

## Report of the Superior General to the Canonical Phase of the General Chapter Rome, September 11 – October 7, 2022

### Part I - Context

1. Six years ago in Pattaya, Thailand, at the conclusion of the Canonical Phase of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, I spoke to the Capitulars. I shared with them some reflections on the four weeks we had just experienced. It was clear to me that the choice of the sexennial theme, *Witnesses of the Redeemer: In solidarity for mission to a wounded world*, had been deeply influenced not only by the retreat preached by Cardinal Tagle, but also by the experience of celebrating the Canonical Phase in Pattaya, in the midst of the wounded world in which we are called by the Redeemer to witness to his presence and redeeming love.
2. I prayed that this theme would not remain only words in our final message, but that it would be written on the heart of every confrere, expressed in our 'going forth' in the spirit of Pope Francis, and that it would revitalize our relationship with the Redeemer, with one another, and with the abandoned poor.
3. Little did I suspect how prophetic that theme would be for this sexennium, for our whole Congregation, and indeed for the whole world.
4. Shortly after the conclusion of the Canonical Phase in Pattaya, the new General Government began its mandate, preparing the Chapter documents for publication, and scheduling the Third Phase Meetings to take place in 2017. At these Third Phase Meetings, each Conference proposed the terna of names for Coordinator, as well as names for the Conference Commission (CARP) to prepare the Apostolic and Restructuring Plans (Decision 5). As well, we began the plans for the Extraordinary Visit of the entire Congregation to take place in 2018-2019. The General Government also presented its Plan of Action for the Sexennium, and encouraged each Conference to begin preparing such a Conference plan as well.
5. The Extraordinary Visit over a period of 18 months engaged the whole Congregation, and the large majority of the Confreres worldwide, in a synodal process of prayer, encounter, listening and discernment. In the Assembly of each Visit, the General Government led a retreat day on the theme, communicated the decisions of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, as well as the Plan of Action of the General Government, and began a serious reflection and dialogue about the missionary and apostolic priorities in each Conference. As well, an initial dialogue about possible models for reconfiguration began, and all suggestions and recommendations were noted and passed on to the CARP Commissions.
6. This process continued with the publication of Communicanda 1, and the first drafts of the Apostolic and Restructuring Plans presented to the Assembly of each Conference in 2018. The Conference Assemblies studied the drafts, made recommendations and proposals, and accepted the second revised draft as a working

document to be presented in every Unit: to the Councils, to the communities, and to (V) Provincial Assemblies and Chapters. The results of these discussions and further recommendations were then sent to the CARP which proposed a revised draft for the Mid-Sexennium Meetings in 2019.

7. At the 2019 Mid-Sexennium Meetings, the revised draft was presented, discussed, revised, and approved. Each plan included missionary and apostolic priorities, fundamental priorities, plans for implementation, as well as a reconfiguration plan in the light of the apostolic plan. Each Conference agreed to work on a strategic plan to be approved in the Conference Assembly in 2020.
8. Flowing from the mid-sexennial meetings, there was an energy and enthusiasm throughout the Congregation, especially with regards to the Apostolic Plans, the Plan of the General Government, the appreciation of the theme, and the progress in the Conferences in renewing our Redemptorist identity. With the approval of the plans by the General Government in December 2019, some conferences already began to prepare their implementation beginning in January 2020. There continued to be resistance among some confreres and some (V) Provinces, but we were moving forward with hope and energy.
9. Then, in March 2020, the Covid Pandemic resulted in a worldwide lockdown – take a moment to remember where you were as the lockdown was announced in your country. Travel came to a standstill, Churches were closed as well as almost all public spaces, and the world was on edge.
10. In some ways, it almost seems now as if time stopped for two years. Everything, worldwide, was interrupted. We understood in a very different and much more personal way what it means to witness to the Redeemer in our wounded world!
11. So many of our plans for the final three years of this sexennium were cancelled or postponed. The opening celebrations for the Jubilee Year of St. Clement were cancelled. Our Churches were closed. Missions were postponed. Assemblies and Chapters were cancelled or rescheduled – again and again.
12. Many of us felt that this situation might last a few weeks, perhaps even a few months, and then we would return to normal. Pope Francis knew better – and he spoke to us with courage and understanding, alone on the steps of St. Peter’s Basilica on March 27, 2020.
13. We watched in horror as the death toll climbed – especially among the elderly, even among our confreres and family members. We suffered with Province of Madrid in Holy Week, as 7 confreres died in the community of Astorga, and public funerals were not possible. In the following weeks, months and years, many more confreres, family members, and lay missionaries were taken from us by this pandemic. Everyone wondered who would be next?

14. We ached with migrant workers who found themselves with no income, on the empty streets, as one business after another closed their doors. We felt for the aged and infirm, who were left isolated and alone. Parents with small children confined to apartments. Schools closed. And we waited.
15. However, we also experienced something remarkable in many of our communities. For many of us, it was a time when we renewed our commitment to community prayer. We gathered in the common rooms of our houses to watch the news and share with each other. Many of us served the community in new and creative ways. We discovered hidden talents for cooking and cleaning, for creativity and joy. It wasn't all light, however. We also experienced shadows. Some among us suffered crises – psychological, spiritual, human. And we struggled through.
16. As the pandemic and the lockdowns stretched on and on, much of the energy and enthusiasm experienced in the first years of this sexennium began to diminish. It seemed as if the Congregation had entered a period of 'waiting', with everything 'on hold'. The deepening experience of community in many places began to encounter frustration as weeks turned into months and the lockdowns continued. In many cases and situations, the 'waiting' turned into paralysis – not only for Redemptorists, but for the Church and Religious Life in general. A low-level 'depression' touched many of us. Many studies and articles on this phenomenon began to be published.
17. Perhaps part of this is due to the nature of our Redemptorist identity and mission. Most of us spend our most productive years and ministry going out, seeking the poor, the abandoned, the unchurched. We are not used to 'staying at home'. In previous historical pandemics, it was actually the religious men and women who went out, who cared for the sick, who fed the hungry... In this pandemic, many of our houses became fortresses. Our Churches and Shrines closed. Many confreres experienced a deep frustration that we became 'locked in', that we couldn't 'go forth'. Other confreres experienced a strong sense of insecurity, and fear of interactions with others.
18. It took us time before we truly realized that something dramatic had changed. And that the pandemic was not going to end quickly. In many cases, and many places, new and creative possibilities flourished among us. Zoom became a new word, prominent in our vocabulary, both as a noun and as a verb. We worked hard at being present to those most in need. Social projects began or gained new insights and initiatives. Some of these initiatives even cost a few confreres their health, and for some, they cost their lives. A growing but fragile sense of solidarity flourished among us.
19. New hope dawned with the vaccines. And then came the variants. And the boosters. And more variants. We know how this pandemic continues to afflict us, and our whole world. But most especially the poor, migrants, and young people. With the pandemic we seem to be living through a cycle of hope and disappointment. However, as Francis and many other commentators point out, it is clear that we cannot go back to the way things were before this pandemic.

20. Again, as Pope Francis often reminds us, the Covid Pandemic exposed many of the other ‘pandemics’ which have wounded our world for many years, and which continue to wound us today. The Covid Pandemic did not cause these wounds or these other pandemics, but it has helped us all to become much more aware of them. Pope Francis speaks of the pandemics of indifference, of economic exploitation, of violence and injustice, of isolation and loneliness, the degradation of the environment and climate change, xenophobia and the abandonment of the elderly, ...
21. At times, some of the confreres speak of the exaggeration of the pandemic. Some even deny the reality of the Covid-19, and claim that it is a conspiracy and a hoax. Yet there is no doubt that the pandemic has deeply touched our confreres throughout the world, has had very significant consequences for our mission and ministry, and continues to be a present reality as we celebrate this Canonical Phase of the General Chapter. This was reflected clearly in the consultation with the communities, as well as in the First Phase Chapter Meetings.
22. Others believe that this focus on the pandemic has become an ‘excuse’ for us. There may be some truth in this assessment. At times, the fear of contagion has separated us from one another, and from those we are called to serve. Perhaps it has been used to justify inaction or resistance to implement our Apostolic Plans, and thus, to maintain the status quo. However, rather than an excuse for paralysis, I believe the pandemic is actually a challenge to open our eyes to the greater reality of the wounds and vulnerability of our world, our Church, and our Congregation. The pandemic has revealed to us our own vulnerability and fragility.
23. This vulnerability is even more evident to us in the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, and the ongoing war in Europe. The impact of this war is felt globally. As the Secretary-General of the UN stated in early August, never since the Cold War has the threat of nuclear annihilation been so real and so concrete. The political repercussions of this war are global, and touch every continent, especially the poorest people. In addition, we are beginning to see the effects of the war in other areas – world hunger and export of grains, use of fossil fuels and escalating prices, influx of refugees and discrimination in their treatment depending on country of origin. Nor can we dare to ignore other places of conflict and violence: from Sri Lanka to Myanmar, from Congo to South Sudan, in Nicaragua... and more recently, between China, the USA, and Taiwan.
24. The pandemic has also exposed the fragility and the woundedness of the Church today. Internationally, Pope Francis is one of the very few universally respected voices. However, on local levels, the Church has been badly wounded. The anti-Francis movement within some dimensions of the Church (especially among the hierarchy) has not helped. In particular, we note that the pandemic exposed several very real wounds of the Church today:
  - The lack of a ‘sense of belonging’: For many people, especially the younger generations, it was very easy to stay away from Church when the Churches were

locked. And in most places, even now after the Churches have been reopened, many people have not yet come back.

- The loss of credibility of the Church: In the light of the crises of abuse – sexual, financial, power – and the challenge of colonialism and colonization, the Church is confronting a growing loss of credibility. This loss of credibility is no longer restricted to Europe and North America – just think of the Me-too movement and Black Lives Matter. It can be noted in every continent.
- The alienation of so many young people, and the poor: Although we have often spoken of the alienation of young people today, the alienation of the poor is much more marked. In Latin America where, especially since Vatican II, the Church has been known as the voice for the poor, there is a sense of abandonment felt by the poor and the people on the peripheries of society and the large urban centres. This sense of abandonment is contributing to the huge growth of evangelical movements, and the associated political leaders, many of whom are ‘populists’ as well.

25. The woundedness within our Congregation mirrors closely the wounds of the Church universal. We see this in the experience of individual confreres and of local communities.

- The loss of a ‘sense of belonging’ afflicts us as well: Some confreres have spoken to me about the diminishing ‘love for the Congregation and its mission’ which was so important in previous generations. Perhaps this is related to the challenge of perseverance in the Congregation today. But it is also more than ‘perseverance’. Without a strong and real sense of belonging and love for the Congregation, the Congregation becomes simply the platform on which I build and carry out *my* ministry. Individualism becomes the norm rather than the exception. Self-fulfilment takes precedence over the common good. ‘Corporate commitments’ become much more difficult to assume and guarantee.
- The loss of credibility has touched our Congregation as well: Sexual abuse and misconduct, financial abuse and misconduct, and abuse of power have cost us dearly. These realities deeply affect our credibility among the people of God, and in society at large. It is important to realize that these abuses are not just ‘historical cases’ from the distant past, but there are actual cases experienced in the present. This indicates that we still need to grow in our human formation and maturity, especially in the area of sexuality and affectivity. These cases have deeply affected all our Units in every Conference. Such cases and scandals question the integrity and meaning of our Consecrated Life and the vows which we profess, as well as our witness to the Redeemer. The cost of these abuses is not only financial – it is not even primarily financial. There is a great human cost – for the victims, for the confreres, for the credibility of the Congregation.
- More worrisome is the ‘malaise’, the lack of enthusiasm, the low-level depression which is affecting so many of our confreres and our communities. I wonder if this is a result of the alienation of young people, and especially, the poor. Our lifestyle has become too comfortable. We are very comfortable. Has consumerism replaced our commitment to God and to the poor? Yes, we serve the poor. But are we truly ‘with’ the poor?

- We have heard frequently about the crisis of consecrated life in the Church today. This crisis is bigger than our Congregation. But how are **we** living this crisis as Redemptorist Missionaries? How are our communities affected by it? Does our Apostolic Community Life dedicated to Christ the Redeemer assist us in living through this crisis and addressing the real issues?

We are at a moment of crisis. There is no doubt about this. And just as with every crisis, it is a moment of both opportunity and danger.

26. This crisis was reflected in the responses which the Central Preparatory Commission received from confreres, the communities, the councils and the lay partners during the consultation process which involved the whole Congregation and our partners in mission. This consultation process clearly articulated five areas of concern in this critical moment:

- Our Redemptorist identity,
- Our Redemptorist Mission,
- Our life in apostolic community dedicated to Christ the Redeemer,
- Formation for our Apostolic Life, both initial formation and ongoing formation,
- Leadership for our Apostolic Life.

27. Although we are in a period of crisis and a change of epoch, we can discern the elements of a path forward. In 2013, in his programmatic Apostolic Exhortation ***Evangelii gaudium***, Pope Francis mapped out this path for the whole Church. It also applies to us, and it is still valid after the pandemic:

- The personal and community encounter with Jesus Christ as the source of our identity;
- The joy of proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to this personal encounter, recovering the mission of Christ in today's world, especially accompanying the poor and the abandoned, the young and the alienated. Francis invites us to place the poor at the centre of our concern;
- The renewal of the Christian community flowing from this joyful encounter with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit;
- The formation of Spirit-filled missionary-disciples, ordained, religious and lay; This formation must be lifelong.
- The role and charism of leadership, following the example of Mary and the spirit-filled men and women we encounter in the Scriptures (and in our history);

28. The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 2016 intuited that this is indeed our path forward for the revitalization of our Redemptorist Missionary Apostolic Life. I believe that it also reflects the programmatic vision of St. Alphonsus for his missionary institute, and we find it already incarnated in the spirit of St. Alphonsus and our Constitutions and Statutes.

## Part II – The Congregation

### The general situation of the Congregation in the wounded world today

29. I won't go into the detailed statistical analysis that I offered in all the first phase meetings. These Statistics are offered in your folder. However, I'd like to share some general observations on the statistical situation of the Congregation:
- The Congregation continues to diminish in numbers. Even though the Congregation is growing in both Africa and Madagascar and in Asia-Oceania, this growth is not sufficient to offset or balance the losses of numbers in Europe above all, but also in North America, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Europe especially is in crisis – though not all the confreres recognize this or how urgent it is.
  - There is a crisis about 'perseverance' in the whole Congregation. This is especially evident in Europe, especially Eastern Europe, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, but it affects all. Each year, the General Council treats more than 50 such cases concerning confreres in perpetual vows. This is not just a question of numbers, but of the quality of our Apostolic Life and its witness.
  - The identity of the Redemptorist Brother is really in crisis. They are an 'endangered species'. Despite our concern over the last number of years – and even the recent Papal decision – the Congregation has not effectively addressed this question. In a very few years, if the present trend continues, many (V) Provinces will no longer have Brothers in their communities.
  - We have experienced remarkable growth in the Redemptorist Family – especially lay partners in Europe, in North America, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Asia-Oceania and Africa and Madagascar are still in the beginning stages (with a few exceptions), but are moving forward as well. Progress has been made in the identity of our lay partners and collaboration in mission, but there is a long way to go.

### Particular situation in each Conference

30. In this part of my report, I cannot offer a comprehensive analysis of the situation of each Conference, and I do not intend to do so. It is important to read and study the reports in the *Conspectus Generalis* for each Conference, the Apostolic and Reconfiguration Plans of each Conference, and the Report to the Canonical Phase of each Conference for a more comprehensive picture. However, I would like to highlight some observations, and some of my concerns which are particular to the individual Conferences.

### Europe

31. Although the crisis in the Church and in Consecrated Life affects our Congregation throughout the world, it is perhaps most urgent and most critical in Europe. Unfortunately, I don't think that the Redemptorists in Europe recognize how urgent and serious this crisis really is for the Redemptorist mission and presence in this continent. There is the real possibility that the missionary presence of the Congregation could disappear from a growing number of European countries within the next decade.

32. The CARP (Commission for the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan) for Europe did serious work to study and analyse this situation, and proposed the Apostolic Plan for Europe which was subsequently adopted in 2019 with a unanimous vote of the Assembly. However, has this Apostolic Plan been owned by the (V) Provinces of Europe? Has it been studied and adopted by the confreres and lay partners? This question could be addressed to every Conference, but it is especially important for Europe.
33. The Conference recognizes the rich cultural and ecclesial diversity in Europe, but the confreres often see this as an obstacle or impediment to communion rather than a resource for mission. It seems that little has been done in Europe in the area of interculturality and diversity. This is a vital area for real conversion and renewal in Europe. It will become increasingly important in the coming years.
34. No Province or Vice-Province is growing in the whole Conference, not even in Eastern Europe. Although there are a few new vocations, especially in Spain, Rome, Warsaw, Ukraine and Bratislava-Prague, there are also serious questions around perseverance, and the new vocations are not nearly sufficient to replace those who are aging and dying, or departing from the Congregation.
35. Although there are confreres from other continents living and working in Europe, there is no real ‘integration’ of these confreres into the Apostolic Plan of the Conference, nor is there a comprehensive plan on Conference level about their presence: how they are prepared for ministry in Europe; how they are integrated into European communities; how these communities are prepared to welcome them and form an authentically inter-cultural community with language preparation, programs to increase cultural and ecclesial awareness and respect, common contracts, etc.
36. Common formation in Europe remains a real challenge. There is general agreement that it is the way forward for our Congregation, and very important for the future of the Conference. But there are many small formation communities in the individual Units, and the common formation projects have been weakened by this. Although these issues have surfaced regularly in the Assembly, and in the First Phase of the General Chapter, very little progress has been made to resolve them.
37. Europe has already engaged in many reconfigurations of Units, and there is also some ‘fatigue’ about this. How do we rekindle openness and enthusiasm for the process?
- i. Naples and Sicily
  - ii. France – in two stages – 1996 and 2015
  - iii. S. Clemens
  - iv. Vienna-Munich
  - v. Bratislava-Prague
  - vi. Warsaw and suppression of St. Gerard
  - vii. Suppression of Regions – Denmark, Vietnamese, Namur
38. The Conference of Europe took the courageous step to establish a common mission in Albania, the poorest country in Europe in which the Christian faith had been practically eliminated in the 50-year history of atheistic communism. Despite numerous

commitments in the Assembly to strengthen this mission with personnel, the Conference has struggled to do so. Other proposals about a common mission in Europe have not gone forward because of this issue of personnel. As well, after the restrictions of the Pandemic, the Camino de Santiago project connected with Astorga and REDCAMP could begin once again. How can the Conference of Europe challenge younger confreres and lay missionaries not just to fill holes, but to create new missionary initiatives?

39. There is a large number of senior confreres in the Conference. Caring for them, especially during the pandemic, is a priority. But it is also very demanding. Our senior confreres are a tremendous richness with their experience, their wisdom, and their commitment. Have serious efforts been made to tap into this experience and wisdom? Do we recognize that we have a lot to learn from their experience and wisdom? At the same time, it is a challenge to respond to their legitimate needs with our diminishing personnel and financial resources. Are new models required for this care?

### North America

40. North America is the only Conference where the average age actually lowered in this sexennium. This is due primarily to the integration of Mexico into the Conference in 2020. However, there has also been some growth in vocations in recent years. As in Europe, this small growth in vocations is not sufficient to stem the declining number of Confreres. For this reason, the internal restructuring of each Unit continues to be especially important – and the North American Provinces have already taken important steps and are planning more steps in this direction.
41. Like Europe, North America has already experienced many reconfigurations. In this sexennium, in Canada, one Province was formed out of three, but the process of integration was slowed by the pandemic, and there is still much to be done. In the USA, through a process of fusion, Baltimore became one with Richmond and the English-Speaking Caribbean. Positive developments in reconfiguration and collaboration in mission are taking place between Baltimore, Denver and Mexico. An important challenge remains how to more fully involve all the confreres in this process of dialogue and discernment.
42. North America is arguably the most multicultural continent in the world. Some of the North American Provinces are moving beyond the ‘multicultural reality’ and consciously becoming more intercultural, and collaborating more fully with Units in other Conferences in this process. However, for some Units, this is even more challenging. One North American Unit is composed exclusively from one ethnicity, and ministers primarily to that ethnic group. Although they are making some efforts to move beyond this situation, progress is very slow, and there is resistance among the confreres. This is a challenge for the whole Conference.
43. Common formation has long been a priority in the Conference. For more than 25 years, there has been a common novitiate. In this sexennium, long discussions and

preparation has borne fruit with the establishment of a common theologate. Not all the Units are fully participating in this common formation, but the dialogue continues.

44. There have been important developments in shared mission across the Conference, and this growth continues to encourage the Redemptorist Mission.
45. Although there has been ongoing dialogue about common mission projects, it is only now that concrete proposals have been approved by the Assembly. The process to designate confreres to these initiatives has begun, and the projects will be implemented within the year.
46. As the number of professed Redemptorist Missionaries in the Conference continues to diminish, there is a practical question about the long-term viability of the Conference. Are there other possibilities which would favour the Redemptorist Mission in North America? Is it time to begin thinking about one Conference of the Americas?

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

47. The Conference Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean enthusiastically embraced the process for apostolic planning and reconfiguration. The CARP Commission worked well on priorities and the Apostolic and Reconfiguration Plan. To date, this Conference has had a more limited experience of reconfiguration than either Europe or North America. However, looking at their situation realistically, the Conference embraced the positive possibilities for mission, for community life and for formation.
48. Their initial plan envisaged that the 22 (V) Provinces would form 7 new provinces with three missions by January 2023. Due to the pandemic, this process was slowed but not stopped. In 2021, the Assembly proposed that the date for the inauguration of the 7 new Provinces be postponed to the end of December 2023. This extra year would provide opportunities for greater integration of the proposed new Provinces through Assemblies and other meetings. Each new Province is also elaborating statutes, facilitating greater economic transparency, and preparing apostolic plans in the light of the Conference Apostolic Plan to respond to the concrete needs of the people they serve.
49. There are significant challenges experienced in implementing the Apostolic Plan. The three common Missions of Uruguay, Surinam and Cuba are all fragile. Although there have been proposals about forming an interprovincial Team for Mission Preaching, there has not yet been concrete action taken. It seems that some of the Units which will form the new Provinces have already begun this kind of collaboration in mission, and others will begin with concrete appointments over the next year. Outstanding challenges highlighted in the priorities of this Conference include the Amazon Region, which extends into many countries, and into many of the proposed provinces.

50. The internal restructuring of the (V) Provinces is an ongoing challenge for many Units. The commitments to so many parishes needs to be reconsidered in order to ‘free’ confreres to implement the priorities in the Apostolic Plan. Units recognize that they need to assess, evaluate and make decisions about the number and location of the parishes, communities and ministries. Some Units have already taken concrete steps in this process, and others need to do so.
51. During this sexennium, the Conference prioritized further integration of initial formation. Three novitiates of the Conference were established with multicultural teams. This initiative is still in the beginning stages. It has been a very important step forward. This process now needs to be assessed and evaluated. Discussion about common theologates is ongoing. It is vital that this dialogue promote theologates which are truly ‘interprovincial’, extending beyond the boundaries of the proposed new Provinces. The new Provinces are also exploring options for formation before novitiate, including philosophy. Ongoing formation continues to be a challenge which must be addressed in the apostolic plans for the new Provinces, as well as for the Conference.
52. Abuse issues are a particular challenge for the Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean. The number of accusations and cases has risen significantly. This raises serious questions for both initial and ongoing formation. It also underlines the importance of good safeguarding policies which are known and implemented in every Unit. Perhaps most important of all is a renewed emphasis in both initial and permanent formation on the integration of sexuality and affectivity in the human process of maturity.
53. Other challenges to which the Conference must respond:
- Perseverance: significant numbers of confreres in perpetual vows continue to leave the Congregation, some for incardination into dioceses, others to return to the lay state.
  - Economic Solidarity is a challenge in the Conference. There are Units with very little reliable income and others that are much more comfortable. Economic transparency and missionary solidarity need to be strengthened.
  - Missionary solidarity within the Conference: how can Provinces learn better collaboration in the areas of media (TV and Radio), of publishing houses, of Redemptorist schools, etc.?
  - Major Challenge for the Conference is moving from documents to practice.

### **Asia-Oceania**

54. Only the Conferences of Asia-Oceania and Africa and Madagascar are growing in the numbers of professed confreres. This growth comes through a large number of local vocations, even as the number of ‘ex-pat’ confreres from the founding Provinces has diminished greatly in the past two sexennia. Asia-Oceania is the second largest Conference in the Congregation. With its continued growth, it may become the largest Conference in the next few years.

55. It is important to note that this growth is not evenly distributed across the Conference. While some Provinces have many new vocations, and have grown consistently during this sexennium, other Units – almost half the Units of the Conference – have continued to decline in both numbers and strength. As well, some of the growing Provinces experience serious economic challenges, especially with regards to financing formation for the increase in new members.
56. The 13 Units of Asia-Oceania embraced the theme of the sexennium enthusiastically. The Conference also began the process of elaborating the Apostolic and Restructuring Plan with the CARP Commission and Conference Council. However, the Conference has been much more resistant to the process of reconfiguration. How realistic and effective is the present reconfiguration plan into three Confederations? Will it promote the greater availability for mission necessary for the implementation of the Apostolic Plan? Will it support common formation and common mission, as well as economic solidarity?
57. It seems that the Conference considers reconfiguration as a last resort for a Unit that cannot survive on its own. This ‘negative’ perception of reconfiguration does not recognize the positive values in the wider missionary discernment and intercultural possibilities of greater integration among and between Units. The danger is that this resistance will continue to impede greater collaboration and intercultural mission until it is too late for some Units to both receive and contribute for the sake of the mission.
58. Although there are some common mission projects, there are questions about the truly interprovincial nature of this collaboration. How are decisions made? What is the role of the Coordinator and the Assembly in these projects, including the appointment of confreres, and decisions about locations? What are the concrete goals of these projects, the strategies and preparation of the confreres involved, the structure of accompaniment and evaluation, and the ministries to implement the projects?
59. Provinces in the Conference have been generous with personnel, collaborating with other Provinces both within the Conference and beyond the Conference. This is very important to recognize and appreciate. It is also time for a better coordination of this collaboration at the level of the Conferences so that these experiences promote genuine missionary outreach, and not simply to ‘fill holes’.
60. In the area of Formation for mission, the designation and preparation of formators, professors, and spiritual directors remains a challenge for the Conference. There are serious questions about the Conference commitment to the Saint Alphonsus Theologate and Mission Institute (SATMI) in Davao. Is this commitment diluted by the dispersion of those in initial formation among many other smaller formation houses and theology institutes? How can this commitment be strengthened – with formators, professors, students, etc.
61. Economic Solidarity remains a challenge within the Conference. The Conference includes several of the most financially stable (V) Provinces in the Congregation, as

well as some of the least financially stable Units. Growth in economic transparency and missionary solidarity would be a great service to the Mission in Asia-Oceania.

62. Partnership in Mission remains a challenge for the Conference. Although there are cultural and ecclesial issues which present obstacles for this partnership in its fullest sense, the Congregation needs to be more pro-active in moving forward. This must involve not only the preparation and formation of our lay partners, but even more important, the formation and preparation of our confreres and communities.
63. A growing challenge in the Conference of Asia-Oceania is in the area of abuse – sexual, financial, and abuse of power. This reality goes beyond the Redemptorists to many levels of society. However, cases within the Congregation, and in every (V) Province in the Conference, have also come forward. Realizing how difficult it is in the Asian context to talk openly about these issues, it is increasingly important that formation addresses these issues in a healthy and integral manner. As well, the policy for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults has a growing importance.
64. The Conference of Asia-Oceania has great hopes and possibilities, but also many challenges to face and address. I hope that this General Chapter will involve the whole Congregation in this process.

### **Africa and Madagascar**

65. As mentioned earlier, Africa and Madagascar is the second conference in which the number of professed confreres is growing, and the average age is very young. This is a source of great hope for this young Conference, but it also poses significant challenges for mission, for formation, for financial administration and for leadership. There are fewer of the confreres from the founding Provinces, and many of them are older and infirm. The Units of COREAM have depended on them for leadership and formation for many years, and now must assume more and more of that leadership responsibility for formation and for mission, as well as for administration. This is a challenge.
66. To understand the Conference, it is important to recognize the impact of three critical questions: insecurity, economic dependency, and colonization.
67. Insecurity has been an important point of discussion in the Conference for many years. The pandemic heightened the sense of insecurity felt by many confreres. Political insecurity, violent insurrections, fundamentalist groups and terrorism are one level of this insecurity which threatens the lives and the futures not only of the confreres, but also of their families. Climate insecurity is also a growing concern with droughts, flooding, typhoons, and desertification changing the landscape of the continent. This general insecurity deeply affects our confreres and partners in mission, as well as the people they serve.
68. Economic dependency is the reality of all our Units in Africa and Madagascar. All the Units of the Conference are economically fragile, and some are more fragile than

others. This has created a mentality of dependency in which the question of finances has a tendency to become the first and dominant theme in any discussion about formation or mission. There is a growing realization that each local community and each Unit must work towards economic self-sufficiency, but this will be a long-term process.

69. The impact of colonization in Africa and Madagascar remains very strong, even after the independence of the various nations. Today, colonization is usually seen as a form of ‘exploitation’. The economic exploitation of the resources of this continent continues today. This also has a real impact on our Units. There is an ambivalent and sometimes ambiguous relationship with many of the founding Units. There is great appreciation for the missionary outreach of these Units, most of which are European, and a strong desire to maintain and grow in these relationships, even in the process of reconfiguration. However, there is also some resentment of the economic dependency, and at times a sense that Africans are not trusted and regarded as fully equal. Many confreres desire to more fully inculturate the charism in Africa and Madagascar. So, there is a tension in these relationships.
70. There are a number of specific challenges with which COREAM is struggling – and with which they are making progress:
71. Missionary Identity: In the early years of almost every Unit, the first missionary identity was linked with forming and serving ‘parish’ structures. Often this was connected to other social structures such as schools, hospitals and clinics, water projects and more... This involved primary evangelization, setting up structures, and supporting the growth of local Churches. This missionary identity has helped to link us closely with the poor, with the peripheries, and with the local culture and identity. It is still valid and important.
72. With the growth of local churches in many countries where we serve, the diocese is now ready to assume much of the ‘ordinary pastoral ministry’, and this has raised questions about our missionary identity – especially as preachers of the Word, and as promoters of the liberation of the whole human person. I think that the Conference is making a serious effort to respond to this shifting situation. Their Apostolic Plan addresses this shift with concrete proposals. However, it remains a challenge to take steps forward.
73. Apostolic Community and Consecrated Life: This is a real challenge for the Units in COREAM, and for the Confreres. In the missionary context in which the founding Provinces began, the model was often quite different from our Redemptorist ideal of *vita apostolica*. Valiant, but individual, missionaries often lived alone and provided for their own needs as best they could, largely with donations from their home provinces and from relatives, friends and parishioners in their home countries. The dominant model for male vocations in Africa and Madagascar is the Diocesan model. The Superior General of an International Congregation of Sisters, the first African Sister in that position, told me recently, “In Africa, consecrated life is for women. Men are called to priesthood and independence.” That is surely an over-simplification, but this

attitude has had an impact on Redemptorist Community and Consecrated Life. The Conference is responding to this challenge in a healthy way, but it involves a long-term process and commitment. And ongoing formation in our Constitutions and charism.

74. Formation for Mission: In this area, I congratulate the Conference, and especially the Coordinators and their Councils, for the progress made on a Conference ratio, the commitment to common novitiates, and the ongoing discussion moving towards common post-novitiate formation, including theology. This has not been easy. The designation and preparation of formators remains a major challenge. The recent Formators' Meetings have begun to make a difference. Interprovincial teams in the novitiates are also an important step forward.
75. Leadership Formation: This is a critical area for further discussion and development. It is important that for the past six years, every Conference Assembly has begun with a half-day dedicated to ongoing formation of leaders, with experts from different Congregations presenting different topics to the Assembly and facilitating reflection and discussion. It is important to keep moving forward in this way! It's not easy, but you're on the right path. There are also proposals for regular 'online' formation meetings of leaders.
76. Safeguarding and Best Practice: As in Latin America and Asia-Oceania, this is an area of growing concern in Africa and Madagascar. Cases involving sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults, abuse of power, and financial abuse continue to arise in the Church, in religious Congregations, and among our members. COREAM has policies and is working on the ongoing education and formation of the confreres. But this remains a significant area of challenge. And it is urgent.
77. The General Government supports the plan for the reconfiguration of the Conference, with the gradual steps necessary to move the process forward. The goal is clear. This will help the ongoing integration of the gradual steps.

### **Part III – Seeds of Hope and Conclusion:**

78. It is a typical human phenomenon that most of us tend to focus more on perceived negative criticism, weaknesses, and challenges rather than the positive stories of success and the seeds of hope so necessary for the process of conversion and renewal which we call 'restructuring'.
79. In a period of real crisis, this is especially true. It is important to recognize our challenges – not as problems but as invitations for learning, for growth, and for conversion. However, it is also important to remember the 'seeds of hope' which are valuable resources on which to build our response as we look towards the future.
80. In this spirit, I would like to conclude this report by reminding you of the 'seeds of hope' that the Holy Spirit has sown among us during this process. It is not possible to elaborate all positive signs which are present across the Congregation. I invite you to remember those which you have experienced, and to share these with other

capitulars in the group discussions as well as informally in conversation. I will articulate seven ‘seeds of hope’ in this final part of the report. I hope that they will help you to remember others.

1. *Growing Missionary Solidarity in the Congregation:*

81. In each First Phase Meeting of this 26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, delegates spoke to me about the growing sense in their (V) Provinces, and in their Conferences, that together, we do indeed belong to an international missionary Congregation and that we are responsible for one another. Although all acknowledged that this is not a new *intellectual* idea, they wanted to emphasize that this is now becoming more and more the experience and felt reality among the Confreres.
82. Many spoke of a growing sense of belonging to the Congregation as a whole more than belonging to their particular (V) Province or Region. Others stressed how important was the experience of common formation in developing this sense of belonging and identity, as well as the insistence of the General Government on this theme. As well, the experience of the Conference Assemblies had strengthened this sense among the Superiors and vocals.
83. Our lay partners also expressed this growing sense, especially in Europe and North America, but also in Africa and Madagascar, and were grateful for the growing international network of lay partners through the digital meetings during the period of the pandemic.
84. This growing sense of missionary solidarity goes beyond economic solidarity, but the responses of so many Units to the appeals for economic solidarity with Haiti, with Ukraine, and with other urgent needs are concrete signs of our bigger reality and growing sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity.

2. *One Missionary Body – Constitution 2:*

85. The whole Congregation has become much more conscious that together we form ‘one missionary body’, devoting ourselves to the mission of Christ as a living unit, each one of us contributing through the ministry entrusted to us. This is still a challenge for us to realize more fully in the face of the individualism and self-realization which are so much part of the dominant culture in which we live and carry out our mission. However, the seed of hope is that we recognize that we are called to become ‘one missionary body’, and not a group of individuals doing ‘my’ work.

3. *Concerns and questions about our Mission in the wounded world:*

86. Many questions about our ‘Missionary Identity’ have surfaced repeatedly in this crisis we are experiencing. This is a challenge that this General Chapter is invited to address. I also believe that it is a sign of hope. Dissatisfaction with the ‘status quo’ is the first step in the process of conversion. Many confreres, young and old, as well as our lay partners are challenging the whole Congregation to re-examine our missionary

identity in the light of our Constitutions and the signs of the time, and to implement together our Apostolic Plans with renewed missionary zeal. We have the missionaries – professed and lay partners – and the finances to do this. The challenge is to put the vision into action.

87. This ‘seed of hope’ has also been nourished by the insistence of Pope Francis that we are called to be a ‘Church-going-forth’, seeking especially the poor and the abandoned. Like Alphonsus, we know that we need to be close to the poor, close to the abandoned. The magisterial teaching of the Holy Father reminds us again and again that we will only respond faithfully to the process of conversion when we place the poor at the centre.
88. This ‘seed of hope’ makes us uncomfortable. And this discomfort is healthy, and I believe, essential in this period of crisis. History teaches us that dissatisfaction with the ‘status quo’ has always prompted Consecrated Life to deeper conversion. And this is especially the case in periods of crisis.

#### 4. *Intercultural Community*

89. It is clear to me that we are convinced that as a Congregation we are moving in the direction of intercultural communities, intercultural mission, and intercultural formation. This is the result of a long process of conversion in the Congregation. One very clear indication of this is the movement of the ‘living centre’ of the Congregation from Europe and North America to Latin America, Asia and Africa.
90. An initial and very important step in this process has been the affirmation of the Congregation’s multicultural reality. We have grown in tolerance, mutual respect and appreciation for the many diverse cultures in the Congregation, and that together we form this ‘one missionary body’. We have grown in our appreciation of our ‘Redemptorist Culture’ rooted in the charismatic experience of Alphonsus and his companions, but which transcends the original Neapolitan culture and context, and is wider than our particular ethnic and societal culture. I especially remember Fr. Lasso speaking about this in the years after the 1991 General Chapter in Itaiçi. The danger of multiculturalism is that we can live in parallel communities and structures, respecting one another, but not interrelating in a deep and significant way.
91. Now, in this period of crisis with its call to conversion, we recognize that we are called to take a further step in the direction of intercultural mission, community and formation. Intercultural community breaks down the walls which separate the cultures in our multicultural reality, and invites mutual conversation, dialogue, learning and growth. The intercultural process creates space for a new and shared culture. This is very challenging, but we have already begun to embark on this journey – and we recognize that there is no turning back.

### 5. *Shared Mission – Lay Partnership*

92. In 1991, the General Chapter officially established the category of “Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer”. This followed several years of exploration on the question of shared mission with the laity, ‘Third Order’, etc. This decision of the Chapter was followed in 1995 by the Communicanda in which Fr. Lasso and the General Government articulated guidelines for shared mission with the laity on a basis of partnership, as well as norms for the new category of Lay Missionaries. Beginning with the General Chapter in 2003, our lay partners in mission have had a formal role in the General Chapter, and since 2016, also in the Conference Assemblies.
93. During this sexennium, the General Government has approved the *Directory for Shared Mission* for implementation in the (V) Provinces as a working document. Of course, this Directory needs to be studied, applied, evaluated and revised. At the same time, it offers us a framework for our growth in shared mission. The General Government also published a *Ratio Formationis for Shared Mission*, to offer helpful guidelines for the formation and preparation of both lay partners and confreres for shared mission on the basis of partnership. The pandemic interrupted the effective implementation of both these documents. Now is the time to continue the process! Perhaps by the next Mid-Sexennial meetings we will have more experience to evaluate and revise them.
94. These ‘seeds of hope’ planted over the past 35 years are now bearing fruit in a flourishing of lay men and women seeking to share mission with the Congregation and to witness to the Redeemer in our wounded world, especially to the poor and most abandoned. We still have a long way to go, but important steps have been taken together. In every Conference, these steps bring new life, energy and passion to the renewal of our *vita apostolica*, and new hope to the poor and abandoned to whom we are sent.

### 6. *Restructuring as a process of conversion*

95. Over the more than 30 years we have been engaged in the process of restructuring for mission, we have come to realize that this process is more about *CONVERSION* than structures. It is now accepted almost universally that this process will continue in every Conference and in every (V) Province. It is a lifelong process and part of our commitment to permanent conversion and formation in the spirit of our Constitutions (Cc 41 and 77).
96. This is also a ‘seed of hope’ as we listen to the Spirit who is always at work within us and our Congregation to ‘raise up missionaries in the Church’ (C. 80).

### 7. *Reconfiguration for Mission and Identity*

97. The process of reconfiguration of our Congregation is also a ‘seed of hope’ sown in faith that it will strengthen our wider missionary discernment and our availability for mission. It continues to challenge us to see beyond the boundaries of our own particular Unit, and respond with generosity and vision. Although there is still

resistance on the part of some confreres and (V) Provinces, it is generally accepted that there is no turning back. It has been strongly affirmed once again in the First Phase Meetings of this General Chapter. The process was slowed in many Conferences during the pandemic, but it now is moving forward again.

98. These seven ‘seeds of hope’ strengthen us to face and address the challenges before our Congregation in this period of crisis and change of epoch.

99. Thank you for your patience in listening attentively to this report. May the Spirit continue to guide us as we navigate the rough waters we are experiencing in this sea-change of epoch. May St. Alphonsus, St. Clement, and so many others who guided the Congregation in other challenging and confusing times, accompany us in this Chapter and always.

*“With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us ... and keep running steadily in the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.  
September 15, 2022

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion:**

1. *This sexennium has been very different from any other. We began with the energy and enthusiasm engendered by the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the Extraordinary Visit, and the work of the CARP Commission in every conference, culminating in the Mid-Sexennial Meetings. This was followed almost immediately by the pandemic, the lockdown, and then many other crises – economic, political and social, and war. What has it been like for you to live through the experience of this sexennium?*
2. *The crisis of identity in Society, in the Church, and in Consecrated Life is a major issue today. The consultation with the Congregation and our Redemptorist Family surfaced issues about a crisis of identity in the Congregation. This crisis of identity affects our understanding of mission, community, consecrated life, formation and leadership. How do you experience this crisis of identity, both personally and in your (V) Province or Region?*
3. *Part 3 of the Report reflects on signs of hope in the Congregation today. What gives you hope as you lead your (V) Province or Region today? And as you look to the future?*