounter for animators of the Bible Apostolate in Medellin (Colombia) with the theme: *“And the Word became flesh”*. This was judged very positively and there is a strong desire to continue the program. It is our hope that the other parts of the Congregation would assume this our charismatic trait with greater determination and creativity. We shall organize biblical encounters and seminars to reinforce this ministry in the other Conferences for greater and more effective realization and coordination of this ministry.

The Institute of Consecrated life in Africa (TICLA) is beginning to take shape as a joint venture of ACLA which has already acquired a parcel of land in Abuja (Nigeria). The inauguration of an initial short course is planned in Abuja from 13-16 November. This will be a step to realizing this long awaited and probably overdue Institute in Africa. The hopes for a Center for Consecrated life in America is gaining momentum with the openness of the Province of Colombia-Venezuela which is taking the initiative to have it as part of UniClaretiana in close collaboration with MICLA. There is need for more concrete steps and communication between the Provinces in America and the UniClaretiana in order to identify and train personnel to undertake such a venture. Fr. Henry Omonisaye, General Consultor, would help to coordinate and facilitate the collaboration and development of the Institutes on behalf of the General Government.

Bro. Carlos Verga, the General Prefect of Youth and Vocations, is preparing an online course for youth ministry. The Team for preparing this course is identified from the different Claretian Conferences, and they are working on this project. This program includes also a gathering of Claretians who are responsible for YVM of each Organism, in Rome, in November 2018 as well as two experiential itineraries in Central America and Spain-Portugal for those who are in the initial stages of organizing YVM in their respective Organisms.

Our confreres in Central America together with members of the Claretian Family are preparing grounds to host the Claretians for the World Youth Day in Panama in 2019. Bro. Carlos Verga and the organizing Team in Panama are working together to organize the Claretian program during the event. We expect the Major Organisms to facilitate at least two youth and one Claretian to participate in the event while promoting the Claretian youth to follow the event via social media and internet in the respective Organisms.

### **On the Second Process of Transformation**

Most of the Provinces have focused on the theme of Community in their Chapters and Assemblies. We hope that there is a qualitative effect of these reflections on the actual life and teamwork of the community. We are at the initial stage of preparing a program of preparation for intercultural living as well as sending and receiving of personnel across cultures. We hope to launch it in 2018. That is why the assignments of missionaries to other Organisms was slowed down this year. We need to grow together further as a Congregation to benefit from the gift of confreres from all continents and so many races and tribes. I think it should be one of the priorities to focus on in the coming year.

The reorganization of the Claretian presence in Europe is progressing as foreseen at different paces and in accordance with the commitment of each zone of reorganization. In Africa, the Delegation of Guinea Equatorial and the Mission of Gabon will form one Major Organism in a span of one year. The Dependent Delegations of Kolkata and Sri-Lanka are progressing well in their growth in various dimensions of the life and mission as Claretians to assume responsibility proper as a Major Organism.

The Delegation Government of the Dependent Delegation of Angola - São Tomé and the communities in that Delegation are taking steps to develop internal structures and dynamics which would lead it eventually to become an Independent Delegation. North Nigeria is another growing missionary region to develop as a unit for better missionary coordination. The two Major Organisms in Nigeria are taking steps to develop more missions in this needy area.

The Province of the Philippines has started our presence in Myanmar on June 13, 2017 after due preparation of the missionaries who are sent in mission to that country. We shall accompany the new mission through our prayers and encouragement.

In the area of Economy, a major event was the meeting of Prefects of Economy in Batatais (Brazil). We are grateful to the Province of Brazil, which hosted the event with great care. We expect that the deliberations of the meeting will have positive results in the Congregation. One of the major decisions of the meeting is the launching of an online course for the training of Economes and others in responsibility to understand the basics of economic administration and the Claretian principles guiding our economy. We should not forget the fact that we are custodians and not proprietors of what God has given us to meet our basic needs and the needs of the mission. A short version of the course on economy is also planned for the formandi which they are expected to finish before completing the initial formation. Another area of economic concern is about empowering the self-sustainability of the Major Organisms in fragile socio-political and economic contexts, and supporting the Major Organisms in these places to develop credible structures of organization and functioning to take advantage of the steps we are taking.

In the area of Communication, the Secretariat is making efforts to improve the webpage and make use of the possibilities offered by social media to facilitate communication and contact among Claretians. The celebration of the Beatification of our Martyrs was a good moment to enable people all over the world to follow the programs via internet. We need cooperation from the ground by sharing news and events, and by offering collaboration from Claretians engaged in this field.

### **On the Third Process of Transformation**

There is growing awareness in the Congregation that without anchoring ourselves in our spiritual heritage, our apostolates will be just pious practices and social activities at best. We will not be then credible witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel. The event of the Beatification of our Martyrs once again reiterated the centrality of the cross of Christ in our missionary life. We shall courageously walk the way of the Lord with the same apostolic spirit of our Founder whose life exemplified the harmony of contemplation and action, and of going out to preach the Word to the people and staying back to replenish the missionary spirit.

We are concluding the bicentenary of the birth of Fr. Xifré, the tireless missionary, who took the Congregation to new frontiers. A number of programs were organized in many communities and formation houses to know and imbibe the missionary spirit of Fr. Xifré. I hope that our homage to this great missionary in his bi-centenary year has deepened our own commitment to be men who dare to get out of convenient comfort zones and step into new horizons to proclaim the Word of God. Fr. Xifré left his own projects and interests and united himself to the project of St. Claret for which he gave himself fully. At the end of his life, he could say: *“Beloved Congregation, I have loved you as much as I could until the end and I will not forget you in the eternity. I lived exclusively for you without counting sacrifices and dangers... I ask pardon and all I pardon, loving all in God, as I love myself”*. The depth of these words invites us too to live our mission with the intensity of love that renders every difficulty and suffering as nothing compared to the joy of belonging to Christ our Lord (Cf. Phil 3:8).

The new program of *The Forge* is on the march now with an enlarged Team of committed staff to conduct the program for both Spanish and English groups. The Province of Santiago has renewed and made available the house in Los Negrales (Spain) for The Forge. The Spirituality Center too has an enlarged Team with two new members. The two Teams (CESC and Forge) would work with Fr. Gonzalo Fernández, the General Prefect of Spirituality, to offer programs of spiritual animation in the Congregation. Both Teams will also prepare *The Claretian Year*, a formative and spiritual itinerary to help all Claretians know and live our spiritual patrimony, as requested by the last General Chapter (MS 74.1). I hope that the Claretian Shrines of Vic, Sallent and Barbastro in Spain will serve as fountains of spiritual renewal not only for ourselves but also for the entire Claretian Family. I would remind the Major Superiors to plan the participation of suitable members to benefit from The Forge program and contribute more to the life and mission of the Congregation.

In the field of formation, the first course for Formators was held in Spain from April to July, and it had 23 participants from thirteen Major Organisms. The experience of the course was rated as very helpful for formation. One important revision made for the program of the course was the integration of the Workshop on Accompaniment that lasted for two weeks. Prior to it, was the ten-week online course that was required for all the participants of the Formators' course. This initiative is a response to the recent Chapter Declaration that emphasizes the importance of accompaniment in formation work (MS 75.2). We appreciate the Major Superiors who took keen interest to prepare Formators in their respective formation houses. The course in Spanish will be from April-June, 2018. I invite the Spanish speaking Claretians to benefit from this course. A program for Formators on personal accompaniment is planned at the level of MICLA in November 2018.

The updating of the General Plan of Formation is in progress. The first meeting of the Team presided by Fr. Leo Dalmao, General Prefect of Formation, was convened in Rome from September 25-30 this year. The international commission is now in its second phase of the work. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2019.

## **Conclusion**

When we receive more, we need to give more. We have received grace upon grace, and one of the latest of these graces is the Beatification of our brother Martyrs. The Beatification ceremony in Barcelona, with the participation of Claretians of various nationalities, Bishops from different parts of Spain, relatives of the Martyrs, representatives from all branches of the Claretian Family, was an experience of our unity in diversity, of our fraternity, and of joy in living and dying for the Lord. I believe, it is the fruit of what our Martyrs prayed for the "*beloved Congregation*" and for peace and reconciliation in the world. We shall pay homage to our Martyrs by transforming ourselves as icons of unity in diversity in a world which is struggling to live fraternity amidst differences. This unity and fraternity is best represented by the image of a seamless fabric with an imprint of Christ made by fine threads of different colors interwoven flawlessly. With the spirit of our Founder we shall weave the Congregation united by our missionary charism with the beautiful diversity that we are endowed with.

Mathew Vattamattam cmf  
Superior General

Rome, October 31, 2017