

LETTER ON THE CONGRESS OF CLARETIAN SPIRITUALITY - 2024

Dear Brothers,

I wish you a fruitful Easter season. May the encounter with the Risen Lord grant us to grow in the gifts of new life and missionary passion.

I am writing to you, in the name of the General Government, to inform you that **during these days of the Easter Season we officially begin the time of preparation for the next Congress of Claretian Spirituality**, which will take place from July 7 to 15, 2024 in Vic, on the occasion of the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the Foundation of our Congregation.

In recent years some congresses of spirituality have been held at the level of organisms and conferences, which have enriched our missionary life. However, since the Spirituality Congress in Majadahonda (Spain) in 2001, there has not been a congress for the whole Congregation.

During the last 23 years a series of social, ecclesial and congregational changes have been taking place which are so relevant that we consider it necessary to look at our spiritual heritage to see how we are living our missionary spirituality in the different scenarios and in the plural circumstances that are taking place in our days.

The General Government has appointed a **Commission to take charge of preparing the Congress** made up of the following members: Carlos Sánchez, Efrén Limpo, Juan Carlos Martos, Gonzalo Fernández, Anthony Igbowke and Edgardo Guzmán.

Here are some relevant points that we as a Commission would like you to keep in mind:

Objectives of the Congress:

To provoke a congregational "conversation" about our missionary spirituality, in which we experience the living presence of Jesus who walks with us as he did with the disciples of Emmaus, and which helps us:

- **To remember and be grateful** for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the 175 years of our congregational history and the missionary spirituality that he has awakened in us to serve his holy People.
- **To update the gift of our missionary spirituality** considering the profound social and ecclesial changes we are experiencing and discovering in them the calls of God to unfold the gift we have received.
- **To revitalise our missionary spirituality** with the power of the Spirit in such a way that we allow ourselves to be transformed, both on a personal and community level, into

mystical missionaries in the style of Fr Claret.

Participants:

The members of the General Government, the prefects or those in charge of spirituality of the Major Organisms, the Provincial Superior of Sanctus Paulus (host Province), the former Superiors General, a representative of each of the branches of the Claretian Family, some guests of the General Government, the speakers and a team of translators.

Themes:

We will begin with a retreat experience that will help us to tune into the mystical-missionary experience of Claret. We will then embark on a three-stage journey answering three questions: Where do we come from? Where are we? and Where are we going? To do this, we will address several themes: the history of our 175-year spiritual journey; what is sapping our vitality; what is nourishing us; the new calls and perspectives we are discovering; and how to be missionary mystics today? These central themes, which will be addressed by different speakers during the mornings, will be accompanied by a series of workshops which, in the afternoons, will help us to deal with various realities related to our missionary spirituality.

Methodology:

We will use the methodology of the last General Chapter: **generative conversations and synodal, narrative, appreciative and discerning approaches**. We intend to harmonise theory with practice and the local with the universal. We do not want to limit ourselves to just talking about spirituality, but we want the days to be a lived, celebrated and shared experience of spirituality. We will collect the spiritual experiences of our brothers of the past and of today through videos presenting their testimonies.

All the conferences, workshops and celebrations will be broadcast live and recorded on the YouTube channel iClaret <https://www.youtube.com/@iClaret> of the Congregation so that all the members of the Claretian Family who wish to do so can participate both live and recorded; there will also be the possibility for some to do so as a community or in different groups.

A time to prepare ourselves:

I consider the celebration of this Spirituality Congress to be a special moment of grace for our missionary family. Therefore, we need to prepare ourselves adequately. First of all, I invite you to cultivate an attitude of openness to the action of the Spirit, who roots us in Christ and launches us audaciously into mission. At the same time, I propose that you take part in three experiences:

1) **Watch in community two videos on community conversations and prayers and discuss them.** The next community retreat or some other community meeting could be the ideal place to enrich yourselves with the content of these videos prepared especially for this occasion by our brother José Cristo Rey García Paredes. He presents two themes that can

help us to prepare our minds and hearts to live this time of preparation for the Spirituality Congress as a personal and community kairos. Here is the link to each of the videos:

Community conversations: https://youtu.be/Vx_Pi0BLp88

Community prayers: <https://youtu.be/B1IMVCb2wq0>

2) **Organise generative community conversations**, as we had in preparation for the last General Chapter. This time, only at two levels: in the local communities and in the major organisms; with the possibility, of course, of inviting other people linked to the life and mission of the communities and organisms. In the booklet attached to this letter you will find the questions and guidelines to follow. The conversations in the communities can be conducted at any time from 25 April onwards; the deadline for submitting your answers is 30 September 2023. The conversations at provincial level should collect the responses from the communities and send a single response; the deadline for this synthesis is 1 October to 15 November 2023. With the answers you send, the Commission will draw up the instrumentum laboris, which will serve the rapporteurs as a starting point for preparing their conferences.

3) **Respond to the survey that will be sent to each Claretian**. Once the generative conversations in the communities are over, you will have the opportunity to respond to an anonymous survey that will try to inquire about the level of practice of the methods that our Constitutions propose for the cultivation of our missionary spirituality; in this way, we will be able to have concrete data that will accompany and enlighten the reflections. We will send you the survey questions on 1 October. The deadline for sending in your answers will be 15 November.

Finally, dear confreres, I encourage you all to participate with enthusiasm and commitment in this time of congregational grace. **We ask especially that the provincial superiors, prefects or those in charge of spirituality of the Organism and local superiors to be the animators of this process of preparation**. Let no one be left out of this personal and community journey.

I hope that the celebration of this Congress, immediately before the commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the Foundation of our Congregation, will allow us to relive the experience of Claret and his five companions at the end of the foundational Spiritual Exercises: "we left full of fervour, bound and determined to persevere..." (Aut. 490). May Mary, our Mother, help us to live these events from the depths of a heart open to God and to our brothers and sisters.

Cordially yours,

Madrid, 25 April 2023

Fr Carlos Sánchez Miranda, CMF
General Prefect of Spirituality and Community Life