

## CIRCULAR LETTER

### CONVOCAATION OF THE XXV GENERAL CHAPTER

Dear brothers:

1. On July 16<sup>th</sup> of last year 2014, I sent you a circular letter announcing of the XXV ordinary General Chapter. In it I reminded you of the fundamental aspects regarding the General Chapter as found in the Constitutions. These speak clearly about the meaning of the Chapter for the life of the Congregation, designate its objectives and give the necessary rules for its establishment and development. The circular letter called for you also to correctly situate the Chapter and its theme within the historical coordinates in which we are called to announce and give testimony of the Gospel. I reminded you that this XXV General Chapter will take place during the “year of consecrated life” that Pope Francis has convened to give thanks to the Lord for this charism and to encourage those of us who have received it to live it with joy and faithfulness.
2. In the circular letter of the Chapter announcement I presented you with the theme that was going to focus our reflection and discernment during the whole Chapter: *"Called to evangelize: Witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel."* I invite you to reread the letter of announcement which specified the reasons that led us to choose this theme. I explained its content and scope and offered you some guidance for dealing with this in community. I want to insist on this aspect. The Chapter theme seeks to help the Congregation to better define the characteristics of our contribution as Claretians to the mission of the Church today.
3. I insist on something that I have repeated several times: the theme of the Chapter is *the mission* and not just the apostolate. I mentioned this in the letter that I sent out after the intensive meetings of the General Government in October of last year. I say again what I said then: *"Mission is a much deeper and more fundamental concept within our lives, that goes beyond what we identify under the concept of 'apostolate'.* The mission is the core of our vocation and, therefore, defines our spirituality, directs the formative processes in the Congregation and determines our style of community life, which itself is destined to be the proclamation of the Gospel, directs the organization of the Congregation's finances, and is expressed specifically in apostolic activities that try, in their turn, to adapt to the characteristics of different places and cultures. Pope Francis is calling the Church to open itself up deliberately to the situations we encounter in our world and to go out fully prepared to support the working of the Spirit in history and to proclaim the joy of the Gospel to all peoples. It is a calling that requires us to reconsider the very core of our vocation and see exactly what it means and what it now requires to live the mission faithfully and creatively. The mission does not 'belong' to us, but we do 'participate' in it. So we should better identify the characteristics required today for our contribution to the mission of the Church. This will lead us to clarify the basic options of our mission, and to further elucidate what kind of lifestyle, community, formation and apostolate it is asking of us".
4. There is a certain similarity with the situation that we lived in the Congregation around the time of the 1979 Chapter. At that time, the Chapter, in addition to working on the final wording of the

renewed Constitutions, confronted the issue of mission as the inspiring and decisive core of congregational life. The five options that it signaled as criteria by which we had to qualify our spirituality, community, formation, apostolate, organization and economy, have deeply marked the life of the Congregation for 35 years. That Chapter took place after a Synod on evangelization (1974), the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI (1975) and some very significant experiences and documents of the continental churches (I am thinking, above all, of CELAM in Puebla, Mexico and of the FABC in Taipei and Kolkata) that decisively marked its reflection and discernment. It was also an important opportunity to bring together, the core issue of mission and the fruits of the process of post-Vatican congregational renewal lived up to that time.

5. Many years have passed, and even though these options continue to maintain their validity, we must integrate into our discernment the new situations in the world, the ecclesial path of these years and the experience of the Congregation which has been enriched by many factors. There has been a significant change in the human geography of the Congregation and the location of our missionary presence. Promoted by the General Chapter, we have lived very significant processes around the Word of God, the “shared mission,” the renewal of the Claretian charism, the commitment to justice and the excluded in their various expressions, etc. Also today we find ourselves in an ecclesial moment marked by the Synod on the “new evangelization” (2012), the publication of the Apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) and the rich contributions of continental churches (I think of Aparecida, the documents of FABC, SCEAM and the Episcopal Conferences of Europe and Oceania), in addition to the experiences of the various Synods that have been communicated principally through the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortations. It is, therefore, a time to reflect upon what these new situations ask of us as a missionary congregation and to discern those fundamental options, taking into account all these occurrences, which should mark our way of living and the expression of the missionary charism with which the Lord has graced us. This is the horizon of our Chapter discernment: what should be the characteristics of our contribution as Claretian Missionaries to the mission of the Church, a contribution which has to touch our lives and our apostolates. I think that this is an important topic that requires great openness to the signs of the Holy Spirit and great fidelity to the missionary life project set out in the Constitutions.
6. Several months have passed since the announcement of the XXV General Chapter. The election of delegates to the Chapter has been concluded in all the Provinces, Delegations and General Houses. The General Government has named those capitulars which are allowed by the decision of the previous General Chapter. The number of capitulars has thus been set. All this has been done in the normal manner and in accordance with the provisions of our legislation. **Therefore, in accordance with the Constitutions number 154 and Directory number 499, with this Circular letter I officially convoke the XXV ordinary General Chapter of our Congregation which will be held in Rome beginning on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August of this year 2015. This convocation is especially aimed at those who by office, election or appointment, have the right and obligation to take part in the General Chapter.** All those called should be in Rome on August 23, before 19:00 hours, to start the Chapter on the 24th in the morning.
7. With the publication of this circular letter begins the official time of the Chapter in which we are all called to actively participate in different ways. All communities should recite at one of its


moments of common prayer the special prayer for the Chapter that we sent to all provincial secretariats and which you can find in the Chapter section of the Congregation website ([www.claret.org](http://www.claret.org)). May this prayer help us to unite with all the Congregation who want to live this moment as a "time of grace" and for this, calls upon the gift of the Spirit.

8. It is necessary to live this moment with passion. The participation of each and every one is important. The quality of the capitular discernment and availability to welcome the decisions that emerge from this path will depend upon it. I remind you of some of the attitudes needed to live this time of the Chapter which I expressed on the occasion of the previous General Chapter:
9. *Let us fix our gaze upon Jesus.* We are his disciples. He has called and sent us. His presence gives meaning to our lives and our community. Our Founder asked us to fix our gaze and our hearts upon Him when he told us that the missionary's "only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate Him in praying, working, suffering..." With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will be able to contemplate the world with His compassionate eyes and we will be bold when determining our options and programs.
10. *Let us give priority during this time to listening to the Word* in liturgy, in reading and in personal prayer, in community sharing. In the attentive listening to the Word we find that water which make flourish in our lives the fruits of the Kingdom. Let it be the Word of God that challenges and directs our discernment. I invite you to create moments in the community to seek, from a prayerful reading of the Word, what God wants to tell us at this point in the history of our Congregation.
11. *Let us deepen our union with this ecclesial moment we are living.* The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* and the guidelines that the Pope has given us for the year of consecrated life offer us very valuable inspiration for our Chapter discernment. Pope Francis has announced the celebration of the "Jubilee year of mercy". This is a new call to open our lives and our communities to experience the merciful love of God and to allow this experience to guide us down the path to follow in the future.
12. *Let us dialogue with the world of today.* Our gaze must carefully focus on the situations and events of our world. What is being asked of us by the troubling situations of violence, war, injustice and marginalization? Are we able to identify the desire of many people who seek a light that opens new horizons of hope in their lives, and reveals to them the true meaning of their existence? Do we allow ourselves to be challenged by the testimony of so many men and women who, from religious or diverse humanistic inspirations, seek to transform the world according to God's design? Let us look at our world with critical eyes, but with the heart of a friend. We believe in the God who is a 'friend of life' (Wisdom 11:26).
13. *Let us keep alive the memory of our Father Founder* and the ideal that led him to begin, with his companions, the missionary path that we are continuing. We have just finished the path of "the Forge in everyday life", which has allowed us to deepen our experience of the Claretian charism. Let us call to mind the memory of so many of our brothers who lived their missionary vocation with utmost of fidelity. Our martyrs and many other Claretians who have responded with generosity to the missionary challenges of their time are example of holiness, they will be a powerful inspiration for us during this time.

14. *Let us unite with the life of the universal Congregation.* The Chapter is a privileged opportunity to become aware of the richness of the expressions of the Claretian charism that has taken root in different cultures and to grow in the universal dimension of our missionary vocation. The Chapter journey is an experience of intercultural dialogue that requires an attitude of openness.
15. *Let us entrust Chapter itinerary to our Mother.* May her *Magnificat* accompany us during this time. We commit ourselves to her maternal love and through this love, we feel blessed and sent to be instruments of God's blessing to all his children.
16. *Let us be guided by the burning desire to faithfully live our vocation.* Let this be the only motivation that guides us in our deliberations and decisions. Let us live our Claretian missionary vocation, with enthusiasm as I said in the circular letter "Missionaries". Let us not lose sight at any moment of our Constitutions. During this capitular time, I want that in each community of the Congregation that you read one number of the Constitutions each day, an exercise that will help us be more aware of the fundamental elements of our missionary life.
17. In a few months, you will receive the draft of the working document of the Chapter which the pre-capitular Commission will prepare from the contributions received from the Provinces, Delegations and General Houses. You can comment on this in your communities and send to the capitulars of your Province, Delegation or General House the fruit of your reflection along with proposals and suggestions that you believe appropriate. Don't forget to create the necessary spaces to collect contributions from the laity and other partners with whom we share the mission. They will help us to find the most appropriate ways to live the missionary vocation in our world. It will be very well that we open ourselves to their questions and welcome their suggestions.
18. At the World Congress on consecrated life held in Rome in November of 2004, we referred to the consecrated life as a way of life characterized by a "passion for Christ and for humanity". It is a very beautiful way to express the ideal of our lives and the desire to respond to the vocation that the Lord has given us. May the desire to be missionaries of the Kingdom in our world awaken in us the freedom that allows us to overcome all the interests and fears that separate us from the cause of Jesus and to spur us on to be guided by the fire of the spirit that burns in the hearts of those who have left everything to follow the Lord.
19. I conclude calling to mind proposition 50 of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization. It asks of us religious, as a specific contribution to the new evangelization, that we be witnesses of the absolute primacy of God, of the humanizing power of the Gospel through the testimony of our fraternal life, and that we be available to go to the geographic, social, and cultural borders of the Mission of the Church. Pope Francis insists on this last point when he speaks of the "peripheries", both as the key hermeneutic to discern our choices and styles of life and mission, and as a missionary horizon towards which we should get underway. Let us listen carefully to this call.

Rome, March 19, 2015  
Feast of Saint Joseph



  
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Superior General