# Guiding vision of the General Government

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During the November and December sessions of 2012, as a General Government we devoted extensive time to talking and thinking about the service that has been entrusted to us. We searched for a common understanding both of what the Constitutions ask of us and the mission assigned to us by the General Chapter. We shared our perceptions of the Congregation and spoke about that which moves us, the challenges that concern us and the beliefs that motivate us. Our time together involved a sharing of simple and fraternal faith that led us to draw up an initial guiding vision for our work as a General Government. Thus we present to you the main lines of this "vision".

## Some convictions

In this paragraph we bring together some basic insights drawn from the recent General Chapter, as well as some assertions that come from the experience of the previous General Government, thus hoping to maintain continuity.

1. The focal point of our action is the SSCC mission, understood as our way of being "tastefully useful" to evangelization. We are convinced that the Congregation has something important to offer: both to ourselves, who are part of her, and to the Church and the world. We understand our mission as a participation in the "Missio Dei", the action of God in the world. To use the expression of the Good Father, we are at the service of the "work of God".

2. Mission is not just a theological discourse. Mission ‘takes flesh’ in the places where we are and in the concrete works that we undertake. The fact of being in places in which there is risk and where courage is needed helps us to give the best of ourselves. We really are evangelised by the people whom we serve, especially when we have the fortune of being wherever the Gospel resonates in a more clear and challenging way. To leave our comfort zones in order to place ourselves in a “good missionary situation” is a blessing for every brother.

3. The spiritual is the most effective. The most genuine acts of the government are those which touch the hearts of the brothers, their motivations of faith. It is in this sense that we understand our service as one of animation and challenge. This requires of us an attitude of on-going and attentive listening so as to understand the brothers and their aspirations and difficulties.

4. The most important events in the life of the Congregation occur in the daily life of the local communities. Everything else has value in so far as it supports and nourishes the daily life.

5. The Congregation, as the General Chapter has stated, is both the Good Samaritan who helps many people, and the man lying on the road that needs to be helped. Our usefulness and our poverty go hand in hand. Both situations need attention, care and respect. Both situations can be occasions for learning and for the active showing of compassion.

6. We believe that it is possible and good to continue looking for an integrative experience of the vocation to be an SSCC religious-priest, so that the fact of being both a religious and a priest is not lived in a conflictive way but rather in a manner that both unites and mutually enriches the two.

7. To carry out a good service, the General Government must be able to take decisions. For this reason it will need to deal with the diverse themes with clarity (taking into account a realistic vision of the Congregation) and charity (always looking to the good of the brothers and the people we serve). The decisions of the General Government should not be limited to medicinal or palliative measures (seeking to heal or cure internal problems) but also be original and challenging.

8. We journey in communion with our SSCC sisters. For a harmonious and fruitful communion, it is necessary for each branch to develop its own consistency, recognising and respecting the differences whilst being proactive in encouraging cordiality.

9. Communion and interaction with the laity - both with those who belong to the Secular Branch and in the mission that is shared at all levels with the laity - is a path which we must explore and deepen.

## The SSCC Vocation is a journey and an adventure.

The Good Father invites us to savour God along the path of life. To be SSCC is, effectively, a specific way to experience God along the journey, as it is beautifully stated in the publication, "An SSCC Spiritual Itinerary".

Since the beginning of our history, from the time of the Founders, the SSCC vocation has been lived as a risk-filled adventure. We only need to think of the Good Father and his adventures as "Marche-à-terre", or the primitive community in the time of the 'Great Terror' of the French revolution, or the missionaries who were sent to the Pacific Ocean at a time when the Congregation had very few members, or Damien or Eustáquio or even the martyrs of the XX$^{th}$ Century … In these present times we would do well to recover this spirit of 'adventure', understanding it as a conversion call to step outside of our safe and familiar comfort zones.

This journey has three dimensions:

1. The journey towards the sources of the charism is an **interior** journey; a journey of faith that seeks the experience of God, a journey which is nourished by contemplation of the Mystery and which goes deep into the Heart of Jesus.

2. It is a journey in **community:**

   a) A journey **together with the brothers**: we are sent by the community and in community; we form one international body whose structures are always relative and changeable; we journey in community until death; our fraternity forms part of our proclamation of the Gospel.

   b) A journey **towards the brothers:** the brother will always be a stranger if we do not go out to meet him with goodness of heart and if we do not engage in the on-going work of healing of relationships and reconciliation.

3. It is a journey **towards the margins.** The General Chapter formulated a clear invitation to move in this direction. Each brother and each community will find in the Chapter Orientations material to help in their reflection and evaluation. For its part, the General Government is committed to:

3.1. Evaluating with each Major Community its commitment to the margins and the possible implementation of new missionary presences.

3.2. Setting up the new community in Leuven, animated by a project related to Damien.

3.3. Supporting some especially significant missionary presences in the Congregation.

3.4. Investigating the possibility of involving the Congregation in a missionary presence in a new situation, outside of the areas and cultures that we already know (e.g. the Middle East; the Arab world; new places in Asia or Africa or in Eastern Europe.)

Our missionary journey is inspired by **the three icons** that were proposed by the General Chapter: Damien de Veuster, Eustáquio van Lieshout and the Spanish martyrs of the XX$^{th}$ Century. These brothers were able to embody, in their time and place, the charism they received from our founders and the first generation, and they acquire all their inspired strength when we understand them to be in connection with the sources of the charism.

## A general framework for spiritual and missionary animation

The work of the General Government is undertaken by means of the usual and ordinary instruments: canonical visits, participation in Chapters and in Conference Meetings, General Commissions, dialogues with the Major Superiors, etc.

In addition to this, we want to propose to the whole Congregation a time frame for spiritual and missionary animation for the next six years, which will help in a pedagogical way to focus our attention on some common themes that support on-going formation and reinforce the sense of communion among all. This is a very simple proposal which does not intend in any way to cover the vast richness of the themes that have been presented. We are proposing an 'icon' for each year (which can be a person or an important event), some themes for reflection in relation to the icon (just one or two knowing that each icon can generate many other themes), and an activity (just one, which could be realised by each and every brother in the corresponding year).

**2013** The icon for this year is that of the **Spanish Martyrs of the XX$^{th}$ Century**, who will be beatified on 27$^{th}$ October 2013. The theme for reflection is **faith**, bearing in mind that the whole Church is celebrating the Year of Faith. The activity that we ask each brother to undertake is to read a biography of these martyrs and share your reflections in community. A biography of the martyrs has just been published (in Spanish, French and English) and is available with the Postulator General as well as online in our website. We know that many communities will have to make an extra effort to translate the biography in their respective local languages. We thank the Major Superiors for doing what they can to assist everyone in the reading

of the life of our brothers. The narration of a story is often more inspiring than the mere exposition of theological or spiritual ideas. In addition to this basic activity without doubt many other events will take place in Spain and in the communities around the world on the occasion of the beatification.

**2014** The icon proposed is **Saint Damien de Veuster**. We are very familiar with Damien. In 2009 many activities took place related to the occasion of his canonisation. However, it is always good for us to return to Damien and to celebrate his memory. The theme for reflection in 2014 will be that of service of the **most poor** and **adoration**, both of which featured strongly in the life of Damien. By way of activity we ask each brother to take part in a workshop on adoration (two or three days) which will be prepared by the General Government and proposed to all the communities.

**2015** The icon for this year is **Blessed Eustáquio van Lieshout**. The theme for reflection is that of **healing** and **reconciliation**. Each brother is asked to engage in a process of internal reconciliation that the General Government will propose to each one of the Major Communities, Regions and Delegations. In September of this year the Enlarged General Council will take place. This will provide us with the opportunity to evaluate the General Chapter Orientations and the eventual impact of the 'icons' on our mission.

**2016** For now, there is no specific proposal. The Enlarged General Council could give suggestions as to the general outline for this year.

**2017** Icon: The **200th Anniversary of the approval of the Congregation** by the Holy See, with the Bull *Pastor Aeternus* (1817). This will be a year to centre our reflection on the **Church,** remembering, as the Constitutions put it, that we are an Apostolic Religious Congregation "in communion with the Church, the People of God". (Const 1, and cf. Const 153.2). The idea that we have of the Church and our way of belonging to her is the key to understanding our Mission. We ask each brother to read fully our Constitutions which, like those of 1817, have been approved by the Holy See and which are our 'identity card' within the People of God.

**2018** This year will be dedicated to the preparation for the 39th General Chapter..

In summary:

| Year | Icon | Theme | Activities |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2013 | Spanish Martyrs | Faith | To read their biography and discuss it in community.<br><br>Celebrations around the time of their beatification. |
| 2014 | Damien | The Poor and Adoration | Workshop on adoration. |
| 2015<br><br>September 2015 | Eustáquio | Healing and Reconciliation | Process of Reconciliation in communities.<br><br>Enlarged General Council. |
| 2016 | | | |
| 2017 | 200 years of the approval by the Holy See ("Pastor Aeternus") | The Church | Read the Constitutions. |
| 2018 | | | 39th General Chapter |

## Other tasks

In addition to what has already been said, we have drawn up a list of tasks that the General Government needs to pay attention to in the coming years.

Several commissions have already been set up to be responsible for a number of areas: initial formation; SSCC spiritual and historical patrimony; communications; spiritual animation of the Secular Branch (together with the sisters), and Vocation Ministry.

In response to a request from the General Chapter (*Follow-up and adaptation…* 3), we have set a date for a meeting of new Major and Regional Superiors that will take place from 29th October – 6th November 2013. We have already given thought to a meeting of the Interprovincial Conference Coordinators (probably in 2014, to help in preparation of the Enlarged General Council). A reflection has started about a possible meeting of some months duration for all those who are preparing for final vows *(Follow-up and adaptation …8*), and also we are wondering whether it would be appropriate or not to arrange something for brothers who are in their first ten years of ministry.

In relation to the invitation of the General Chapter to do what we can to prepare ourselves to die as believers (*Mission 37*), work has started on preparing a booklet setting out some guidelines for brothers' funerals.

As regards the need to loyally accept the necessary control systems that come with our work and our responsibilities (*Mission 29*), in February we will study a draft document outlining a general policy for ensuring the protection of children and the prevention of abuses.

Also in February we will begin to explore ways to study in more depth the different themes that are relevant to 'Internationality' that was proposed by the Chapter (*Internationality …* 2-6).

On the other hand, in regards to what is referred to as the on-going work of adjusting community structures, we are already in dialogue with some Major Communities with a view to possible changes in the near future.

Finally, we have also created a list of tasks to complete in respect of the financial solidarity of the Congregation, and for this we have the collaboration of the General Econome and his commission of advisors.

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Through this long letter we want to share with you the thinking of the General Government and the way we are orientating the service that you have asked of us. Without doubt, we will be learning along the way. We remain open to new lights and initiatives that might come from prayer, from common reflection, from experience and from your help.

In these days in which the **echoes of the celebrations of the Epiphany** still resound, we see ourselves as pilgrims, like the Wise men from the East, on a journey involving search and adventure, which takes us away from our lands and which brings us to the place where we will meet with "the child with Mary, his mother" (Mt 2,11).

May the Hearts of Jesus and Mary lead us by the hand to where God wishes us to be and fill us with the 'immense joy' that the Wise men experienced when they saw the star, close to Bethlehem.