

SSCC General Chapters 2024

Brothers, Sisters and lay people,

This letter is an invitation to you to enter in this spiritual time of preparation for General Chapters.



We have been inspired by the replies coming from the communities in response to the two mains documents that came from the previous General Chapter: "Our Inner Self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4,16) and "Pastoral and Missionary Conversion: new paths to Emmaus". This retreat is a propitious time of discernment that takes place by listening to God in his Word, to our religious family, to the cries of our world and our Planet.

THE CONGREGATION AS GOD'S WORK

Considering the Congregation as God's Work (L'oeuvre de Dieu) entails :

Seeing Mission as your work oh Lord, and that you want it to be ours as well.

"Be aware that the mission belongs to the whole Congregation and not to a few confreres (Common Mission Project). May our charism be the inspiration of the mission where we are (Sense of Belonging to the Congregation)." **(Brazil-Paraguay)**

To discern the Lord's calls to not confine ourselves to our chapels or to our regions, but be open to the entire in the world and the Church in which we live.

To recognize in our fellow companions, men and women, "your Brothers and Sisters, oh Lord".

Already in 1804, the Good Father confessed his confidence in God's work in the Congregation to Sister Gabriel de la Barre:

"Yes, my dear daughter, I live only to cement, if necessary, at a great price, the work of the Heart of this amiable Master who fills me with his favours; if I am ungrateful, he still loves me, and I feel in my heart that he will love me always, yes always.

I would be limitless if I were to write to you with all the force of his grace on my soul, with the extent of his power in my depths. So love him without sharing and I tell you that nothing will separate you. Whether we are persecuted or left to rest in peace, let us be children of the cross; may our feelings burn with longing for the immolation it demands or permits, and everything, yes, everything will be according to his will, which I feel and want to feel until death, is always adorable"¹

¹ Marie-Joseph Coudrin, « Letter of Fr. Coudrin to Sr. Gabriel de la Barre » (Paris, 4 August 1804), LEBP 192 in *Correspondance*, vol 2, Rome 1995, 72.

I. Where do you, Lord, count on us? The SSCC mission

We need to continue our apostolic discernment as regards our SSCC mission. This is important because not only we are fewer, but also because there are new calls coming up from the World and from the Church and there are new opportunities offered to us. Let us do this alongside our sisters and lay people and together with men and women of our world who struggle for a more fraternal and just world. Let us listen closely to the poor: migrants, the elderly, families, young people, and the cries of our Planet.

Let us dare to ask ourselves about our ways of doing things:

“about the types of pastoral work that we are doing that no longer respond to today's needs.” (**Andina**)

We recognize also that many times we are ourselves evangelized by the people we meet.

“This component of “**be evangelized**” is the challenge. Most of our experience in living our charism and mission has been 'to evangelize' with great passion and zeal. Through this effort, we reflect on the fact that at times we failed to recognize how we have been evangelized in return. Not much reflection on this point because we were too busy doing the evangelizing. Yet, we have great comfort that we were doing what we have been called to do.

Now that we are smaller in numbers and our geographical expanse is wider, there is much more effort to reflect on how we are to continue the mission. This new reality forces us ever more so to discern, reflect and make conscious decisions that focus us on how we are to understand 'being evangelized'.” (**USA**)

To carry out this apostolic discernment, we all, together, need to be attentive to the new things you, Lord want to make surface in what we already doing or in the new borders that you are calling us to go to.

“We are concerned and it seems to us a priority to pay greater attention to the world of young people and with them their families, thinking about how to accompanying them in the important moments of their lives, their questions and more concrete and fundamental concerns. We must dedicate people and resources to the service of young people. **We cannot continue with a 'maintenance' pastoral with respect to the world of youth.** New proposals are needed to accompany them, to know the culture they share, their dreams, desires, worries and conflicts. Offer the best of our charism to young people to heal their wounds, to repair and enable the transformation of their hearts, collaborating in their vocational discernment.” (**Andina**)

We can rediscover: what being a missionary is in the everyday of our life, in what simply comes to us (funerals, masses...), and even when it seems as “if God is not also there...” (**Chile Argentina**).

If we want to enrich our discernment together, “the sense of teamwork becomes essential”. (**USA**)

II. Care for the inner Self

This **means taking care of our relationship with the Lord.**

"Everything starts from within: the desire to follow Christ, to love him more and the desire to abandon ourselves in God's hands, the desire to embrace the path of salvation and the desire to turn back... it's a matter of deep urgency to take care of our inner self." **(Africa)**

If we want to care for the inner-self, we have **to cultivate a contemplative attitude** in daily life.

"Our motto of: 'Contemplating, living and proclaiming the love of God,' - how is this part of the everyday lives of our sisters and brothers in the Congregation and in ministry? Is it just an aspiration? Faith needs to be lived. There is an impoverishment when we lose the gift of seeing and living contemplatively. Those members who have a daily contemplative practice are indeed blessed." **(Ireland-England)**

"Cultivating your inner life gives you a theological outlook on the world" **(France).**

Relying on the support of the community to cultivate our life of faith, our inner self.

"There is a deep agreement in the view that living in communities that share faith, life and mission animates our interior life." **(Iberia)**

"To make community life a place where the inner life is stimulated." **(France)**

"It is necessary to find (again) communitarian forms to encourage and strengthen one another in the simple effort to believe. Possibilities for this are adoration, community Eucharist, centering personal and community life on the Word (*Lectio divina*), it seems that there is no other way to renew the life of faith than attentive listening to the Word of God. The ancients believed in the efficacy of the Word heard and shared, which did what it said." **(Germany)**

Help each other to be believers, inspired not only by those exemplary sisters and brothers, our saints and blessed, but also by those men and women who, day after day, have been or are still being molded by the Lord, even in their struggles and failures.

"Articles that appear in INFO are almost always on positive topics, mainly success stories. Some would also like to know about problems, difficulties, stumbling blocks and failures in the wider context of the congregation. Concrete figures we can learn from or who have played a decisive role in our vocation and who are not necessarily the 'saints' of the congregation." **(Flanders)**

III. Community of Brothers

- ◆ Communities as spaces where we care for our inner self, foster the contemplative attitude, and help each other to be sound believers in God.

“So it seems that also today - at least from the perspective of the cultural spheres of the West - **the challenge is simply to believe**. It is about clinging to God, holding on Him, not letting go as we make our way in the darkness in which we are immersed both in global and local human society (wars, hunger, climate change, migration, etc.) and in the Church (abuse scandals, lack of credibility, polarization) and in the Congregation (lack of vocations and the aging of many provinces). It is about an unembellished faith. Simply believing in God's love even in the presence of evil in the world and in ourselves. “(**Germany**)

- ◆ Communities where the brothers celebrate our faith, dare to share from what we are, from what we believe in, not being afraid to show ourselves vulnerable.
- ◆ Communities where we welcome each other, we look at each other with kindness and learn to correct mutually.
- ◆ Communities where we not only recognize the capabilities of the brother, but also we encourage them to put those capacities in common for the sake of the mission.
- ◆ Communities in which we open our doors so that young people may discover our life and the poor may feel at home. Then we might “rediscover a quality of listening and take the time to dialogue, especially with the poorest and with those who suffer.” (**France**)

A final Invitation

Let us make ours the words that the Good Mother addresses to the Founder as words addressed to each one of us:

“The good Lord has given you the precious gift of his habitual presence, that is to say, by talking, walking, or doing something else, without thinking, you think about God. Finally, he is more in you than you are yourself, if you can put it that way. To respond to this particular grace, it would be better if you went several times during the day (even if only for a moment) into the depths of your heart to adore it, because it is there that he stays and enjoys himself, because the faults you may commit are never made with complete deliberation.”²

Let us turn to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary and ask them to help us taste the depth of God's love that is manifested in them and to impel us to seek where and how God wants us to love the people and to care for the Planet in His name.

To prepare our sharing:

What is the Lord's call to you that resonates the most in you?

² Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie, “Billet au Bon Père” (s.l., towards the middle of 1801), LEBM 32 in *Correspondance*, vol 1, Rome 2008, 231.