

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc

A conversation in the family

Congregation of the Sacred Hearts
of Jesus and Mary

Rome

Feast of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, July 9, 2013

Publication of the SSCC General House

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Abbreviations

Art.	<i>Article</i>
BM	<i>Bonne Mère (Good Mother, Co-Foundress of the SSCC Congregation)</i>
BP	<i>Bon Père (Good Father, Co-Founder of the SSCC Congregation)</i>
CIAL	<i>Latin American Interprovincial Conference</i>
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i>
CIVCSVA	<i>The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life</i>
Const.	<i>Constitutions of the SSCC Congregation</i>
EGC	<i>Enlarged General Council</i>
INFO SSCC	<i>Monthly bulletin of the SSCC Congregation</i>
PARL	<i>Project of Apostolic Religious Life</i>
SG	<i>Superior General</i>
SSCC	<i>Sacred Hearts</i>
Stat.	<i>Statutes of the SSCC Congregation</i>
USG	<i>Union of Superiors General</i>
UISG	<i>International Union of Superiors General</i>

Introduction

You have in your hands a book of the letters of Javier Álvarez-Ossorio, Superior General of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, written for the monthly bulletin, INFO SSCC, during his first term (2006-2012).

The reason we brought these letters together in one volume was the response they have received among the brothers, sisters and the laity associated with the Congregation. Many of our communities have used them for reflection in a meeting, a retreat or an assembly. Their character as letters that appeared monthly permitted direct, continuous and honest communication from the Superior General to the brothers and also within the SSCC family between brothers, sisters and laity. We have made a selection of the letters that respect the reason and the context in which they were written. For that reason we indicate the date and the number of INFO. We also indicate some basic themes that appear in the diverse letters and so we have grouped the letters chosen under five themes, which of course are interconnected:

The Consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

Living together

In order to serve

Damien

Liturgical Seasons

This book is not meant to be a systematic presentation of the Congregation's spirituality. We offer it more as a guide book for travelers, practical and easy to use. The chapter titles are sort of viewing points to see the whole panorama of the journey. Each person can go visit a specific place following the titles of the chapters.

The title of the book came from a comment by one brother who after reading the letters wrote to the Superior General thanking

him that he had not given a discourse on various topics of SSCC religious life but had begun a “conversation” and issued an invitation to constructive dialogue.

So we hope that this book will help continue a conversation among brothers, renew the flavor of the consecration to the Sacred Hearts and boldly give ourselves to their service.

A special thanks to Paul Lejeune, Richard McNally, Remi Liando and Maria Centofanti for their patience and competence in assisting the process of this publication.

Alberto Toutin ssc
General Councilor

Rome, Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 7th, 2013



The Consecration to the Sacred Hearts
of Jesus and Mary

To the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary...

June 13th, 2007

INFO SSCC Brothers, No.4

Only those who recognize God know reality and are able to respond to it adequately and in a truly human manner...

But... Who knows God? How can we know him?... For a Christian, the nucleus of the reply is simple: only God knows God, only his Son who is God from God, true God, knows him. And he "who is nearest to the Father's heart has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). Hence **the unique and irreplaceable importance of Christ for us**, for humanity. If we do not know God in and with Christ, all of reality is transformed into an indecipherable enigma; there is no way, and without a way, there is neither life nor truth.

God is the foundational reality, not a God who is merely imagined or hypothetical, but God with a human face; he is God-with-us, the God who loves even to the Cross. When the disciple arrives at an understanding of this love of Christ "to the end", he cannot fail to respond to this love with a similar love: "I will follow you wherever you go" (Lk. 9:57).

Benedict XVI, in Aparecida (Brazil)
May 13, 2007



The Sacred Hearts
Chapel of the Provincial House
Fairhaven, (USA)

"It seems that we are of different religions," said a brother just recently in a community meeting. We were speaking of the different ways we understand God, the Church, the vows, our commitment as religious...also of the different ways we pray (in the chapel or somewhere else, daily Eucharist or no, concelebrating and vested or no, how we make adoration individually, praying the breviary, how we organize community adoration etc.) All of that can make brothers feel at ease in the community or the opposite, alienated and ill at ease.

Recently someone said in an assembly, *"We should not underestimate the cultural differences among us and the difficulties they cause in living together."* Certainly. We can see fear and distrust among the brothers when they have to come together with others or when we bring together groups with different sensitivities and histories or when we redraw the boundaries that separate and protect us.

That's all true and merits consideration. And however...This is the time when we celebrate the Sacred Hearts, the sign of God's love manifested in Jesus and in Mary. The Good Father told us, *"The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our Institute."* Our way of drawing close to the mystery of God is to pass through the door of his heart. This is the way of profound mercy. This is the way to the love that has been poured forth in our hearts thanks to Jesus Christ. We could call this **"our religion,"** as different as our sensitivities and our practices may be. That is a "religion" that brings us all together.

It's true that we cannot underestimate differences. However for the feasts of the Sacred Hearts I want to invite all the brothers, the enthusiastic and the dispirited, the skeptics and the passionate, those who are closed to change and those who are seeking it, those who are happy at how the Congregation is going and those who are disappointed, those who create communion and those who cause trouble, those who feel strong and those who are sick and tired, those who believe and those who no longer believe, those who pray and those who no longer pray, the peaceful and the resentful...everyone, I ask you not **to underestimate the force of our charism** and the power of the

Sacred Hearts. The love of God that we profess is able to make brothers of us in whatever circumstances. The love of God will help us live right now, in our local communities, the reconciliation and peace that our hearts desire and that we so often preach to others.

Happy feast of the Sacred Hearts!

In SSCC,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Heart of Jesus – Love that is interested

June 6th, 2012

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 61



The consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is the foundation of our institute.

Good Father

We will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfilment.

Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei* 13

At this time when the Church is reflecting on “the new evangelization” and, in that same spirit, as the Congregation is seeking light to renew our apostolic mission (the main theme of next [38th] General Chapter), I would like to stop and consider the Heart of Jesus, whose feast we are about to celebrate, asking him to include us among the workers in that abundant field of grain that so moves him to compassion.

To evangelize

Believing is an act of confidence. Faith arises when two things come together: the witness of another and an inner light that makes us say “yes”, God loves us, we are not defenseless and condemned to the void, we are radically saved.

The reason for our confidence is Jesus. Only his love merits belief. We know Jesus when a word, which sheds light on something that already resonated deeply within us, is taken once more to heart (this is the meaning of the Latin for “remember”- *ricordari*- to take to heart once more). The Spirit helps us to remember what Jesus has said and done. The hearts of the

disciples burned within them as the Risen One explained to them the Scriptures.

So to evangelize means to transmit confidence that resonates in our heart of hearts. Confidence born of faith is first of all confidence in God, confidence in his hidden action everywhere, and so it is also confidence in the brothers and sisters that He gives me and in the Church which he makes me part of.

"What is so fascinating about God is his humble presence," says Brother Roger of Taizé. *"Without any fanfare, Christ allows God to become transparent."* Like the Lord, evangelization takes the style of the Servant, who does not break the bruised reed but rather lets himself be broken, like the bread of the Eucharist. The Heart of Jesus is the heart of the suffering servant, who having given everything, invites us to come to Him.

Confidence does not impose itself by force, it is spread through friendship. "I call you friends," says Jesus. And so he shares with his disciples what he knows of the Father. That is how he "evangelizes" them. Trust in the Good News flowers in the garden of friendship. In short, evangelization is a matter of love.

Love that seeks love

Sometimes we say that true love is love that expects nothing in return. To imitate the generosity of Jesus' love, we would have to give and give of ourselves without receiving anything. However, a Jesuit said to me recently that such seeming nobility comes from the "evil spirit" (being a Jesuit he is familiar with that way of speaking). To love without expecting a response is a way of deifying our ego (strong and autonomous to the point of absurdity) and of projecting the image of a "perverse God", so extremely gratuitous and uninterested that it would be impossible for us to respond to him in kind. We would then take refuge in the misery of feeling guilty for the mere fact of being human, needing affection and comfort. My Jesuit friend declared sententiously, "Such gratuitousness is diabolic! The love of God is not like that!"

The love of the Heart of Jesus is not undemanding, it is interested. The Lord hopes for everything from those whom he

loves. The Heart of Jesus seeks us out, he knocks at the door wanting us to open to him, he thirsts for our response, he begs for our love, he suffers at not being loved. His is a heart that is vulnerable, betrayed, wounded, crowned with thorns, crucified.

Jesus does not love for nothing. His love has a goal. He wants to light fire on the earth. He wants all to be saved. He wants the lost to come home again. He wants us to follow him. He wants the blind to see and those with leprosy to be cleansed. He wants to bring together the dispersed. He wants the Father to be held holy and his reign to come. To take our language to the limit, we can say that the love of Jesus wants to “buy us”, to make us his own, to rescue us. His joy is in our changing and growing as children of God. The Heart of Jesus is gentle, humble...and ambitious.

Because of that, Christian love is certainly “unconditional” but it is not “disinterested.” It is irrevocable but it is not a love that is free.

It is unconditional because there are no prerequisites demanded. Love always takes the first step, and as Jesus was moved at the sight of the lost crowd, it moves into action seeking the good of the other. In any circumstance, whatever happens. It is not necessary that the other be “good” or that he respond to my expectations in order to receive my service and affection. As Gustavo Gutiérrez said to some people who were naively idealizing the poor, we do not make an option for the poor because the poor are good but because God is good. Christian love loves the sinner and even loves the enemy because it understands that sin is not a crime that someone has to pay for, but more a kind of blindness from which we have to be cured. It's a love that never goes into reverse. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

However this unconditional love is also interested. It is not some kind of last ditch effort launched out into the abyss. Nor is it just some kind of gratuitous exercise, in which the consequences do not matter. It is not satisfied with giving and receiving nothing in return. The reaction of others really does matter. In fact, it seeks and yearns for the response of love, for friendship returned. It never resigns itself to being love that is one directional. Joy is not only found in loving but in loving “one another,” in forgiving “one

another," in washing "one another's" feet. The Reign of God is love that is mutual, as in the Trinity.

And so there is nothing strange about suffering when our love is not returned or when all the effort we put into improving things appears to fail or when peace and reconciliation become impossible. "*How hard it is to enter into the Kingdom of God,*" says Jesus (Mark 10:24). It is normal that lack of love sadden us because we are nothing without others. We are a mystery of communion and any rupture to this communion wounds Jesus' Heart...and ours also.

It can happen that we give up on love's reciprocity just out of weariness. Conflict, attitudes that wound, irreconcilable differences wear us down. We replace friendship with bitter criticism or respect from a distance. We give up knocking at the heart of our brother, we despair of there being harmony, we accept defeat in the good fight of faith. The world is full of this kind of sad coldness.

However the Heart of Jesus never "loses heart." He is good at waiting and calling for love. He desires the good of the other, he looks to the imprint of God that we each have within us. As the man who came to Jesus wanting to inherit salvation, Jesus looks on us with love but that does not involve a fuzzy undemanding acceptance of who we are, but rather a trusting invitation to change, "you lack one thing; go, sell what you have..." Because he loves us, he challenges us to be better.

Humble and ambitious

This unconditional thirsting love is the secret and source of evangelization in all its dimensions. Passion for the apostolate, attention to community life, time given to silent prayer (where it appears that nothing is happening but where the most important decisions in life take shape), commitment to justice...all of that is founded on one same love.

The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is a path of growth in faith that little by little unifies our heart and that prepares us to love

with that unconditional and evangelically interested love that we discover in Jesus.

We make this journey humbly and ambitiously.

Humbly because we are far from the measure of Christ, because we do not know everything, because we have just about begun to know something of Jesus. Like Peter, we must hear Jesus say, "*You cannot bear them now...you shall follow me afterward!*" May our generosity not betray us and, attempting more than what we are able, we end up denying Christ.

Humbly, because none of us are able to build God's Reign by ourselves. It is impossible for human beings. It is only possible for God. All is grace. May we never do and say so many things in God's name that we end up hiding the God who is acting and speaking.

Humbly, so as to better be companions on the journey to every person that we encounter, to whom we are friend rather than master, in whom the Spirit is present even before we arrive on the scene.

And with "evangelical ambition", "the ambition of the Gospel" because what interests us is nothing more or nothing less than the Reign of God, because we have known the love of the One who came to set the world on fire, because we believe and we know that only he has the Word of Life that every human being awaits, thirsting in their heart of hearts. Our greatest desire is to be admitted among the workers in his field of grain.

Happy feast of the Sacred Hearts.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Mary

January 3rd, 2012

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 56



Image of Mary and the Child
SSCC Sisters' house
Heverlee (Belgium)

Let us console ourselves in our difficulties, remembering that Mary will always be our protectress, our support, that we will always have a place in her heart. When God withdraws, we must have recourse to her in our difficulties, our affliction, our unfaithfulness. She will pray for us if we call on her instead of becoming upset.

Good Father,
Circular Letter of April 17, 1817

During the liturgy of the Christmas season, Mary is in the forefront in the Gospel reading. Mary is the **woman** blessed among women (Lk. 1:42), the **mother** of Jesus (Mt. 2:11), the **wife** of Joseph (Mt. 1:24).

Mary is in the title of our Congregation and, united to the Heart of Jesus, she is part of our religious consecration (*to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*). However, there are few references to her in the writings of the Good Father. That's not all that strange. From a sound theological and spiritual perspective, Mary is always subordinate to the mystery of her son Jesus. The **Good**

Father presents Mary to us as the protective mother of her children, who intercedes for us and protects us in moments of difficulty. Even though the prayer most frequent in our tradition is the “*Salve Regina*” (Stat. 21), we do well to remember that the Good Father also recommended the recitation of the “*Sub tuum praesidium*” (We fly to thy patronage...) in order to invoke Mary’s protection.

The figure of Mary as **Mother** has solid biblical roots (the mother of Jesus in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, at Cana in John 2 and the mother of the disciples at the foot of the cross in John 19). It also has a firm dogmatic basis. The main element of the Church’s confession of faith about Mary is that she is “*theotokos*”, Mother of God. However, as someone once said to me, no doubt the emphasis on Mary as mother and protector also has something to do with our perspective as celibate males, who find in Marian piety a way of expressing our desire for female affection. Perhaps women have a different way of experiencing marian devotion, more in a “woman to woman” relationship.

In our **Constitutions**, the name of Mary is mentioned in 10 articles (10 out of a total of 153). Once more, the main emphasis is on the union of the two hearts to whom we are consecrated and here too Mary is subordinate to Jesus (Arts. 1, 2, 13 and 17). Mary also appears as **disciple**, a follower of Jesus, who precedes and accompanies us (Art. 3) and who lives what we profess in the vows of chastity (Art. 19), poverty (Art. 24) and obedience (Art. 32) in a particularly profound way. Finally, the Constitutions invite us to associate ourselves intimately with Mary in **prayer** (Art. 51.4) and to express our filial devotion, especially by praying the rosary (Art. 59).

Returning to the Gospels of the Christmas season, we also see Mary as Joseph’s **wife** (“Joseph’s lady” as Esteban Gumucio calls her in one of his poems). Wife and mother go hand in hand, as Mary could not have been the mother of “the son of David,” if she had not been the wife of Joseph. Some will say that once again this is looking at things from a “male” perspective, the woman defined in relationship to the man on whom she is dependent.

However, recognizing Mary as wife avoids enclosing her in some sort of “divine sphere” separated from the world and situates her in the reality of a human relationship, which is where the incarnation takes place. The covenant with her husband Joseph is sign and foundation of all the other covenants of which Mary is the image and symbol. Without a real concrete love, person to person, a loving heart does not exist.

Mary is the spouse of messianic times, of which the prophet Isaiah speaks, “*And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.*” (Is. 62:5) Clearly we can never come to understand God if we do not know something of this spousal joy, whose source is more in the woman than in the man. This joy, which is so very present in the infancy narratives, speaks of the fullness of what it means to be human and is a sign of what God most desired in creating humanity (as we read in Revelation 12:1-2).

The **heart of Mary**-spouse is similar to the heart of Jesus as seen in Matthew 11:28-30, where Jesus invites all “who labor and are burdened” to go to him to find rest. According to the “maternal” image of Mary, the children go to the mother seeking *protection* (*Sub tuum praesidium*). However, according to the spousal image, it is the wife who offers *rest* to her husband. Being protected from danger is not the same as being comforted in the midst of trials. The Gospel does not promise us *protection* (on the contrary, we are called to risk and to lose our life and we are told of persecutions to come). However the Gospel does offer *rest* to the simple and lowly, helping them bear lightly the yoke of commitment to others, the yoke of love. That rest, which is liberation, is the one Mary sings of in the *Magnificat* (Lk. 2).

The heart of Mary is the heart of a **woman of faith**. That is her deepest identity, which connects the different dimensions of her person. Mary is a believer, yes, but she believes as a woman. It is impossible to understand anything of Mary without her relationship with God and her obedient openness to his Word. Just as we cannot know her if we forget that she is a woman. Woman and believer is all one piece. Creature given totally, Creator in love. Heaven and earth united, a new creation. Her

heart is the port where spouse, mother and disciple are anchored. Our own consecration to the love of God passes through her heart. Even though we are men, unmarried and without children.

Mary, woman of the believing heart, mother of Jesus, spouse of Joseph, pray for us.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Artistic Representations of the Sacred Hearts

August 11th, 2007

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 6

God's love that so willingly lowers itself and takes flesh in the infant of Bethlehem nestled **on Mary's lap**, in the youth who spends most of his life "hidden" in the everyday life of Nazareth, in the man who takes to the road to proclaim God's reign and in the condemned who undergoes the suffering of the cross, must continually renew the desire, in each brother's heart, to offer themselves to Him and to his brothers and sisters.

Jesus' attitudes, choices and works led him to mortal conflict which culminated in the cross. Because of that, we are children of the cross (BP) and, in all humility and strength, we aspire to be where our Lord is (Jn. 12:26). The contemplation of the humanity of Christ, of **the body of the crucified**, of his pierced heart, is our spirituality's point of departure.



Pietà, XI c.
Arnstein (Germany)

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 7-8

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last month I participated in the Picpus program for a few days. As you know, it brought together more than forty brothers and sisters from throughout the Congregation. In one of the talks the topic of artistic representations of the Sacred Hearts came up. The speaker said that traditional images, in which Jesus and Mary are shown with an innocent expression exposing their

enflamed hearts, could have little meaning for some people. Clearly this is not the case for everyone, as I have witnessed while visiting the Congregation; such images are still prominent in many of our rooms, houses and chapels (and t-shirts, screen savers, bookmarks, medals, key chains etc.)

Someone said that the true icon of the Sacred Heart is the image of Jesus on the cross, his heart pierced by the lance. It is an image inspired by Scripture rather than by revelations coming from certain mystical experiences. In this same sense we could think of the image of Mary at the foot of the cross or the Pieta, Mary receiving in her arms the body of the dead Jesus, as icons of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In both we contemplate the two pierced Hearts (Jesus' pierced by the lance and Mary's by the sword spoke of by Simeon), united in the highest expression of saving love.

The artistic expression of the Sacred Hearts is not something essential and it depends on one's taste. However there is no doubt that it is connected to a way of understanding and experiencing our relationship with Christ and with Mary and in that sense, it could have an effect on our communion (something similar happens with other relative but important topics such as the way we celebrate the liturgy or the use of the habit, for example). The esthetic sense is capable of moving us, of opening the treasure chest of our deepest feelings, and thus of helping us in our life of faith to move beyond the merely cerebral to the depths of the heart, where the motivations which lead us to act in one way or another are really formed. We go from talk which comes merely from the head to sentiments rooted in the heart so as to be capable of moving our hands and feet (charity in action).

An appropriate image can be a bond of communion and identity for a group and also a powerful instrument of evangelization when it is able to evoke the religious experience to which we desire to witness. Prayer does not need loads of words. It can be expressed in a passage from Scripture or an image that recalls the mystery of Christ and that moves one to heartfelt confidence,

to thanksgiving, to compassion, to a desire to serve, to adoration. May Christ, the perfect image of the Father, inebriate us with his beauty and move us to love him.

Fraternally in SSCC,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

“Believe in Love”

Jean du Cœur de Jésus d’Elbée

November 12th, 2007

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 9

Yes, Jesus truly loves us immensely. He loved us with an unbelievable love which surpasses all the words we could think of. He loved us to the furthest limit....What I have just said to you, you know by heart. It is nothing else but the Gospel...But we do not read the Gospel in the light of Jesus’ love often enough.

Without love, every difficulty, every demand becomes a weight too heavy to bear...What an abyss there is between the two ways of acting: out of obligation or out of love.

I am not telling you, “You believe too much in your wretchedness.” We are much more wretched than we think. But I do say to you, “You do not believe enough in merciful love.”

And too often we live as orphans, as if we were forgotten, as if it were hell that were waiting for us. Men of little faith!

I think that you are like me, but I need to live by love, I need to celebrate, I need to sing and because of that, and this is what I hope for, I need to know that I am forgiven...The remedy is the inner peace that Jesus gives us. We are confident that we are forgiven because we are loved



Jean du Cœur de Jésus d’Elbée,
Sixth Superior General,
I Believe in Love (extracts)

December 3rd 2007 is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Father d’Elbée

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This edition of INFO begins with some words of Father Jean du Cœur de Jésus d'Elbée, who was the sixth Superior General of the Congregation from 1938 to 1958, a very difficult period (beginning on the eve of the Second World War) but a time of great growth in the community (during his Generalate the brothers' branch grew by 400 members). We remember him at this time because shortly we will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.

These sentences are taken from his book "*I Believe in Love*", published in 1969, which has been translated in five languages and which has just been republished in France. The book captures the essence of Father Jean's preaching in the numerous retreats that he gave.

During this retreat I want to preach to you about confident Love. I can not preach about anything else because this is my life and I can only give what I have. I am more and more convinced that this doctrine corresponds to the vocation of our Congregation in the holy Church. It is the essence of our spirit. I am not a great apostle but a little instrument and a witness of Jesus who, in spite of his great misery, allows himself to be led according to the will of the Spirit of Love under the gaze of the tenderly merciful Father.

The center of the preaching of Father Jean is God's love, the true "dogma" of the faith – as he said – that is so difficult for us to accept. His message can be summed up as a passionate call to trust in that love. As he himself says over and over again, the spiritual key to that message is found in Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

I believe that this insight of his is, in fact, part of the enduring content of our vocation and mission as a Congregation. It is an essential truth for which we are always thirsty. "*Too often we live as if we were orphans,*" we arrange our life and we experience suffering, joy, conflict, love, dreams, success and failure as if we

did not know the Father who loves us. How can we become so severe, proud, unsociable and so little given to compassion? There is only one doctor who can heal the heart. It is Jesus who saves us from ourselves, from the sadness and violence we create, from shame at our own wretchedness, from our inability to forgive and from our unfulfilled desire for communion. Jesus invites us to believe in the most scandalous and liberating reality that there is: the love of a Father who gathers the lost son in his arms. Good news for all of us, good news for this suffering world of ours.

The teaching of Father d'Elbée is even more appealing when you know something of his personal history. In 1918, Claude (Fr. Jean's baptismal name) married Louise de Sèze. Two years later, after a time of discernment in which they were guided by Father Mateo and after receiving a papal dispensation, the two separated. Louise, who would take the name Sister **Claire-Marie du Cœur de Jésus**, entered Carmel and Claude entered our Congregation. Much later he recalled that separation in these words, *"Jesus saw fit to form in our hearts a wound of love through which he was to enter but through which he would never leave except to be given to souls...A wound which will never be healed, even in death, for it will be our glory in heaven...Jesus loves us. He filled us."* During the rest of their lives, the two lived out their common vocation at a distance interrupted only by brief meetings at Carmel. Sister Claire-Marie died two years before Father Jean. *"Since she is up above, Mother Claire is always here (with me)."*

A unique love story that doubtlessly had an impact on the depth with which Father Jean experienced and preached the love of God. Personal contact with him left a mark on many people who met him. Not long ago a sister said to me, *"Father Jean was a father to me, at once good, tender and demanding. He was filled with the teaching of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus (about abandonment, confidence, simplicity etc), deeply human and truthful (calling a spade a spade), appalled by dishonesty and injustice..."* Perhaps the human and spiritual quality of the man had something to do with the hidden and continuing presence of

his wife's love. As someone who knew the two of them well wrote two years ago, *"The grace of Claude's vocation to the priesthood was associated with the grace of their marriage and the quality and insight of Louise's love was needed in order to shed light on the different paths that their one vocation to love Jesus absolutely would take."*

In a few days we will celebrate the feast of the **Good Mother**. Though clearly different from that of Claude and Louise, the story of our founders is also that of a deep relationship between a man and a woman. Their affection for one another, their being so in tune with one another spiritually, and their complementarity color the charism and style of our community. Speaking of the Good Mother's role in the foundation of the Congregation, the Good Father indicates that she is the root of the tree; if you pull it up, the Congregation will hardly survive. (Letter to Raphaël Bonamie, January 1829)



"Male and female he created them." On October 26 when the brothers participating in the program for new Major Superiors



Jesus welcomes Mary into glory.
Fresco in the Benedictine Monastery of the
Sacro Speco (Subiaco)

met with the sisters also gathered in Rome (the General Government and the Major Superiors), Richard McNally reminded us that the difference of the sexes is not only part of our reality as a Congregation (founders, two branches) but of the dynamic of God's love. The combination man/woman is image and sacrament, expressed in the hearts of Jesus and Mary: the

heart of a man and the heart of a woman. Mary is mother and also spouse, as a figure of the Church. It is only right that throughout the Bible there is an abundance of nuptial images that speak of God's love. We know how right that is, for it is written in our very being. We are not fully human without a feminine or masculine face which completes us. Equal in dignity, different in a thousand ways, called to deep affection and reverent respect. As the poet said, "*They say that a man is not a man if he does not hear his name on a woman's lips....Isn't that so?*"

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Foolishness of Gratuitous Love

September 2nd, 2009

Extracts from INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 29



Fresco on Damien
Provincial House, Lahnstein (Germany)

As the absolutely gratuitous gift of God, hope bursts into our lives as something not due to us, something that transcends every law of justice. Gift by its nature goes beyond merit, its rule is that of superabundance. It takes first place in our souls as a sign of God's presence in us, a sign of what he expects from us.

Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 34

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What I would like to do right now is offer a brief reflection on one of the things I have been reading during my vacation. It is the latest encyclical of Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. The Pope's letter is an attempt to shed light on, among other things, an aspect so essential to human relationships as the economy, a subject especially timely given the famous "crisis" that has affected us all and has caused such suffering to so many.

The Pope reminds us that in order to make the world more human the laws of the market are not enough ("to give in order to receive," the purchase-sale of products and services) nor are

laws made by politicians enough (“to give out of obligation”: such as taxes that try to redistribute wealth in societies). What is also needed is “gratuity” or “the logic of gift” (“to give without expecting anything in return,” as a friend gives, as a mother who cares for her child, as God who gives to us because he loves us etc.)

This **gratuitous love** is not something private, springing from good feelings, something perhaps worthwhile but marginal. There is more to it than that. We need this kind of love so that the market, the economy, politics, the family and all other areas of social life become just and human and really seek the common good. Without gratuitous love our hearts become hardened. Love demands and seeks justice, in other words, the recognition and respect of the legitimate rights of persons and peoples. But love is greater than justice and brings it to completion in the willingness to give of oneself and to forgive, things that no law can oblige. It is not only a question of always claiming what is rightly mine in justice. We also have to be capable of “gift”, in other words, to give even of what is mine so that the other has what he/she needs to live.

To love like that is “**insane**” (to give not expecting anything in return), as insane as the Gospel of Jesus. It is something that can only come from God, who loves us in a superabundant way that we cannot even begin to imagine. It is true that our globalized society draws us closer to one another but it does not necessarily make us more brothers/sisters. The map of suffering and cruelty in our world continues to be horrifying. Brother/sisterhood is not just something achieved by our own strength but rather a gift of God that we have to know how to receive.

I believe that these ideas from the Pope’s encyclical can shed light and can challenge our life as a religious community that is trying to live fraternity and that sees itself as having a charism of “reparation” in the midst of a hurting world. And of course this reflection on the “logic of gift” also makes me turn my eyes once more toward our brother, **Damien of Molokai**. Damien loved those suffering of leprosy to the very end. He remained with

them, isolated on Molokai, until he himself contracted the disease and died as one of them. That is an example of gift, gratuity, brotherhood, love, superabundant dedication that no law could demand but which springs forth from a heart touched by the mystery of the mercy manifested in the Heart of Jesus.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Our SSCC Vocation

October 10th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 19

Baptism in Kinsasha
July 2008

To know Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; the fact that we have met him is the best thing that has happened in our life, and to make him known in word and work is our joy.

Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean in Aparecida, Brazil, 2007, No. 32



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The thirteenth assembly of CIAL (the Latin American Interprovincial Conference) was held in Lima September 16-25. You will find more information on it in this issue of INFO. One day was given to reflect with the sisters, who were also meeting at the same time and place, on the challenges that the Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean poses to our religious life. The conference was held last year in **Aparecida**, Brazil. Eduardo Pérez-Cotapos, a member of our General Council who participated, offered us some keys for understanding its content. According to Aparecida, the essential starting point for becoming a Church of disciples and missionaries serving our people is found in one fundamental certainty:

"To know Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; the fact that we have met him is the best thing that has happened in our life, and to make him known in word and work is our joy." (No. 32)

If that is true, having Jesus at the center and rediscovering *"the beauty and the joy of being Christians"* (No. 14) we come to see the need for a pastoral transformation of the Church. *"The Church needs to be shaken profoundly so that it does not just settle down comfortably, stagnantly and tepidly as it looks on the suffering of the people of the continent"* (No. 362). In the final analysis the content of the mission of this Church of disciples-missionaries is *"the offer of a full life to everyone"* (No. 361) a dignified life, a life of quality.

Listening to these reflections, it was not difficult to think of our **SSCC vocation**, whose foundation is found in Jesus, in the joy of knowing the love of his heart and from that experience sharing that love (which is life) as a community with those who most need it. It was in that sense that our Thirty-seventh General Chapter spoke of our mission: *"one of our purposes still is to "propagate devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary", understanding "devotion" as "surrender," binding oneself to the love of God manifested in Christ. Drawing people to that love, speaking of it from our own poor yet radiant experience: that is our mission"* (Our Vocation and Mission, 27). Our experience of Christ's love is *poor* because we are sinners but it is also *luminous* because it comes from God's grace and floods us with a joy that nothing can take away.

As we can see, the document of Aparecida uses the language of **"life,"** a language that we as religious often turn to when we use expressions such as: to give life, to liberate life, speak from our life experience etc. For many this way of speaking represents an advance over an "older" way of speaking as religious that emphasized things such as sacrifice, immolation, renunciation, asceticism and the like. However we must admit that it is not enough to speak of "life" if we want to be consistent with the Good News. In fact, Jesus speaks to us in a shocking way of life and death: the grain of wheat that must die in order to bear fruit

(= in order to give life), the Son of Man who has come to give up his life (and Jesus died young and in an awful way)...And so the *life* that we speak about is always linked to the Pascal mystery. As the document from Aparecida says:

"Life is increased by giving it and it weakens in isolation and comfort. In fact, those who most enjoy life are those who leave the security of the shore and become passionately involved in mission communicating life to others. The Gospel helps us to discover that an unhealthy care for one's own life threatens the human and Christian meaning of that very life. We can live much better when we have the interior freedom to give all, "Whoever loves his life loses it..." (John 12:25) Here we discover another profound law of life: life is fulfilled and matures in the measure in which we sacrifice it to give life to others. This is what mission is all about." (No. 360)

Our last General Chapter speaks to us in this same sense. *"We are called to overcome that temptation (the temptation to focus on our survival, our life, our security) and so free our hearts for generous and joyful service to the outcasts and the needy, risking all we have to."* (Our Vocation and Mission, 23)

I believe that we can speak of a spirituality of life and also of a spirituality of **the joy of living**. I do not mean that in the sense that the most important thing is for us to live well but rather that we organize our life in the service of others' happiness so that those around us, especially those who suffer the burden of darkness and pain, might find joy in living. This involves resisting the temptation to put the focus on ourselves (or on our devotions, our ideas or our opinions) so that we can serve and respond to God's desire to wipe away the tears from the eyes of his sons and daughters and prepare a banquet of joy for them. Loving is more important than living. Loving one can give life, like Jesus and like Damien. The opposite, not loving and just surviving, is a joyless way of dying within.

From this perspective I can understand better what our forebears tried to express in words that today can arouse suspicion or

misunderstanding. For example, I can understand why **Father Euthyme Rouchouze** (third Superior General) exhorted the General Chapter of 1863 to recover *the spirit of victimhood and continuous sacrifice* in union with the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Father Rouchouze had to struggle to rebuild the Congregation after the awful crisis of the schism of 1853. For him, the life and death of the Institute depended on the individual and communal renewal of that spirit of victimhood. *“That spirit proper to the Institute is its life, its soul. We will have life as a Congregation, a vibrant life, young life in the measure that we have that spirit of sacrifice and that we live in a state of victimhood to the very least details of our life... On the contrary, if that spirit diminishes, we will vegetate, if you will, because we will just be good folks with a good will who do not want to do evil but we will not have a strong and vigorous life...”*

Yes, we want a vibrant life but we have to be able to give it (*sacrifice*) for the good of others (*victim*) like the Lord. This was at the heart of Father Rouchouze' passionate concern that the Congregation not just be a group of nice people with good will but lacking evangelical character and flavor but rather the fruitful seed that reaches out to embrace others in the boundless love of God.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Feast of the Sacred Hearts

"They will look upon him whom they have pierced" (Jn. 19:37)

June 3rd, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 39

Devotion to the heart of Christ and of Mary invites the brothers & sisters to proclaim God as a God of grace, a God of mercy and a God with a predilection for those who suffer, for the poor and for the unevangelized.

Decree of Approbation
of the Constitutions
CIVCSVA, June 9, 1990



Jesus and Mary (Santiago López SSCC)
Paintings, Generalate (Rome)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year on the feast of the Sacred Heart the "Year of the Priesthood" will come to a close. Without a doubt the celebration will be affected by **the sexual abuse crisis** that for some months has shaken the whole Church and in some places has also directly affected the Congregation.

As the Pope said recently, *"The greatest persecution of the Church does not come from enemies outside of her but from sin within the Church. For that reason, the church has a deep need to learn to do penance, to accept purification and to learn forgiveness but justice is also needed. Forgiveness is not a substitute for justice."* (May 11, 2010 on the plane going to Lisbon). Those are strong words that speak to us of a wounded Church, which does not see itself primarily as the "repairer" of the sins of the world but a Church that is trying to recognize how she herself has wounded God's love.

I believe that the sexual abuse crisis is a call to justice in two ways. In the first place we must respond to the injustice involved in the abuse of power by people invested with spiritual authority. The sexual abuse of young people or the mentally or emotionally fragile is an extreme case of the corruption of "clerical power," which is also manifest in other forms of authoritarianism and lack of respect for persons. Also unjust is a policy of concealment of known cases and lack of attention to the victims. We cannot forget that a religious who sexually abuses a minor has committed a crime and must be judged by the law of the state as any other person. Equally unjust is the lack of responsibility involved in not dealing adequately with psychological and affective pathologies that become evident during the process of initial formation, allowing the religious profession and ordination of unsuitable candidates.

Fortunately I think we are learning a lesson about the policies and procedures to be followed. As Msgr. Mariano Crociata, Secretary General of the Italian Bishops Conference, said on April 29 [2010], now we understand better that if someone abuses minors, we can say he has committed a crime, he is sick and he has sinned. And so he has to submit himself to the law, to therapy and to grace. Those three elements are necessary and distinct. One cannot substitute or compensate for the other. More difficult is the evolution in our way of understanding "spiritual power" as a Church. In any case, this painful crisis can be an excellent opportunity to move toward a more humble, respectful and fraternal understanding of relationships within the Church.

However we must also respond to another type of injustice. It is unjust to generalize and to conclude that the Church is obsolete and that the majority of religious and priests are sexual deviants dangerous to society. It is unjust to label as "sexual abuse" acts and behaviors that are quite different. For example, it is not the same thing to rape a child as to embrace them affectionately in public. It is unjust that so many false accusations are made, slanderously destroying the honor of innocent persons and pursuing legal cases for financial gain or revenge. It is also unjust to impose disproportionate canonical sanctions in reaction to media and legal pressure or to accept to pay exorbitant financial

compensation without adequately verifying the truth of the accusation. There are priests permanently suspended from the exercise of the ministry for unverified accusations or for actions whose seriousness consists only in the subjective interpretation of the accuser. Others are suspended for things that happened many years ago and that were already made up for in their time. Is there no possibility of redemption in the Church?

We are preparing to celebrate **the feast of the Sacred Hearts**. Even if in some places the liturgical celebration has been moved to Sunday, we can say that it is the feast of two hearts linked to the mystery of “Friday” and “Saturday”.

The Heart of Jesus is a “Friday” heart, the day of the cross. The heart of the crucified Lord is opened – pierced – and pours forth blood and water. Christ dead on the cross is the exalted Lord, source of the life that overcomes death. The traditional image of the Sacred Heart shows the wounds (the crown of thorns, the cross, the wound of the lance) but there is also the flame, the fire that transforms with the force of love. “Friday” explains the newness of the one commandment: to love “as Jesus has loved us.” As Jesus hangs naked on the cross, often the force of his love can only be understood and experienced with “naked faith,” when the weight of existence, discouragement, violence or sorrow robs us of consolation and joy.

The Heart of Mary is a “Saturday” heart. Saturday is the day of vigil, the eve. Before the incarnation, Mary accepts the disturbing Word. Before the “hour” of her son, she asks us to do what he tells us. Before the hour of glory, she is at the foot of the cross and becomes the mother of the beloved disciples. Before the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, she is in the midst of the Church at prayer. On Saturday, while Jesus is in the tomb, Mary maintains hope in new life.

The abuse crisis that I spoke about and the general climate in many parts of the Church and the religious life have aspects of a “sorrowful Friday” and a “silent Saturday.” This is the context in

which we celebrate the Sacred Hearts this year, with the hope of the “Sunday of glory” that forms one mystery of salvation with the two days before.

We enter the Heart of Jesus through the wound. In him we can renew ourselves; we can dwell there and find rest. I would like to finish with some words of Carlos Azpiroz, the Master General of the Dominicans, from a recent interview in *Vida Nueva*. He wisely indicates the root of authentic hope in time of crisis:

“More than at few other times the religious life is aware of its wounds and poverty... Hope inspires us. God is not a woodcutter who makes wood from the fallen tree. He is the vine dresser who prunes the vine so that it gives fruit in abundance.”

Fraternally in the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General



Living together

SSCC Family

November 8th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 43

We know we are linked by special bonds of communion with the sisters and the laity of the Secular Branch. We have yet to discover the possibilities of those bonds. (...) We will make our way sharing more deeply our spiritual experiences (...)

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission,
No. 19



SSCC Brothers, Sisters and Laities
Bogota (Colombia), September 2011

The Family Spirit

One of the characteristic features of the way we live our charism is what we usually call “the family spirit.” That expression refers to “that tender charity which is part of the happiness of religious life” of which the Good Mother spoke and the simple, respectful and heartfelt way in which we relate to one another and to those with whom we journey and share life and ministry.

It is a characteristic that we all understand even though it is difficult to put into words. It’s a style more than a way of speaking. It is not concretized in any one activity but gives a special flavor to our communion and our apostolic work. It is not something all that original, but it is something to be thankful for in a Church looking for ways to be more open, freer and more imaginative.

I believe that our “family spirit” refers both to the heartfelt way in which we relate as well as the challenging spirituality that is at the basis of our common vocation.

1. A heartfelt style

The family spirit makes us feel that we are at home, where people are accepted and respected for who they are. In the family we make room for everyone, everyone is needed. The weakness of some is borne by all. A heartfelt way of treating others naturally flows from a spirituality like ours: a spirituality of the heart, centered in the love manifested in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Goodness of heart among brothers/sisters becomes a reflection of the gratuitous and overflowing love of the Father.

2. A challenging spirituality

Our being a family finds its inspiration in the new family inaugurated by Jesus, *"whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."* (Mk. 3:35) The family is not constituted by bonds of blood or acquired rights. Neither does it mean that we have a common ideology or that we all think alike. What is most important is not membership in a group but being conformed to what God wants. The aim of our being together is a radical desire to live the Gospel, which is the result of the Father's call. Because of that we have to encourage one another, to correct one another when necessary and to discern what is important and what is not important.

A family with a charism

The term "family" can also refer to all the people who are inspired by the SSCC charism and commit themselves to live it. We are speaking therefore of a family with a certain charism within the people of God.

The SSCC charism is a gift of the Spirit officially recognized by the Church. This gift takes flesh in specific individuals who live their Christian life through this charism. It is a personal call, a vocation, and as such it is God's initiative.

The SSCC charism is like an wave that keeps building. It reaches many people in different ways. The charism bears fruit in numerous programs of Christian formation and apostolic outreach, in which many Christians manifest their affinity with the

SSCC spirit. However, properly speaking, the nucleus of this SSCC family is made up of those who publically manifest a specific vocation through a commitment recognized by the Church.

There are two forms of public commitment in the SSCC family: religious vows according to the Constitutions (for the religious branches of brothers and sisters) and commitment by lay people according to the Statutes of the secular branch. These public commitments mean that we can be counted on to responsibly live out this gift of the Spirit that we call the SSCC charism.

This group of people publicly committed to the SSCC charism is what I am calling here the "SSCC family." To paraphrase Bernard Couronne ssc (in the book, *The Lord Led Us by the Hand*, p. 127, 2004) we are speaking of "*a family of men and women, clergy and lay, who feel called to live and proclaim the Gospel in the way that Pierre Coudrin and Henriette Aymer did. Because of their common heritage and choice of life they are deeply united both emotionally and religiously. This is a source of solidarity that embraces their whole life.*"

Understood in that way, the "SSCC family" is a reality much broader than the "Congregation," which refers to the religious institute and, consequently, to the two religious branches.

I am aware that the Statement of the General Governments on the secular branch of October 2008 caused confusion and unease among some precisely because of this restrictive definition of the term "congregation." In spite of that I would maintain the need to be precise in our concepts and to clarify distinctions. It is a way to respect persons, to avoid misunderstandings and to honor the richness of different styles of life. To be a family does not mean that we are all the same or that we are always together. To make distinctions, does not mean creating distance or, even less, entering into conflict.

In my present responsibility, I find myself in a privileged position to appreciate the diversity within our SSCC family:

- We brothers have many differences among us in terms of sensitivities, emphases we give to our religious life, ways of understanding community and ministry etc. Communion among ourselves is a great challenge. It is interesting and beautiful but a challenge all the same.
- We know that the differences between the brothers and sisters are great and obvious and we do well to recognize them, name them, respect them and try to work with them for the good of the mission. It is something like a dance. According to the Constitutions, as sisters and the brothers we have complete juridical and organizational autonomy and rightly so. This is a good and healthy distinction, which does not exclude our looking together for inspiration to the sources we share and being very attentive to communion and collaboration.
- The distinction between the two religious branches and the secular branch is also clear, because the forms of commitment to our respective states of life result in essentially different realities.
- The communities of the secular branch, which do not have an international structure uniting them, are even more diverse among themselves. They all have in common the public commitment of their members (which is what makes them the "SSCC secular branch") but they are organized in different ways, they understand their purpose with different accents and they even call themselves different things. In spite of their great diversity, I have felt myself well received in all of those communities; I have seen the mark of the SSCC charism in all of them; I have seen common sources of inspiration in all of them and in all of them I have seen possibilities for our charism still to be explored.

Let us give thanks for the differences! But it is not enough just to acknowledge them. Let us remember that these three communities (brothers, sisters and laity) form one SSCC family, with one charism and, in a certain way, our destinies are linked.

The real impact of the charism, which we are called to live, depends on this *family* in its totality. The Good Father often said that he wanted us to be *useful* for the Church. The *usefulness* of the charism depends on all of us: that it be *useful* as a way of searching for God, useful in real service to the poor, useful in healing hearts and nourishing hope, useful in proclaiming the Gospel. The fruitfulness of the charism is entrusted to all of us.

As I said at the beginning, the relationships between us –brothers, sisters, laity– must be characterized by the “SSCC family spirit.” Especially in times of darkness or tension, let us remember that we are not “a family” only because we are able to somehow get along, but because at the beginning there was a challenging call from God the Father of mercy, who wants to be known as overflowing and healing love.

That call is the real reason to try to get to know one another better, to grow in our vocation together and to share the mission.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Visibility

May 4th, 2012

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 60



Little concerned about external and precise regularity, which circumstances made impossible, she worked on the essential, the interior, not wanting to decorate the edifice before having laid the foundation well.

That way of acting, so in keeping with right reason, was the cause of much persecution... [Many] were scandalized just to see the sisters and their superior speak, act and live, to all appearances, just like normal everyday people.

Gabriel de la Barre,
speaks of the Good Mother
Writings 1802-1829, p. 221

A topic that always comes up when speaking of the religious life is “visibility.” We are concerned about our “**identity**,” knowing who we are and what is it that distinguishes our way of life from others and from other ways of contributing to the mystery of the Church. We want that identity to be recognized by others. We want it to be visible. We say that we have this concern because it is part of our mission and it can stir up interest in a vocation among young people who may feel called to follow Jesus in our ranks. However this concern may also subtly respond to our legitimate desire to see ourselves as important, useful and necessary when faced with the fear of being irrelevant and marginal.

The official discourse of the Church about *the new evangelization* asks that consecrated life make itself more “visible”, in order to be a clearer sign of the God's presence in the

world. This visibility distinguishes religious congregations from secular institutes. However this insistence on visibility suffers from the same ambiguity that surrounds the term *new evangelization*. What does it involve; to make God's truth more visible to the world (a truth which we supposedly know and which humanity has forgotten) or that we be converted so as to be able to discover the presence of God in the world of today in a new way? Does *new evangelization* mean that we have to be "masters" (those who know) or that be "companions on the journey" (with all the men and women of our time who are searching)? It probably involves both. But how do we relate one to the other.

The concern about the visibility of religious life is expressed in different ways, for example: the way we dress (use of the habit, clerical attire or congregational symbols), vocational materials we publish, the way we celebrate the Liturgy, the style of our pastoral ministry, the place we give symbols of identity, practices of piety we use and promote etc.

Among the brothers there is a wide **diversity of approaches** to visibility. Some have a tendency to the iconoclastic and are uncomfortable with external signs of belonging; while others want to use more visible signs of identity. Some prefer to be informal; while others feel more comfortable when things are more formal and solemn...

The members of the General Government also have different approaches but we agree (and it's something we have communicated in visits and Congregation meetings) that we need symbols that help us express what comes from within and that allow us to see ourselves as members of one and the same community. Symbols speak for themselves, remind us who we are and are capable of moving the heart spontaneously.

Whatever be our tendency, we have to avoid useless judgments or criticism. For example, it is not right to label as neoconservative, retrograde or out of touch with reality everyone who wants to wear the habit or other signs of identify. Just as it would be unjust to label those who do not use such external signs as being unfaithful to their vocation, thoroughly secularized,

or of weak or uncommitted faith. I really think that it is better not to make these topics into a battle cry or let them become reason for division among us. It is best to respect the different ways that people express themselves.

What really counts are *the essential, the interior, the foundation*, as we read in the interesting quote at the beginning of this letter. Gabriel de la Barre remembers how the Good Mother was not concerned about *decorating the edifice* but rather *laying the foundation well*. That led to criticism from those who were scandalized that consecrated women could *speak, act and live, to all appearances, just like normal everyday people*.

A feature of the Congregation in its beginnings was this simplicity as regards external forms. This was due to the fact that in the early years they had to live underground but it also came from the family spirit, the simple and heartfelt way of relating to one another, the assurance that the Good God looked to the heart without being caught up in appearances, the importance of that inner zeal with which they did things... And so adoration is not ostentatious (it is usually made before the closed tabernacle), it does not matter that they dress as people of their time and that they enjoy an air of freedom which even leads to putting their life on the line in some daring forms of ministry, as did *Marche-à-terre* [BP] in his early years.

Other charisms in the Church emphasize discretion and a presence that is invisible. For example, I think of the Little Brothers of Jesus, inspired by Charles de Foucauld, whose members are to be brothers to all, especially the very poor and different, "hiding" themselves in the midst of those folks, leading an extremely simple life, with a clear identity as religious but which does not express itself in conspicuous ways.

We are not the Little Brothers of Jesus, but we do share that taste for simplicity which is to color the way we live and be with others in a heartfelt and disarming way. What is important to us is not that others see our "image" but that they know Jesus and that his Kingdom grow. That can be a very good contribution to the Church's mission in this time of the *"new evangelization,"* when

there is the temptation to understand the mission as a power struggle between the world and the Church.

I finish this reflection with a little observation on the motto of the upcoming General Chapter, "*Salt is good...*"

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of salt in two ways. In one place he says, "*You are the salt of the earth.*" (Mt. 5:13) It is a striking affirmation that leads us to see how important we are for Jesus and the decisive role he gives us in the work of salvation. This passage would seem to make us the principal players in evangelization, those who have something to give to others whose role is to receive. It is certainly good to meditate on these words of Jesus, but it is not the passage that we have chosen for the Chapter.

The Chapter motto comes from another saying of Jesus about salt, where he does not say that we are the salt but that we must "keep salt in ourselves." "***Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another.***" (Mk. 9:50) The perspective is different. Jesus is not speaking about us sharing salt with others but about our being converted (*to be salted with fire*). Our evangelizing mission begins in a self-critical look at ourselves that allows the Gospel to lift us up and transform us. The emphasis is not on the salt that we can give (understood also as our "visibility") but in the taste that we must have within (*the essential, the interior, the foundation* that the Good Mother was concerned about.)

Our reflection on mission cannot be reduced to rethinking apostolic strategies or the ways we are visible, rather it has to begin in the heart of each one of us, where the real consecration to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary takes place.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

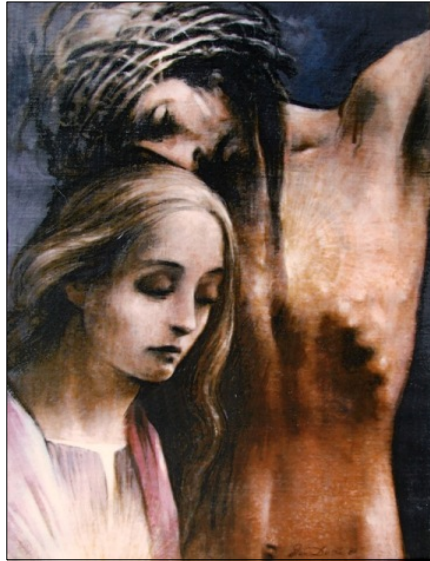
Humility

February 11th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 12

And so our fraternity is built on gratuity and humility (and not so much on “negotiation” or the balance of forces)...we know that we are the fruit of the seed given out of love, that our existence and love is pure gift, that we are enwrapped in the wonder and beauty of grace, and that we are called to the freedom and joy of God’s children. (No. 43)

Jesus Christ crucified binds us inexorably to the poor and the forgotten of our world and unites us in a mysterious way – but which must be realized in concrete ways in our lives – to the immense and unimaginable burden of the suffering of the little ones of this world... (No. 11)



37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission

Image of the Sacred Hearts
Generalate (Rome)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Lent has just begun. We turn our gaze to the One who *“humbled himself, becoming obedient to death.”* (Phil. 2:8) We are invited to *“go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore.”* (Hebrews 13:13). Easter, the feast that we are preparing for, is a mystery of humility.

Humility is a movement downward, toward the *humus* of our being, toward the truth of who we are without masks or acting. *“I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me.”* (Psalm 131:1) Humility predisposes us to serve, without conditions, without bargaining, without negotiation. Humility draws us close to the One, who being Master and Lord, is at table

as one who serves. (Jn. 13:14). For that reason humility is liberating while the proud heart is a heart enslaved and fearful because it has interests to defend.

Humility simplifies life, increases our taste for the simple, for the poor and for that reason it does not involve much expense or much recompense. Humility remains joyful in the midst of poverty, contradiction, sickness, even in the face of aggression. Humility does not get exasperated claiming its rights. Humility does not allow one to feel offended, humiliated, taken advantage of because it knows that everything asked of it does not belong to it in the first place.

Humility takes us toward the poor, it lets us enjoy their company, it gives us a greater desire to live with them, to serve them, to learn from them, to get rid of our luxuries, to enjoy their inconveniences. Humility unites our heart to those who are simple and leads us to give our lives for them.

Humility makes fraternal life a delight, a haven of peace, a gift for the soul. Pride and suspicion kill us, make us surly, harden us toward others and divide us. If at times we are severe with one another it is without a doubt because of our lack of humility. Humility unites hearts and smoothes the way toward communion.

Humility heals our wounded hearts and helps us treat others with goodness, without making them pay the price for our frustration.

Humility does not keep account of one's merits and does not demand reparation for supposed affronts. It does not justify one's life proclaiming the excellence of one's actions. Humility is wise and recognizes its littleness; it is not deceived by words of congratulation or by failure. Humility does not sell out to anyone for it has only one Lord: a Lord naked, unappreciated, nailed to the cross, who let himself be condemned without crying out, without shouting, without breaking the bruised reed.

Humility recognizes its errors and its sin, it knows how to turn around, ask pardon and accept correction without feeling

wounded. It recognizes its misery without going to pieces. If it is attacked, it does not bear a grudge. If it corrects others, it does so with charity. Humility is a gift to be asked of the Spirit, because there is no true humility without Grace. Humility makes friends of God. Humility consoles. Pride hardens. *"And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for: "God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5: 5b-7)

The Good Father used to say, *"The first virtue that we recommend to you in order to imitate Our Lord, is simplicity...Humility is the faithful companion of simplicity."* The Congregation is filled with brothers and sisters who have lived and who live this spirit of SSCC simplicity. What a joy it is to meet them! In them we see the reality of our family spirit and that warm way of dealing with people that should characterize us.

We have to recognize that the Congregation can also be tempted to pride and arrogance. We can see ourselves as "clergy" separated from others, with a monopoly on power, important folks called to distinguished work, having a "dignity" that merits extraordinary respect, hard and solid types in whose lives no one can interfere, absolute masters of our possessions, worthy of applause for whatever good we do, whose opinion should always be sought and followed, bothered by every little criticism etc. We can also work for the "glory" of our institute, rather than seeking the "glory of God," trying *to make a name for ourselves*. Such temptations could be lying in wait for us and if we give in the cross of Calvary moves farther away from us and God becomes silent. May it not be so among us.

One way to grow in humility would be to stop and consider the disproportion that exists between our "fears" and "lack of trust" as religious concerning our internal problems (organization, structures, finances, concern for security, mutual misunderstanding, wounds from the past etc.) and the real life dramas that cause suffering to so many people in the world, especially the members of the body of Christ that suffer most: the

orphan, the widow, the displaced, the sick, the anxious, victims of violence...*a people humble and lowly, Who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD.* (Zeph. 3:12) I believe that only authentic humility can save us from this pathetic contrast and help us “laugh at ourselves” with the true humor of one who can smile freely with self-detachment. The humor of faith, the wise humility of the Gospel, lets us see what is really important and unmasks the supposed “seriousness” of our little tiny problems. Humility is like a cool breeze freeing us from the trap of our myopic interests so that we can go forth and serve not being concerned for ourselves.

May the journey to Easter deepen true humility in the Congregation and prepare us to pass through the baptism of Easter with Christ; the birth, through the cross, to the new life of the Risen One.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Violence and Respect

November 8th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 54



Damien's Hands
Stained glass window
Kaneohe (Hawaii)

All we have to do is just open our eyes to realize that relationships between individuals, groups and people everywhere are strongly marked by violence. Violence is moral or physical. It damages, excludes and tramples on human dignity. Violence arises from fear or greed. Violence is justified with the excuse of defending ones rights, the interests of the group and even the glory of God.

I want to reflect with you a bit on this because we say that ours is a "*reparative vocation*." Reparation has a lot to do with the respect due to those who, in one way or another, suffer violence; "*the men and women who are victims of injustice, hatred, and sin in the world,*" with whom our Constitutions call us to be in solidarity (Const. 4). So it would be good to ask ourselves to what extent we are involved in this violence which wounds people and saddens the Spirit, and how we can share in God' love, which constantly repairs the forgotten dignity of his sons and daughters.

1. Violence and abuse of power

Violence can appear as the desperate cry of the weak in the face of the strong. However more frequently, violence represents an abuse of power by the strong in relationship with the weak. The one who is more powerful physically, militarily, economically or culturally can beat down and humiliate the one who is more defenseless.

This is what we see in the violence of war, terrorism, religious persecution, abuse in families, abortion, rape, marginalization of minority groups, ethnic killing, the accumulation of wealth leaving immense masses of humanity in misery and in so many other forms of personal or structural violence that weigh on suffering humanity.

I am also thinking of (and that's what I want to call our attention to in this letter) the violence which exists in our own community and church. We know the ravages caused by the abuse of minors and people who are fragile. We must always be attentive to this because awful cases of abuse have occurred among us and continue occurring. It is disturbing to note that this type of violence is generally linked to an abusive exercise of power that we believe we possess by the fact of being pastors and spiritual guides.

However without even getting to the aberration of sexual abuse, the exercise of "clerical power" in the Church can at times translate into some rather surreptitious forms of violence, as for example: a dictatorial attitude in ministry, taking advantage of resources at our disposal for our personal interest, treating people harshly, scorning those who do not think as we do, ignoring those who make us uncomfortable, those who seem to be slow or a nuisance....This is all violence.

Manipulation of conscience is also a form of violence and it is so easy for someone who gives spiritual direction and preaches in the name of God's Word. The tendency to seek emotional compensation or the hidden anger resulting from frustration can

blind the minister of the Gospel and make him into a manipulator, who leads people more to himself than to the Lord.

We are violent when we believe ourselves better than others or when we desire that the other respond to what I think he should be. We are violent when we speak badly of others, always complaining of the evident deficiencies of a brother, speaking of his bad side, judging him severely without listening to his reasons. We are violent when we serve others in a hurtful way, impressing upon them our superiority and their inferiority.

Violence disfigures the work of the first craftsman, the Creator who made us in his image, with the same inalienable dignity. Violence is an affront to the universal title of sons and daughters of God, beside which makes all the distinctions and labels we invent pale.

In the face of every kind of violent aggression the clear warning of Jesus rings in our ears, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones*" (Mt. 18:10), because "*you have but one Father in heaven*" (Mt. 23:9).

2. Respect and reparation

Violence damages. Love repairs. Love restores the work of art that is each human being. "*We wish to identify with the attitude of Jesus and with His reparative work.*" (Const. 4)

2.1. In the Mystery of God (adoration)

The complete reparation of the great human drama corresponds to God in his mystery. He gives himself –we don't know how- to wiping away the tears from the faces of everyone. It is to us to draw near to his saving love and to be humble witnesses of the heart of Christ which welcomes, consoles and comforts, even though the "effectiveness" of our reparative work is imperceptible and is beyond our ability to evaluate or measure.

Adoration is an excellent space where we can expose ourselves to the mystery of God's reparative love. The time of adoration is a

pause along the way, where I quiet the noise in my life and my work and open myself in silence to the immense love of God revealed in the cross of Jesus. He, whose body was so violated on the cross, gives himself to us in the simple sign of bread and opens the only path possible toward breaking the cycle of violence.

In adoration we lie defenseless, yielding ourselves to the infinite love of God which heals all those deep wounds which, often unconsciously, make us violent and incapable of loving with joy and generosity.

2.2. In our dealings with others

Reparative love loves the one who does not seem lovable and honors the one who does not seem to deserve respect. Such love is only possible with true humility, which leads me to recognize that the other is as important as I am.

Reparative respect translates into dialogue. Dialogue listens more than speaking, it makes the one with whom I am speaking my companion along the way. Dialogue means being interested in the other as a friend. Love that translates into dialogue welcomes the contradictions of human life with compassion and recognizes that I am a sinner just like everyone else.

Reparative love is not a matter of feeling. Feelings come and go. Often they dominate us rather than us controlling them. Loving is more a decision of the heart, a statement of my practical readiness to be of service. The one who loves the other says, "You can count on me." Reparative love does not seek return. It finds joy in seeing others grow. Such love creates communion and repairs the wounds of conflicts.

The one who is violent and aggressive toward others also deserves respect. However reparative love is always firm with regard to evil and is able to say "no" to abuse. To the disrespectful it responds with clarity but also with charity, avoiding a violent response and seeking the salvation of all.

I believe that a basic principal in everything we do should always be absolute, loving, delicate, reverential respect for each person. This respect will be more "reparative" the more it is shown toward the littlest ones, the most abused and those who suffer the most. This is also the way we recover our own dignity and we experience real joy, the joy that Jesus found among the little ones (Lk. 10:21).

I will finish inviting us all to grow in four dimensions of this reparative respect:

- a) Reverential respect for each individual: which is concretized in dialogue and listening, in friendly interest for everyone, in justice in our dealings with others (including social justice for those who work for us) and in being polite and attentive with those whom we meet.
- b) Really being close to those who are most wounded and in need of support. Let us ask ourselves who the people are to whom we dedicate most of our time or with whom we prefer to be. Do I have friends among the little people, the poor, the suffering?
- c) Heartfelt respect among ourselves as religious. Are our religious communities oases of respect and friendship in the midst of a violent world?
- d) The practice of Eucharistic adoration, where we allow ourselves to be illumined by the healing love of God in the silence and we humbly invoke the balm of his mercy on our wounded world.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

House Work

July 7th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 40

Our fraternal life, which brings with it a sharing of all things in common, ought to be characterized by simplicity in relationships and in the resources at our disposal. We want a life that is simple, open, welcoming and self-sufficient in the area of housekeeping.

37th General Chapter
Our Vocation and Mission No. 24



Walterson and Luiz Antonio doing dishes
Vale do Paraopeba (Brazil)

In a paragraph on poverty (No. 24), the document *Our Vocation and Mission* from the General Chapter of 2006 subtly invites the brothers to take responsibility for the house work in our communities, to the extent that is possible. That would include things like cooking, cleaning, laundry etc.

It's sort of "revolutionary" as we can count on one hand the number of communities of our brothers that do not have outside help and where the brothers do all **the work around the house**. In the large majority of communities, we have hired employees, almost always women, who take care of us and make sure that the table is set at the right time and that the house is kept clean.

I remember in one community where I lived we had a very young woman who did the housework. She was married with two children. A brother, who figured that she must have got married when she was still almost a child, said to her that perhaps she lacked the maturity to take on the commitment of marriage.

“Maturity?” she answered respectfully but with a lot of self-confidence, “You’re speaking to me about maturity and you are so like children that I have to get your food and clean your house.” How’s that!

I’m also thinking of the observation of a Superior General in a recent meeting in which we were speaking of the consecrated life in Europe. “As religious” he said, “we are less but we have more people working for us.” Of course it’s not like that everywhere, but his comment is still a challenge.

We could argue that we need domestic help because our work does not leave us the time to take care of the house. However we have to admit that **the matter of gender** is involved here. In most of our cultures, domestic tasks are for women and it never occurs to men to question the status quo. And let’s admit it, we are also clerics. We just have to look at women’s religious communities, who are much more independent as regards cooking and housework and at the same time seriously dedicated to apostolic and professional work. We can think also of older religious women or our aged mothers or our grandmothers who continue cooking, cleaning and doing laundry as long as their strength allows. However many of us are a disaster when it comes to these kinds of things. And before going any further, I don’t have a clue what to do in the kitchen (however I can take care of myself if I have to clean my room, do the laundry or iron...).

Recently we were talking about these things in the Generalate. Jerzy (the weekend cook and responsible for so many other services in the community) is returning to Poland and the number in the community has increased at the same time. We spoke about the possibility of hiring another person to help with the cooking and housework. Finally we decided not increase the staff but to try do some services around the house ourselves, for example, house cleaning, gardening, preparing the meal when there is no cook, ironing etc.

In some canonical visits, the General Government has asked communities to review the number of outside personnel hired to work for the community (domestic or secretarial work) because it

seemed that there were too many and that it would be better to **live with fewer employees**. I know that some communities are reorganizing themselves in order to live more simply and austere.

When we really do need to hire people for domestic or administrative tasks because of the amount of work we have or especially for the care our older and sick brothers need, we have to be scrupulous about observing what is asked of us in Statute 92:

The criteria of justice, solidarity and charity... should be very clearly present when drawing up contracts with personnel... and in our compliance with legislation in the areas of labor law and social rights.

Relationships with those who work for us must be defined by **just contracts** in keeping with local laws. They must have adequate salaries and work conditions. A work relationship should not be based on an informal arrangement nor should it perpetuate irregular situations regulated more by “friendship” or the presumption of generosity on the part of our coworkers or to save money on taxes or similar things. That is unjust, illegal, lacking in respect for the individuals and their families and it becomes the source of future conflict.

If we really need people to serve us and care for us, then we have to make contracts that are legal, just and clear and we have to accept to be “bosses” with all the consequences that involves.

In any case, before hiring outside personnel to serve us, it is good to meditate on the perspective that the General Chapter text offers when it goes on to say, *“We prefer simplicity out of solidarity with the poor of the earth, also convinced that abundance and ease choke apostolic creativity, diminish generosity and isolate us from people, while modest resources stimulate that creativity, make us more available and create communion with the littlest ones. We would like to trust more in the transforming power of Gospel poverty that we profess than in the power of money.”*

I have no doubt that if we take care of our own houses, it will have positive effects on our brotherhood, our way of treating others and even our style of prayer. As someone said poetically, *while we're washing the dishes together, this will also be something of God.*

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Poverty

September 6th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 52



Statue of Saint Francis (detail)
Assisi (Italy)

Our fraternal life, which brings with it a sharing of all things in common, ought to be characterized by simplicity in relationships and in the resources at our disposal. (...)

We would like to trust more in the transforming power of Gospel poverty that we profess than in the power of money.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 24

The reflection in this INFO is occasioned by a request from some major superiors and some formators of the Congregation. They asked that I explain the practical consequences of our vow of poverty with regard to how a brother deals with material goods.

The commitment of the vows

I begin with a brief reflection on the vows in general. I speak of “the vows” in plural, to refer to chastity, poverty and obedience, even though the three form a unity, one “vow”, as our formula of profession says.

In each vow our life finds a profound inspiration. Each one also commits us to a specific way of living that inspiration.

- a) This deeper inspiration is related to faith. It has a theological character and is based in the consecration to the Sacred Hearts and our communion of love with the Lord. It is rooted

in the desire to live as Jesus and is oriented toward love and practical service of the Church and humanity.

- b) The specific way of living that inspiration sets limits to how we act and places us in a situation of dependence in relationship to our community, to which we bind our freedom and our destiny. This specific manner of living does not develop all the possibilities contained in the deeper inspiration (that would be to limit ourselves to a dismal kind of formalism). However it constitutes a structure of life, which allows us to grow in the living of the Gospel, a condition *sine qua non* to be able to call our life an SSCC religious life.

So, for example, the vow of **chastity** is meant to configure our way of loving to that of Jesus (profound inspiration), but it does it by our concrete commitment to “consecrated chastity in celibacy” (specific way), which means we renounce marriage and the possibility of sexual relations. Clearly it is not enough just to remain celibate. What is important is that from our celibacy we love more deeply and more effectively. However, even if we just observe chastity in celibacy, we are still religious.

The same happens with **obedience**. Its deeper inspiration is found in taking on the loving obedience of Jesus toward the Father. However, concretely we commit ourselves to accept an assignment that comes from a superior or the community (through chapters and elections). And so, if we say that we want to obey God but we do not accept to be sent by the superior or the community, something important is lacking.

The vocation to the consecrated life consists precisely in living meaningfully and joyfully this relationship between that deeper inspiration and the specific forms it takes in the religious life. When that connection is broken, everything becomes twisted and we have to ask ourselves if it would not be better to leave religious life and find another place for ourselves in the Church

The specific commitments of the vow of poverty

Now I am going to try to respond to the question of the superiors and formators concerning the vow of poverty. Without a doubt it is a somewhat controversial question, which is triggered by conflicts that often arise in communities: is it permissible or not for some brothers to use money outside the purview of the community or the superiors?

Articles 23, 24 and 25 of the Constitutions beautifully describe for us the deeper inspiration for our poverty: participating in the poverty of Jesus and the lowliness of Mary, loving the poor, living detached from the goods of this world, embracing the system of community of goods etc. Article 30 speaks of the values at stake in our life of poverty (frugality, solidarity, the discovery of real human dignity, denunciation of injustice etc.) These values are the consequences of the deeper inspiration of the vow, even though they can be lived in other states of life.

The concrete way in which we live our poverty as religious is described in article 26, which follows:

By our vow of poverty we commit ourselves:

- 1. not to dispose of or use material goods, both patrimonial and communitarian, without the authorization of the legitimate superiors who preside over the religious community, in accordance with the universal and proper law;*
- 2. to place in common all that we earn or receive by whatever title except that of a family inheritance;*
- 3. consequently, all that we receive through our own work or because of the Institute, we acquire for the Institute; this is also true for whatever we might receive as a pension, subsidy or insurance..*

These commitments are clear and define what differentiates the religious life from other lifestyles. What is proper to us as religious is placing everything in common. Everything that I receive (salary, donations, gifts, compensation from insurance, lottery winnings, stipends for services...everything) belongs to the community, the

Congregation. It's not that I have my money and from it I make a contribution to the community fund. It's not that. Everything that I have and receive is the community's and I cannot dispose of anything autonomously. Also, everything that is the community's is mine and I have to take care of it but I cannot claim anything for my exclusive use.

This places me in a position of dependence on the community. All the money I use I have to ask from the community and later I make an account of how I used it. The best way to realize this dependence is through a community budget, which is developed and evaluated regularly in community as Statute 5.1 asks. Superiors, local and provincial, have the last word in financial decisions (as indicated in Statute 6 referring to budgets and balance sheets) and must be informed (through the treasurers) of all the material goods that the brothers and communities receive and how they use them.

This communal character of goods also arises when there is a question of opening a bank account. As Statute 4 says, an account can only be opened with the consent of the major superior and at least one other authorized religious must have the power to do any kind of transactions related to the account.

There is one exception as regards placing in our goods common: family inheritance. If I receive something by inheritance, I can retain ownership. I can also maintain ownership of something I possessed before I made profession. However I do not have the right to the use or usufruct of those goods. I can only designate who will administer them, as is indicated in article 27 of the Constitutions. Where those goods go after my death has to be stated in my will, which we are all supposed to have. However while I am a religious, those goods in no way affect my manner of living, which is subject to the religious discipline of the community.

And so there are no "rich" brothers (with more resources, with friends who give them gifts, with the ability to buy what they want or even, in their own name, to be generous with those in need) and "poor" brothers (who only have what the community gives

them). No, we are all “poor brothers”, equal one to the other. If it were not so, we would kill the brotherhood.

In closing, I recommend a meditative reading of Statute 5, where we find orientations for living our poverty. Let me emphasize three points, which I consider of special interest for us today:

- A simple and sober life-style (since, in general, we live at a rather comfortable level.)
- The common law of work, by which we normally acquire the means to support ourselves and to share.
- Contact with those in need and our commitment to them (to get closer to a poor life style in solidarity with the poor that article 31 of our Constitutions speaks of.)

The attraction of religious poverty

This is our way of living poverty according to the Constitutions that we have professed. As you can understand, I am very aware of the great disparities there are in the Congregation with respect to religious poverty lived in communion of goods. Many jealously defend their right to have their money and to manage their possessions autonomously. Some consider financial dependence on the community a lack of maturity. Still others reject the idea of living poorly, considering it an embarrassment and a step backward.

However, the religious life is not only discourse about values, but a way of life in community with concrete demands which give it a specific meaning in the Church. If we blur those signs of identity, it does not make much sense to continue together. The more we weaken the specific basic commitments of the vows, the more the apostolic vitality of our religious life is weakened.

Detachment from goods and voluntary dependence on the community form part of the attraction of religious life from its origins. It is a very “countercultural” feature, which prompts spontaneous rejection everywhere. It is quite odd that someone voluntarily renounce having possessions and a comfortable life.

But it is precisely the surprise it causes that is an excellent way of witnessing to Jesus, poor, free and happy.

Poverty is learned. It is part of the spiritual journey of each person. Whether we come from families that are rich or poor, when we enter religious life we all need to learn to live with a heart that is free and detached.

The renunciation characteristic of living the vows give religious a special freedom to live the Gospel and serve those most abandoned. It is good that we humbly look at this anew and commit ourselves more deeply to this common path so clearly described in our Constitutions.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Communion of Goods

December 10th, 2007

Extracts from INFO SSSC Brothers, No. 10

Precisely for this reason, the “family spirit” that characterizes our fraternity must surpass the limits of our local community, extend to the whole Congregation and witness to God’s desire to see his children reconciled. We can be foreigners and different but we are not strangers. We can not plan, organize or live without others (“others” includes all the brothers and communities of the Congregation). There is no part of the life of the body –of which we are all a part– that does not affect me.

This fraternity, which desires to be interdependent, involves the renunciation, by each brother and by local and provincial communities, of our power to autonomously manage our goods and of our monopoly over the decisions that affect us...

For our mission, it is essential that we journey together, encouraging one another to live the faith, looking after one another, and serving as people called by the Lord. This requires a mutual confidence that is based in confidence in the One who calls us.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission No. 7,18,37



Damien Formation House
Bandung (Indonesia)

Dear Brothers,

The communion of goods is one of the distinctive signs of our religious life and an essential element of our vow of poverty. Sharing everything we have lets us breathe the fresh air of the first Christian communities, nourishes freedom of heart, creates joy and fraternity and offers a humble but striking message to humanity too often caught up in the anxiety for security and money.

This past month, the General Government has been working hard to implement some decisions of the last [37th] General Chapter relative to the communion of goods at the level of the whole Congregation. After studying budgets and requests for assistance and consulting the Major Superiors, the General Government has established the amounts of the contributions for 2008: an ordinary contribution (which in keeping with the General Chapter will cover the expenses of the Generalate, the structural deficit of the African province and assistance for Initial Formation) and an extraordinary contribution (based on Statute 96.2 and intended to cover work to be done on the Generalate).

(...)

The best thing about this common effort is that it helps us experience being one family throughout the world united spiritually and practically. It is also a call to fidelity and to truth in sharing. If at times we do not really place everything in common or state openly what we actually have, we must be aware that we are placing a burden on others that in justice we should be bearing ourselves. And so I congratulate the communities that already have a high level of transparency and healthy austerity and I encourage those that need to improve in that area to move forward with confidence. Everyone can count on the help of the General Government and the General Treasurer.

May the Lord give us the intelligence we need to manage our resources well and the simplicity to use them generously and in a spirit of poverty.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Where Does Our Money Come From?

January 12th, 2009

Extracts from INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 22

The mission of the Congregation leads us to share the life of the poor and to take up their cause, knowing that solidarity with them can bring us face to face with a world marked by injustice.

Placing our confidence in the paternal providence of God, and being careful not to allow ourselves to be seduced by riches and the power that comes with them, we wish to live detached from the goods of this world.

Following the example of Jesus and the ideal of the first Christians, we share all things in common.

(...) Our life of poverty... denounces the idolatry of profit and of consumerism as well as its devastating effects on rich and poor alike. It points out the values of the Kingdom, indicating the way to liberation and to human fulfillment.

Constitutions 25 and 30.3



Edouard Brion ssc in a demonstration against bombs made from depleted uranium, in front of the Belgian Ministry of Exterior Matters (Brussels) November 25th, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I believe that we can be happy with the growing financial interdependence in the Congregation. The awareness is growing that all our possessions belong to the Institute and not just to individuals or communities. Also increasing is the interest and the willingness with which the contributions are made.

There is a growing awareness that we are one body and that our goods are *at the service of communion, mission, justice and solidarity*. (Const. 142)

In analyzing the finances of the Congregation, it would be good to ask ourselves, where does this money that we share come from? What are the sources of the capital we use for our living expenses and for helping one another? A part of the money comes from our work: pay for services, salaries in remunerated work, pensions of those who have worked all their lives...Another part comes from donations. Another comes from rent or sale of our properties. Finally, an important part comes from the income produced by capital that is invested in various forms. I would like to pause a moment on this last sources of income, that I will refer to as *"speculative capital."*

Speculative capital is not *"productive capital"* (meant to produce goods and riches). Nor is it *"financial capital"* (used to distribute, sell or buy what is produced). On the contrary, *speculative capital* is money dedicated to speculation. In other words it is used for taking advantage of the rise and fall in value of traded goods with the purpose of obtaining a profit. The profits are based on types of interest and rates of exchange. They say that the financial crisis in which the world is immersed right now is due to the collapse of many of the products of such speculative capital. Financial markets have frozen an enormous amount of money in fictitious products, that have no relationship to the actual economy (i.e., with money that produces work and commerce), with the sole objective of inflating interest rates and fueling the world's major capital markets. The greed of those who have the most has provoked this economic catastrophe. What happens then? *Productive* and *financial capital* feel the effects of the crisis in *speculative capital* and jobs disappear and the suffering and deprivation of those who are not rich increase.

I say this so that we are aware that an important part of the Congregation's money comes from investments in such *speculative capital*. We must not deceive ourselves. We need those investments, mainly for two reasons. The first is that we want to serve the very poor. For that reason we do not seek good

salaries for our work and many times we give ourselves to works which are not well paid. The second reason is that we are not a little family but a large institution, with our expenses (initial formation, apostolic works, care for our elderly, international structures etc.) that exceed our capacity to generate income. However, the model of reference for our finances must not be the security that comes from having large quantities of capital invested in financial products (which would be the model of the rich of this world). The spirituality of our finances must help us maintain and strengthen **the relationship between money and work**. The money that we use merits our respect and our care because, among other things, it comes from our daily work (salaries, services, things we produce etc) or from the work done in the past by our elder brothers (pensions) or from the work of those who help us (donations, subsidies etc.)

To live from the fruit of our work: that is what we want for ourselves and for all of humanity. That dynamic brings us closer to our brothers, the workers and the poor, who usually do not have a mass of capital as back-up. The close relationship between sustenance and work is what confers dignity both on one's work and the money it generates. On the contrary, the dissociation between work and money triggers all kinds of injustices.

"The one who does not work should not eat", says Saint Paul; or as Saint Benedict says in his Rule (the inspiration for our rule) "for then they are truly monastics (in our case: religious) when they live by the labor of their hands as did our Fathers and the Apostles." (Rule 48, 8)

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Service of Authority and Obedience

June 13th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 16

Our life is not based solely on how we want to live. There is always a call from outside ourselves that takes the focus off ourselves and surprises us; a call from an “Other” who will bind us and perhaps take us to places that we would prefer not to go (Jn. 21:18) We do not pretend to build up ourselves, no matter how lofty might be our motivations, rather we must let ourselves be led, or to put it in our religious language, we must give ourselves to obedience.

A particular way that we open ourselves in obedient to that “Other” is related to the service of authority that can, if circumstances call for it, help us to go beyond ourselves, reawaken our most essential vow and even take us somewhere we would not want to go.

37th General Chapter(2006),
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 40 & 42



Washing of the feet
Sieger Köder

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As usual, at the end of May the Superiors General of Religious Institutes in Rome had their biannual assembly. The Holy See took that occasion to present the new document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) on the service of authority and obedience. It is entitled *Faciem Tuam, Domine, requiram* (I seek your face, Lord, Psalm 26:8)

The document, which I invite you to read, reiterates that both obedience and authority are always founded on the Lord Jesus,

obedient servant, beloved Son of the Father. The three sections of the document try to show how the vow of obedience helps us to live our consecration, build fraternal communities and carry out our mission.

The document understands the religious community as a communion of consecrated persons who make profession to seek and do the will of God together, persons who have different roles but one objective and one passion. This search for God's will is done together with the brothers and it is precisely this that makes us one family in Christ. Those who at one period of their life are "superiors" must know that their authority is meant to be at the service of this search so that it can be carried out in sincerity and truth. For that reason, authority must always remind the brothers of the *raison d'être* of the consecrated life and that there is nothing more important, beautiful or true than to dedicate one's life to the Lord and his littlest children.

This obedience can only be appreciated if one sees oneself as "son" and finds joy in that. It is part of the logic of love, of intimacy with God, of belonging to him who in the end makes us free, even though His will may finally be something dramatically different than ours. To seek God's will means seeking a will that is friendly, benevolent. It is a *via amoris*, a way of love that opens us to listening and being a disciple.

Obedience builds up fraternal life in community, overcoming individualism and our tendency to divide and separate. Fraternal life is a constitutive (not optional) element of our religious life and an eloquent sign of the humanizing effects of the presence of God's reign. The apostolic fruitfulness of our life depends on the quality of our fraternal life, called to be a witness that it is possible to live together and love one another even being very different. This is what we want to offer the world as a message of reconciliation and reparation.

In the dialogue with the other Superiors General, besides encouraging one another to exercise our ministry in the spirit of what I have just shared with you, we also discussed our difficulties in this area. Allow me to mention three.

One is the difficulty of achieving the interior attitudes required for authentic “discernment” of the will of God (inner freedom, indifference regarding personal interests, getting beyond psychological and affective blocks that I might experience with those with whom I have conflicts, sincerity of heart, the firm intention to always maintain unity etc.) If this is difficult to achieve in a single individual, in myself, how much more difficult in a whole community! Some would say that “community discernment” properly speaking is almost impossible. The most that we can achieve is a “spiritual dialogue” about practical decisions.

Another difficulty is the small value that brothers sometimes give to the inevitable “human mediations” in making decisions. These mediations would be the Constitutions, the decisions of Chapters and the “last word” that a superior (a provincial or a general) has when it is impossible to reach a consensus of all. The high value we place on our autonomy as an individual or a group can at times create a certain allergy with regard to these forms of mediation. We see them as external, not really contributing anything and even alienating. However in organizing the religious life that we have professed these mediations are certainly human but they also have authority. They are imperfect but they can also create bonds. They are infinitely inferior to what they always refer back to, the will of God, but at the same time they are necessary. In spite of how difficult and demanding this can be, authority has the pastoral obligation to guide and to decide in order to support communion and mission and to avoid a community finding itself in an endless state of discernment without ever coming to a decision.

The third difficulty, finally, is the dispersion that results when brothers look for their own commitments without being sent by their superiors. Communion is thus ruptured and the sense of the Congregation being a “body” in mission is lost. In reality, when we lose a sense of obedience and of receiving a mission, the common mission becomes incomprehensible and everything is reduced to the self and one's personal choices. Mission is not a “profession” or “job” for an individual's self-realization, something one does on one's own and according to one's own lights. The

mission entrusted to the Congregation requires a profound personal conversion that transforms us into members of a body to which we give the gift of our apostolic energy.

Certainly you are all aware of these difficulties that I have mentioned, whether because of the tensions that we experience in community or because of the inner struggle we experience because we hear within our heart the call to let our life be configured by the community in which we have made profession. We must not be afraid because things are that way. The Lord knows our weaknesses and our struggles and he is with us. Those tensions and that struggle are an occasion of grace, for the wound opened in us by the vow of obedience can draw us close to the cross that Christ came to in his desire to “*be baptized*” and to “*set the world on fire*” (Lk. 12:49-50) thus becoming a mysterious source of peace, freedom and joy.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

On Elections in the Congregation

April 6th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 25

Jesus' attitudes, choices and works led him to mortal conflict which culminated in the cross. Because of that, we are children of the cross (BP) and, in all humility and strength, we aspire to be where our Lord is. (Jn. 12:26)

The contemplation of the humanity of Christ, of the body of the crucified, of his pierced heart, is our spirituality's point of departure.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 8



Crucifix mutilated by the Communards during their sack of Picpus in 1871. After that it was used at Picpus for the adoration of the cross on Good Friday.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to speak to you about something that has been a concern of the General Government for some time and a topic we have been discussing during our meetings these last few weeks.

The Easter season is a time when in many parts of the Congregation there are Provincial Chapters. Almost always chapters include the election of Superiors and Councillors. Accompanying the various Chapter processes led us in our recent meetings to reflect several times on **the availability of brothers to accept election to positions of authority.**

In INFO 20 (November 2008) we spoke of how *in many places there is the custom of brothers withdrawing their names from the list after nominations without really serious reasons. They thus deprive the community of being able to call them to something and they distort a process of discernment and obedience.* We would like to look at that now in more detail.

The service of authority is a constitutive element of the Congregation (Chapter V of the Constitutions). Our life and mission require that there are brothers who accept and exercise this ministry. When we become part of the Congregation, we commit ourselves to take an active part in the Congregation's life with its many aspects. Over the course of our life we can be called to participate in various ways in different common responsibilities in the apostolate as well as in services within the community.

Elections are first of all a means of communal discernment. In the community we do not "campaign for election," no one promotes either himself or someone else as a candidate; no one aspires to "power." When we vote for a brother, we do it seeking the best for the community, electing the person we consider the most capable of encouraging the community in fidelity to its spirit and mission at a given moment.

Elections are also an eminent way of exercising religious obedience. The candidate does not decide autonomously about his life but rather he abandons himself to the will of the brothers, recognizing in the election a call from God to serve in a new way and, almost always, in a way that is demanding and may even take us away from much that is familiar and comfortable.

If my name appears on the list of candidates, I may be overcome by fear and all kinds of reasons why not to be elected come to mind: I would have to leave my present commitments, give up direct pastoral ministry, distance myself from the things and people that keep me going, spend time confronting brothers about personal issues (Who likes to do that?) etc. Or it could just be that I have no desire to shut myself up in a provincialate (or generalate) and give years and years of my life to meetings. But if

I withdraw my name from the list of candidates, I deny the brothers the freedom to discern about me and I close myself to the possible call of the Spirit that comes through the community, acting as if I were the only one with the right to say anything about my future.

Availability to accept positions by election is part of our vow of obedience. An election is an obedience (an assignment) given by a Chapter, which is the supreme authority in the Province (Provincial Chapter) and in the Congregation (General Chapter).

Some will ask: and so one cannot refuse an election or withdraw as a possible candidate? Certainly it's possible. The brother who decides to withdraw, having considered in conscience his reasons for doing so, merits the respect of all. What we cannot forget is the need to discern in conscience the grave reasons that would lead me to withdraw or not accept. It is not just a question of personal desire. In every case, I have to weigh the extent of my generosity and the possible consequences of my decision. Among other things, I have to remember that the burden that I do not accept will necessarily fall on someone else and it could be that the responsibility goes to someone who is not suitable, with the suffering for himself and for the community that entails.

The law allows us to refuse an election once it has been completed. That is wise. For only at the end of the electoral process can I have all the necessary elements for discernment. It might be that it is easier to withdraw my name when I am still a candidate, thus avoiding knowing what the brothers would decide concerning me. However, it would be more authentic – and more demanding- to listen to what God is saying to me through the community right to the end of the process and then to decide in conscience if I can accept or not accept what is being asked of me.

It is a sad thing to see a community in which a large part of the candidates withdraw their names without dialogue or common discernment. Sometimes in the end there are only one or two or three brothers on the list, reducing to mere formality the whole electoral process and not leaving the community the option to

decide freely. It would seem that such a group has lost much of its vitality and the freshness of its vocation.

I understand how much it takes to accept the ministry of authority. I myself have experienced the aridity and pain that comes with authority as well as the sacrifice that it entails. I also can understand that some may have a negative image of religious authority and look suspiciously at those who are asked to exercise it. It is not easy trying to be a good and faithful servant with wisdom and an evangelical spirit. But don't we need this ministry so that the Congregation can live? Aren't we called to trust more in God and in the brothers when it comes to being open to a possible election? Where is my generous willingness to serve the brothers when they ask that of me?

Allow me to end with a practical recommendation. Let's not have elections that are just formal and mechanical. Let us take sufficient time to dialogue and reflect together. Let us not withdraw our names from the list of candidates (unless there is a grave reason of the interior forum) without giving the brothers the opportunity to listen to us and to speak to us. May those who are reticent to be elected open themselves to the community and listen to the opinions of others. Let us engage ourselves in this delicate but stimulating aspect of life in community. It might be that in the word of our brothers we discover a call from God to be more generous than we think ourselves capable.

And above all, let us ask the Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of wisdom, freedom and sacrifice, to enlighten the minds of those who vote and those who are voted for.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

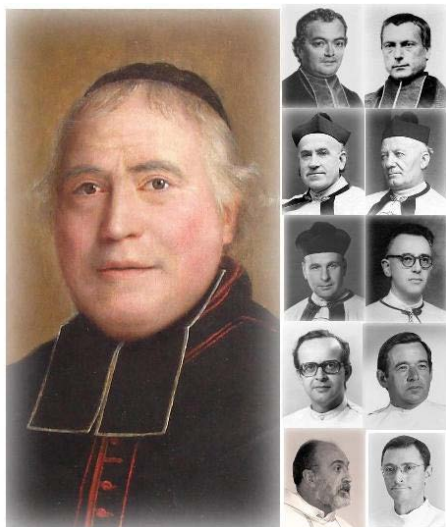
Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Superior General

March 2nd, 2012

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 58

March 27th, 2012 – 175th anniversary of the death of the Good Father



*Adieu cher bon Prieur,
il est brisé, la plume sur
l'autre de main, je m'écroule
Affection
f. m. j. Coudrin, S.g.*

*Farewell, my dear friend.
It's midnight.
The pen is falling out of my hand.
I'm falling asleep on my feet.
Your very loving uncle,
f.m.j. Coudrin, S.g.*

Letter of the Good Father to his niece
Madame Glossinde Coudrin,
October 20th, 1836

At the top of this issue of INFO you see the image of the Good Father and the ten brothers who have succeeded him as Superior General. To the right is the conclusion of a letter of the Good Father, written five months before his death. The handwriting is shaky. We can see that he is tired. In the signature there is something often found in his correspondence, he puts “f” before his name and the letters “S.g.” after. The “f” is for “brother” (*frère* in French) and “S.g.” for “Superior General”.

In this letter I would like to speak about the figure of the Superior General in the Congregation, presenting different aspects of this responsibility to which some brothers are called to be of service

to our religious family. I will take the Constitutions as my main guide. The relevant articles (only the number) are cited in parenthesis.

The Superior General: An Essential Element

The Congregation has a Superior General (SG). The Superior General is a constitutive or essential element of the Congregation's existence. The SG represents the whole Congregation to authorities and organisms of the Church and society (137.5), giving the Congregation visibility as a "body."

The major superiors have their own authority in their respective area. However they exercise it under the authority of the SG (101), who has authority over all the provinces, houses and members of the institute (Canon 622 CIC).

The SG has the last word in the structural organization of the Congregation. He is the one who decides the erection, modification or suppression of provinces (102) and vice-provinces (115.2). He gives authorization for the erection of a region (120). The SG erects novitiates throughout the Congregation (77). And oddly enough, it is he who suppresses a house (100,2), as closing a presence affects the whole of the Congregation and not just the province in which the house is located. The provinces also require the consent of the General Government to expand their geographic area (63).

We can say, then, that the SG is a necessary part of the essential organization of the Congregation. However this function as organizationally "essential" as it may be is not merely bureaucratic, but is closely tied to the "symbolic function" which I will speak of below.

The Superior General: Symbolic Function

We can understand the word “symbolic” from its Greek root, as a “unifying connection”, something that unites different aspects allowing them all to be seen as complementary parts of a whole.

First, the SG is a link creating communion with the whole Congregation from its historical and charismatic beginnings. The SG is the successor of the Good Father. He is not his successor as founder, a role that is unrepeatable, but as the “father” of this family called together by consecration to God’s love manifested in Jesus and Mary. The SG keeps alive communion with all the brothers who have gone before us in this special way of Gospel discipleship and he occupies, as a brother among brothers, the place Good Father had in the family.

He is also a bond of communion among all the brothers who form the Congregation today. The figure of the SG helps achieve the always difficult balance between the local and the global in our international community. We are called to very intense and specific commitment in the places where we find ourselves. Division in provinces, vice-provinces and regions respond to that dynamic. However we live that commitment as members of a brotherhood that extends beyond the boundaries of province and country, because it is nourished by the same experience of the Spirit that is able to be incarnated in very diverse cultures (60). The SG is a sign of the universal communion that exists among us in the midst of our great diversity. By actively exercising his role, the SG helps the Congregation to be one charismatic, fraternal and apostolic “body.”

This bond of comunión is especially evident in religious profession. Article 80 says that *“Profession of temporary and perpetual vows is made into the hands of the Superior General, or, in his name, into the hands of the proper Provincial Superior or his delegate.”* Here the primary reference is the SG (others act *in his name*). We can see more clearly how in making profession I become part of a community that is much wider than my province and I enter into communion with all the brothers, living

and dead, and with them I become responsible for the gift that God gives to the world and the Church through the Congregation.

As was the custom of my predecessor, I usually send a congratulatory letter to all those making profession, whether first profession or perpetual profession. In the case of perpetual profession, which involves a deeper incorporation in the community, we could strengthen this symbolic dimension of communion with the whole Congregation. I would suggest that those who are accepted for perpetual profession by their provincials write a letter to the SG concerning their upcoming profession and telling something of their lives as SSCC religious. It would put them in contact with the general level of the Congregation and would give the SG the opportunity to answer each brother in a more personal way. What would you think of that?

The SG also has a symbolic role as bond of communion with the SSCC sisters. Today, this is a shared role. With the Constitutions approved in 1990, the SG of the brothers is no longer SG "of the whole Congregation." The responsibility for guaranteeing the unity of the two branches, as final instance, is confided jointly to the General Governments of the brothers and sisters (8).

The Superior General: Function of Governance

The constitutive and symbolic functions of the SG are the foundation for his responsibility for governance. He carries out this function of governance in communion with his council, who with him make up the General Government, which exercises ordinary authority in the Congregation (133).

The SG has a personal responsibility to see that the General Government, which he leads, exercises its mission in communion and in a spirit of coresponsibility (137.1). The whole General Government is called to exercise its authority in a spirit of service, respect, listening and communal discernment, which the Constitutions ask of all authority in the Congregation (90-95).

The General Government animates and challenges the Congregation to be faithful to its mission, implements the Constitutions and Chapter decisions and develops communion among all. To that end, the General Government carries out visits, organizes general services and stimulates and coordinates initiatives in formation and apostolate (136).

The Congregation is organized in provinces (89), formed of local communities that have a common plan of apostolic religious life (101). For that reason, respecting sound autonomy and the necessary subsidiarity, most government decisions are made at the provincial level. However, that should not lead us to think that the scope of the SG and his council's government is limited to activities at the general level that have no impact on the internal life of the provinces. The General Government animates and challenges the Congregation at all its levels and, on occasion, it has to make decisions affecting the concrete life of the brothers.

For example, the visits of the SG and general councilors (136.4) are a privileged occasion for personal dialogue with each brother, for evaluation of the life of the community and for offering it orientations. It is also the competence of the SG to confirm the election of major superiors (111.2) and to approve decisions of the provincial chapters (109), sometimes modifying them. In financial matters, it is the role of the SG to make certain decisions about contributions -according to the system established by the general chapters- and he has the faculty to transfer, for a just cause, goods from one community to another (Statute 97).

The SG is the SG of each and every brother. Any brother can contact him, either as an instance of appeal (137.3) or just to speak about what he wants. On his part, the SG can call any brother to a service that he considers useful for the Congregation (137.2) and he has the freedom to speak with any member of the institute when he deems it necessary. Personal dialogue with the brothers is certainly one of the deepest and most moving aspects of the service of the SG. It allows him to get to know the reality of the Congregation in a very particular way, both its great beauty and its tragedy.

The SG has a final and personal responsibility in the process of leaving the Congregation and the imposition of certain disciplinary measures. With the consent of his council he can dispense from temporary vows and send other cases of dispensation to the Holy See. Acting collegially with his council, he can issue a decree of expulsion. He has the obligation to ask and even require that provincials do what is needed to canonically clarify irregular situations of brothers.

In virtue of these aspects of his governing function, we can say that the SG is “at home” anywhere in the Congregation and that his decisions, when they respect what is said in our Constitutions, should never be seen as interference. On the contrary, the Congregation has the right to expect that the SG do what he is supposed to do.

Election of the Superior General

In seven months we will be having the Thirty-eighth General Chapter. One of the functions of the General Chapter is the election of the SG (128.8). Until 1958 the office of SG was for life. At that chapter it was changed to a term of six years, renewable once. Since then, the four subsequent SGs, who were elected for a six year term, were reelected in the following chapter and so served for twelve years. However the reelection of the SG is in no way an obligation nor need it become a custom. We have to take into account that nowadays, with the ease of travel and means of communication, six years is really enough to know the Congregation and carry out a complete program of government. Nowadays time is more intense.

The General Chapter will have to give sufficient time to the discernment required in any election, without being carried away by the inertia of the usual.

As you know, I believe that we all have to be ready to accept the assignment that our brothers give us in an election, even though it is not what we may personally desire. However that does not mean that before the election we will not dialogue as brothers

and freely express our doubts and fears. May the Lord enlighten us and helps us decide what is right.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Local Superior

March 8th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 36

Juridically constituted communities are formed by a minimum of three religious, one of whom is the local superior.

Constitutions, No. 98.2



Meeting of the local superiors (Sisters & Brothers)
El Escorial (Spain)
February 14th, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The last [37th] General Chapter reminded us that the local community is the principal agent of our formation and mission. Those who have already had a canonical visit of the General Government know that we continually emphasize this point. Local community life is an essential aspect of the “beauty” of our religious life. However, we have to recognize that in many parts of the Congregation local communities lack real vitality or simply do not exist.

The Constitutions tell us that a local community consists of at least three brothers, one of whom is the local superior. In this letter I would like to reflect a bit on this odd figure: the local superior.

(A short while ago, a journal of the religious life, "Testimonio", asked me to write an article on the animation of the local community. In this letter I want to offer some extracts from that article, which appeared in number 234 of the review.)

The same thing happens to the local superior that happens to the local community: often it's not clear what it really is. And sometimes there is not even a brother formally designated as such. We can't be surprised then that major superiors become a sort of traveling local superior for everyone. He's something like a fireman that has to put out fires when they start to burn or like a gardener who has to visit each house regularly to water, weed and touch up the garden that is community life. The local superior seems to be the "missing link" in the chain of animation and governance.

Some would say that the local superior has vanished, swept away perhaps by the winds of democracy, equality, human respect, allergy toward paternalism, fear of confronting others or the inner awareness of our unworthiness and littleness (Who am I to tell others what they should do? Etc.) No one wants to be "superior" to anyone. The very word produces an allergic reaction.

However, the core of religious life, what gives it real visibility and consistency from day to day, is not so much the brothers considered as individuals (as valuable as their ministry may be) but brotherhood lived in a local community. To exist a local community needs some basic structure, in which the "superior" is a key player. What can we say to encourage local superiors to come out and reclaim their ministry?

It seems to me that the root of the ministry of the superior is found in two decisions of the heart that are intimately related to what we call "vocation," namely:

- a) Our desire that the community remain alive and aware in a religious sense and
- b) Our appreciation for the brothers: an appreciation which means loving them, being interested in their lives, wanting the best for them and taking their vocation seriously.

These draw nourishment from a faith conviction: we are not together for any old reason or because we have chosen one another out of friendship or affinity, but because the Lord has called us together and is counting on our community to collaborate in his work in the world.

From this conviction flows an inner freedom that allows us to overcome the fear and human respect that block relationships and prevent us from speaking with clarity and charity. We need *clarity* to overcome the taboos that are often part of common life, to avoid the babblabla of ideology and to recognize humbly what is going on in our lives. We need charity in order to always seek the best for the brothers, to communicate without wounding one another and to keep violence and conflict in check.

Besides pointing out some basic attitudes, how can we help someone to exercise his ministry as a local superior? What does a superior have to do in the concrete? Following is a list that, among other things, indicates what any religious sufficiently motivated in his vocation can do in order to serve his community as a local superior (I offer them in the form of personal advice to someone who is a superior):

- 1) *Call your brothers together for community meetings and for communal prayer. Make sure that there is a regular schedule for both. Remind them of the schedule, prepare the agenda for the meetings, and emphasize the importance of everyone's participation. There will always be reasons to cancel meetings and to arrive late for prayer. In any group inertia leads to dispersion. You have to doggedly remind them and call them together. Without community meetings and community prayer, the community dies.*
- 2) *Make a plan of life and keep going back to it. Make a simple community plan, that emphasizes the things that need emphasis and that includes specific actions that all commit themselves to. Every once in a while the whole community should evaluate the plan.*
- 3) *Review the community finances together. Each month or at least each quarter, look over together the community*

finances, including personal income and expenses. Ask simple questions: how are we doing? do we need to adjust our budget? are we poor? Without real communion of goods, a large part of what we say about our religious life becomes just fireworks.

- 4) Don't be afraid to make decisions if necessary. When you have to decide something, decide. Leaving things open without ever making a decision undermines the common life and often results in injustice toward the brothers or toward the people we serve. If the matter allows for a decision together by consensus, great. If not, it is up to you to decide. I'm sorry but you can't make everybody happy all the time.*
- 5) Take an interest in what is happening in the broader community (province, congregation). Attend to the information coming from the Congregation, put it out in the community, speak about it, answer questionnaires that are sent, etc.*
- 6) Be attentive to your brothers. It's enough to show interest, to ask how life is going from time to time or to stop and talk at length if it seems helpful. Take an interest in the brothers' families, their health and their work. If you detect some serious personal problem, don't hesitate to speak with the provincial.*
- 7) Pray! Offer the Lord the responsibility that has been entrusted to you. In the final analysis, the community is His. The brothers are His most precious possession and He is asking you to care for them. Give him thanks for such great and unmerited trust.*

Take heart, it is not really difficult. And may you have the good fortune of not having to deal with brothers who are too complicated. At least you can try not to be so.

I am convinced that with these simple suggestions, a local superior can do a great work and make the local community a place that the brothers will find pleasant to come home to. A home that is more human, more religious and more fraternal.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Process of Separation from the Congregation

February 12th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 23

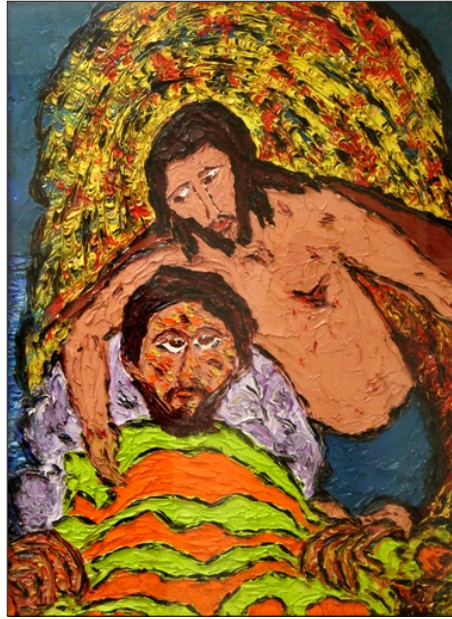
Our religious profession produces singular effects.

It consecrates us to God through the ministry of the Church. Rooted in our baptismal consecration, our public vows involve a total donation of our entire being.

It assigns us a place in the visible body of the Church along with other religious.

It incorporates us juridically in the Congregation with the rights and duties defined by the Law, creating bonds of solidarity among us and making us members of one and the same family.

Constitutions No.12



Jesus and Damien
Antoine Knibiehly ssc
Generalate (Rome)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to speak with you about a topic that perhaps might seem shocking or inappropriate. It is something always present in the life of the Congregation and occupies a significant part of the work of the General Government. What's more it is the subject of a whole chapter of the Constitutions (Chapter VII), even if a short one. I am referring to the different ways of leaving the Congregation.

As you can see from the statistics published in the last issue of INFO [No. 22], twenty-six brothers left the Congregation last year.

Leaving during temporary vows (A time of discernment before making a definitive commitment) is certainly not the same as leaving after final vows or ordination. In this letter I am going to speak of the brothers who leave after making perpetual profession. In our meetings this month the General Government has treated the cases of nine brothers in final vows, most ordained, who are in the process of leaving. And there are others to come.

As the Constitutions say, "*Juridical separation from the Congregation is a process that always requires a climate of respect for persons. This presupposes dialogue in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment*" (Const. 148). Leaving the Congregation almost always involves a break with something that has been important. It is an experience of sadness and grief. It's something that we would rather avoid but when the case arises, it must be dealt with well for the good of all.

We all come to profession and ordination with the firm desire to persevere in this life with God's help. That involves the never ending work of ongoing formation. "*When we enter the Congregation we commit ourselves to begin a life-long process of formation, growth and renewal*" (Const. 66). God's people have the right to expect that we live what we have publicly professed. However the Church, for "grave" reasons, admits the possibility of someone requesting an "indult", in other words, permission to be freed from the promises made. It is not a "right," as if continuing or not continuing depended solely on my free choice. The Church speaks rather of a "favor" requested in humility, confiding in the mercy of God and the mercy of the Church. I exercised my free choice when I requested profession or ordination. The bonds I take on are not only subjective ones, but involve others beyond me: the Congregation, the Church, God himself. Our freedom grows within the commitment we have made. To put aside that commitment is a favor we can request and that can be granted but it is not something we can demand.

The discernment of the "grave" reasons that can lead to someone leaving is a delicate process that requires time, help, fraternal dialogue, love, sincerity and prayer. We can and we must help

one another, opening our heart when we need help and gently and openly allowing our brothers to share their difficulties with us. For some, asking to leave involves courage and honesty that demands much of them. When they undertake the process in good conscience as best they can, they deserve respect and support.

Certainly there are conflicts and personal crises that can be overcome without leaving religious life. We all experience falling in love, emotional pain, loss of meaning, inner turmoil, the darkness of faith, fears, burn-out, frustration, anxiety, physical illness etc. At such times our religious commitment can be shaken. However we can get through such difficulties without necessarily leaving. We can even come out of such experiences with renewed hope, thanks to the mercy of God and the help of the brothers. It requires patience and trusting prayer. However it can also happen that problems of that kind become “grave” reasons that lead someone to request an indult to leave.

There are situations where a brother has made a mistake, has committed errors or has clearly been unfaithful to his commitment. We can and we must get beyond those, when the wound the brother has caused can be justly repaired and there is an authentic desire to once again take up the vocation. At such times the joy of forgiveness and the light of reconciliation should shine among us. We are not a community of “the righteous” but of forgiven sinners, always sinners, always forgiven. (Rule of Life)

However at other times objective situations are created that make it obligatory to leave the Congregation. This is true especially where there are other people involved who might be victims of our conduct. I think, for example, of brothers who have fathered a child. In such a case, there prevails the right of the child to know his father and count on his help, as well as the right of the mother to be helped by the father of her child. The brother must leave the Congregation in order to have the necessary freedom to face up to his responsibility.

There can also be cases of brothers whose vocation has died within or who have become settled in a style of life completely

foreign to religious life, who should leave the Congregation but cannot bring themselves to do so, thereby causing greater damage both to themselves and to others. In such cases, leaving the Congregation can be an experience of liberation and peace rather than “condemnation or punishment.”

The Constitutions say: *“The different forms of separation from the Congregation – exlaustration, change of Institute, and dispensation from temporary or perpetual vows, dismissal – are governed by the norms of the universal law* (Const. 149). Canon law offers different processes for different cases. They are not too complicated but they require the attention of the Major Superior and the collaboration of the brother involved (writing letters, reports, responding to questionnaires). We could be tempted to think that it is all just the paper work of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy and that we can do without it but that is not the case. It’s a matter of a serious obligation of respect toward the Church, the Congregation and oneself. Coming to final vows and ordination, we go through a long process and we ask the favor of being admitted to religious life and ministry. The commitment is public and we like to celebrate it in a big way. As a consequence, the breaking of that commitment also requires a public process that helps the brother find his new place in the Church. We are not the absolute masters of our commitments. It is a matter of respect, profound obedience, faith and humility.

Major Superiors have a particular responsibility in assuring that the process of leaving is done properly. There are many brothers who in fact have left the Congregation but who have never followed any canonical process. There are also brothers who should be out of the Congregation for clear objective reasons but no one has begun the corresponding process. That creates unjust and unhealthy situations, which discourage and confuse others. Clarity in defining situations is not contrary to charity. On the contrary, compassion makes us call things by their real name.

I congratulate and encourage the Major Superiors who are attentive to these things accompanying brothers in the process of leaving with *“equity, generosity and justice”* (Const. 150.2) and who take advantage of the situation to help the community

reflect on the need to care for the precious gift of a religious vocation.

I often make mine the prayer of Esteban Gumucio ssc; *“Thank you for the secret journeys of each one, brought together in your own, hard at times but always gentle; for each one goes his own way with you, respecting the path of the others.”* Let us always have a special place in our prayer for the brothers who are suffering in their vocation, who carry the weight of doubt and conflict. Let us lift up one another and offer a helping hand.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Our Elderly and Infirm brothers

November 10th, 2009

INFO SSSC Brothers, No. 32

Our old and sick brothers are an essential part of our community's treasure. They make us go deeply into the second and fourth ages of Christ. They strengthen us as "family". They save us from the selfishness that is the temptation of the strong and active.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 21

Our elderly and sick brothers will receive our best care and our most solicitous fraternal charity.

Constitutions, 49



Juan Vicente González sssc
Chile, July 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this letter I would like to send a special greeting to our brothers who are elderly and sick. Meeting them during the visits we make throughout the world, always affects me in a special way for in them we see what our religious life is capable of accomplishing in the life of a consecrated person. There is a special place on the desk in my office for the letters I receive from them from time to time responding to congratulations on a golden or diamond jubilee. These are brothers who are seventy and over. From their words, often written with a shaky hand, I try to capture the meaning of their long journey through life. Their letters are also a mirror that helps me reflect on my own journey and what awaits

me in the future. Our strength as a religious and a human community can grow in dialogue with our elder brothers.

It is said, and rightly so, that old age and sickness (experiences that often go together) are a school where we can learn to live with the fragility of the human condition and accept having to receive, to depend on others and even to be passive. However it seems that for people as active as we “Picpus” are, speaking of fragility and dependence is an institutional taboo. It frightens us to think of ourselves as inactive.

As we know well, our Congregation is essentially apostolic. The Constitutions tell us that our consecration “*fills us with zeal for our mission*” (No. 2) and the mission “*urges us to evangelizing action*” (No. 6). It is good that zeal and urgency to act characterize our lives and, to a great measure, make us feel useful and valuable. We should not deceive ourselves about that. And, as the Good Father warned, woe to us if we were to become idle and interested principally in our own well-being (physical or spiritual)! However this call to action and zeal can lead us to mistakenly believe that our life is worthwhile only to the extent that we keep up a rhythm of activity appropriate to youth or middle age. But that is not true, for old age and sickness in their own way can be an opportunity for bearing fruit and exercising apostolic zeal.

What I will offer below is just a brief meditation on the two texts quoted at the beginning of this INFO, one from the last [37th] General Chapter and the other from the Constitutions. Both rightly emphasize the importance of the wisdom hidden in life, when we become old, endure sickness and ultimately face death. Take a look at what the texts say:

- **Our old and sick brothers are an essential part of our community's treasure.** They are not a nuisance. They are not an obstacle to the Congregation's mission. On the contrary, they are necessary so that the Congregation be what it is called to be. This is not because “in spite of being old and sick” they can still lend a hand in some ministry, but precisely because they are who they are: brothers with a different

activity than that of those who are younger. They are not part of the Congregation's treasure because of "merits" accumulated in the past, when they were more robust and active, or because they contributed to our history in a more or less glorious way, but because of who they are right now: elderly, sick, dependent and sometimes passive. They are valuable being who they are and nothing else.

- **They make us go deeply into the second and fourth ages of Christ.** According to the Preliminary Chapter of our Constitutions, our vocation does not just consist in following the example of Jesus' apostolic life. We are also called to reproduce his hidden life (second) and his crucified life (fourth). This traditional language, which might sound strange to some, contains great truth about the process of being configured to Christ. The elderly or sick brother does not have to try to maintain some apostolic activity as in the third age of Jesus life. The best that he can offer us is his communion with the Lord in hiddenness and suffering. Prayer, adoration, quiet mediation of the Gospel, communion with Christ and with suffering humanity in his own personal suffering, all of that has an apostolic fruitfulness which goes much beyond what we can foresee or measure. The Congregation needs brothers who remind us of those two ages of the Lord.

- **They strengthen us as "family."** A family without elders or a family that does not take care of its sick members is not a complete family. We know that in some provinces there have been no young brothers for some time. A family without sons loses a great source of joy and vitality. But we are also aware that in other communities we have a good number of young people and very few (or no) elderly brothers and that also impoverishes the family and the young brothers are sort of like orphans, deprived of the guidance that older people can give. In some cases the General Government has even decided to restructure some communities so as not to leave groups that are younger without the accompaniment of brothers who are older and who have more experience.

- **They save us from the selfishness that is the temptation of the strong and active.** Is it really possible that strength and apostolic activity can become a temptation to selfishness? Yes, it is certainly possible and happens much more than we think. As religious we do not “marry” a woman, but we can fall into the temptation of “marrying” our apostolic work, a project we have created where we can develop our preferences and our capabilities. We can “marry” a position of power where we are recognized and where we have space to exercise our autonomy. We can “marry” a frenetic rhythm of activity that becomes like a drug. We can “marry” a way of acting that makes us think we are better than others and that sets us apart from those we consider more ordinary. We can get to the point of believing our lives “justified” by our work and we are annoyed when asked to work in a team, to reserve time for the community and prayer, to be available to do what is asked of us, to be with others who are not like us etc. At times, this conviction that we are doing things well grips our heart even when we are older and we panic when we have to give up responsibility and activity because it seems a form of capitulation or a kind of early death. We can see that all that is a temptation to selfishness (even as much as we are working for others). It blinds us to God's grace and diminishes real charity toward our brothers. Old age and sickness can save us from that temptation, if we can accept them with peace and joy when we get there ourselves and if we can care for and serve the brothers who are already there.

Because of that the Constitutions tell us:

- **Our elderly and sick brothers will receive our best care and our most solicitous fraternal charity.** Here we are speaking of charity in two ways. There is the charity of the elderly for those who are younger: letting themselves be cared for, being able to give up what is no longer their role, accepting with goodness of heart the younger generations (who will not be like them or as they would desire them to be), taking on the role of “kindly grandfathers” with the brothers that God

gives them. The constitutions are also referring to the charity of the younger brothers toward those who are elderly and sick: never disregarding those whose capacity is diminished, not judging anyone's past (and so not distinguishing between the "nice old men," who receive more attention, and the "disagreeable old men," who get less), caring for all with gentleness, patience and brotherhood, even though it takes time and energy that we would rather use on things that we like more. The time given to our older brothers and those who are sick will never be time lost. If we do not care for our old and infirm brothers, what love will we preach to a world that so often forgets those who are weaker and considered less productive?

At the beginning of this letter I told you that meeting our old and sick brothers always touches me in a special way. Let me say it openly and honestly: when I meet brothers who, in the last years of their life, are happy, kindhearted, faith-filled, joyfully given to prayer, who are happy with brothers of other age groups, who forgive easily and who like the simple things of life, I give thanks to God from the bottom of my heart and it confirms in me a desire to serve the Congregation and to offer it to the Church as an authentic way of living the Gospel. But when I meet brothers who have arrived at old age angry, disillusioned, with all kinds of grievances and resentment, with only sarcasm when it comes to renewal, closed to any call of the community then, God forgive me, my heart sinks and I ask myself if our religious life makes people more human or just frustrates and gives them complexes.

So I say to our old and infirm brothers, offer us the gift of your joy, generosity and fraternity. I assure you those are the most beautiful of God's blessings to us. In that way you will become a real source of encouragement for those who follow you on this journey. To brothers who are younger, active and who have not yet been touched by sickness or old age: love and care for your older brothers and take care that you nourish your faith, live simply, remain open, learn to easily forgive, without becoming paralyzed by suspicion and selfishness, so that when your time comes you will accept old age joyfully, with faith and with an

open heart in the midst of our community. May the Lord, who makes us one, help us to live joyfully this communion between generations.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Death and Solidarity among Generations

February 7th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 46

The discipleship which Jesus demands is so radical that it is unliveable, unless we expect the coming of the Lord (...)

*Yes, I'm coming soon! Amen!
Come Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20).*
Hope for the Parousia makes it possible to live the Gospel. Following Christ is an existence based absolutely on hope.

Patrick Bradley ssc
Continual Conversion, p. 97-98



Stone in the cemetery near Dublin (Ireland)
where some of our Brothers are buried

A few days ago I was in Dublin to participate in the funeral of Pat Bradley, who died suddenly at 76 years of age. Pat was the ninth Superior General of the Congregation. For many brothers of my age, Pat was an inspiring figure among our older brothers, who lived through the enormous transformation of the Church and religious life in the 60's and 70's and tried to open new horizons in the 80's.

It was just when I was thinking about this letter for INFO that I received the news of Pat's death. What I would like to do is offer a brief reflection on death and on solidarity among the different generations in the Congregation. They are two themes that are profoundly interconnected. Even though we do not produce children, charity makes us feel responsible for future generations and for what happens after our death.

The closeness of death

In some of our canonical visits we encounter provinces that are “confronted by the reality of death” in a particular way. This is clearly the case for brothers that are older or infirm. Death can come to us at any time, but advanced age or physical weakness bring it to mind in a particular way.

At times the closeness of death becomes an occasion of temptation and darkness. It can happen that the wear and tear of the years provokes skepticism. Worry about one’s health and well being causes prayer and generosity, the spring that nourishes the common life, to dry up.

However, the closeness of death is also the opportunity to experience a special kind of fulfillment. I have been privileged to hear the moving testimony of faith given by brothers, who with complete simplicity and spontaneity, are looking toward to their approaching death with peace, trusting in the mystery of God who accompanies us and waits for us. And so they do not see that final stage of life as simply “decline” but as a time to understand and savor basic truths that previously they were unable to discover. It is a time to focus gently and lovingly on the one thing that really counts in the final analysis, love.

There are also times when death has to be faced collectively, when a province has not had young members for some time and is aware that as a community it is coming to its end. For many, this absence of a new generation is painful and even disconcerting, as if the vocation to which they gave their lives is now discredited in the view of upcoming generations. In some extreme cases, this lack of “paternity” in religious life seems to have been a premeditated choice made some time ago, when the brothers ended up convincing themselves that our life no longer had meaning and that it should no longer exist in the Church.

Finally, for many others the future of our communities is something hidden, part of a plan that only God knows. Because of that, it is always possible to live in trust, without claiming to

control that which is really beyond our control. As Madeline Delbr el said, *“the only thing we know is that what is given to God is not lost,”* and that if we are less concerned about our own life, *“old age will speak to us of birth and death of resurrection.”*

Solidarity among generations

There is no doubt that old age and the nearness of death are experienced very differently when the religious community has “children”, to whom we can hand on our tradition of the following of Jesus. Fortunately where brothers of different ages and generations live together, the thread of life is not broken. The older person realizes that he does not know everything and that there is always something new happening. The young person understands that the world did not begin with him and that others have already faced the same trials as he. Of course there are always conflicts and misunderstanding between generations, as in any family, but if there is still real affection, the community is strengthened in wisdom, in the witness that brothers give to one another and in the service that we can offer to God's people. Then I can see my own death as a natural part of the life flowing through the “body”, which we all form by God's grace. My death is no longer just my own dramatic affair.

Some would identify three generations among today's clergy and religious (Benedict XVI takes up this scheme in his book *Light of the World*, Chapter 7).

- ❖ There is the “1968 generation,” brothers that are now around 70. They are a generation of fighters, who experienced sharp breaks with the past and developed solid convictions. However at times they were incapable of being “fathers” to others and became “lone rangers” resistant to common life. They remained stuck in ideologies and that makes it difficult for them to grasp new things that are always appearing.
- ❖ Then there would be a more pragmatic generation, those of us who are around 50. This group is small in number but it has a lot of responsibility. It does not get caught up in positions that are very ideological but that tries to make

space for newness, which, on the other hand, it is not really able to define.

- ❖ Finally there is the new generation, those who are around thirty. They are a very diverse generation, different from the preceding ones. Personally they seem fragile but more trusting than the '68 generation. Some would see them as sort of an "orphan" generation, one without parents who are close to them, who can accompany them.

Even though we know that these classifications are approximate and do not necessarily reflect the complete reality, we can say that we have these three generations in the Congregation, even though all three do not exist within every province, vice-province or region. If we really experience ourselves as one "body" of religious in mission, we will see that all the older brothers – even in provinces where there are no vocations – have "sons" (i.e. brothers who are younger) and all the younger brothers – including those of communities where there are practically no older ones - have "fathers" (older brothers who have gone before them). Within the Congregation we should never feel ourselves to be *the abandoned elderly* or *the orphaned young*. As an international community we know that we are brothers not only of those who are close but also of all the members of the Congregation in whatever part of the world. The vital energy that is our charism runs through the veins which link the different generations in all the countries where we are present.

How can we become more aware of this communion and strengthen such solidarity? How can we better understand that our real life is not limited to my own individual adventure or to the community in my country, but that it is grafted onto a living organism beyond that? How can we liberate the joy that comes from the awareness of being a member of a larger body which is both old and young at the same time?

There is no doubt that a privileged place for the encounter of generations, nationalities and cultures is the General Chapter which we are already beginning to prepare. It is our hope that in the preparation for the Chapter of 2012 and in the Chapter itself,

that we will be able to create space for each generation and, especially, for the new voices that have so much to offer to the renewal of our apostolic religious life.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General



In order to Serve

A Common Vision

May 10th, 2007

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 3

What can I tell you, my very dear friends, but only that my heart and my spirit will follow you and accompany you until we receive news from you. Really love one another. Put up with the little difficulties which will always be present due to differences of personalities. Have but one heart and one soul...Be gentle and obedient with one another. May no one cling too much to his feelings... Farewell my dear, good and worthy friends. I find you happy to be the first members of the Congregation called to succeed Saints Paula and Barnabas in their ministry.

The Good Father to the first missionaries to the Pacific. (PS. of a letter to Brother Séverin, October, 1826)



The Damien Window
Honolulu Cathedral (Hawaii)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After spending a month in the Pacific (French Polynesia, Hawaii and a few days in California) I have to begin by recalling the Congregation's first outreach in mission and the Good Father's thinking with great affection of those places where the Church's presence began with the arrival of our brothers.

During these days we also celebrate the memorial of Damien, whose tomb on Molokai I had the good fortune to visit a few weeks ago thanks to the wonderful hospitality of the Hawaiian Province.

During the Eucharist in Saint Philomena, the church that Damien built in Kalawao, I said that Damien was fortunate. He was fortunate because twice in his life he found a work in which he could give himself generously and serve passionately: when he left for what were then the Sandwich Islands as a missionary and when he remained among the lepers on the island of Molokai.

During the meetings these past weeks several brothers said to me *"We lack a 'vision' of what we want to do."* We need a vision that helps us find ministry that we can be passionate about and that motivates us, one for which it would be worth putting aside our familiar routines, one that even makes us change our organization and structures, one that causes us to live together, one that frees us from attachment to our possessions and our independence. If we do not have that why change anything?

One of the three main orientations of the present General Government is to try to revitalize the apostolic thrust of the Congregation. We are an apostolic community. That is the reason we are together. We can be apostolic until the end of our days, even though we might be older, fewer and infirm. There is no retirement from religious life.

Certainly we need to find works that generate enthusiasm, that get us moving, that help us realize once again the value of our life and that inspire us to be available for what the Congregation might ask of us. But it is also certain, and I am convinced of it, that living in community, putting our possessions in common, forgiving one another, being available and "obedient" to what is asked of us, and even reducing the number of our Provinces/Vice-provinces so that we are more "governable" and more able to make decisions that are daring, all of that is not an *objective* that we aim at by coming up with attractive projects but rather first and foremost a *starting point* for being more faithful to what we have professed.

It's like prayer. We don't learn to pray by listening to a lot of explanations but by beginning to pray. Just like we don't learn to ride a bicycle by reading a book but by pedaling. The same for us. We will not be more "Congregation" because we talk a lot

about ourselves but in so far as we accept sincerely and unconditionally that - here and now - we are brothers by the grace of God who in his mercy has called us together to be at his service.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Our apostolic dynamism is based on the love of the Good God, who takes us by the hand and to whose providence we entrust ourselves. When we decide to make changes in order to take up new commitments or to maintain the works to which we are already committed, we are inspired by what the Founder experienced shortly after his ordination: confined in the grain loft (prayer and meditation while living with the threat of a dangerous world), the risky and “not very bright” decision to go out (believing himself the only surviving priest, wondering what he could do given such a situation), and the offering of his life at the foot of a tree (he relies on the love of God and offers himself without calculating nor looking back).

37th General Chapter, Our Vocation and Mission, No. 29

Apostolic Impulse

September 10th, 2008

INFO Brothers SSCC, No. 18

Our mission leads us to love and serve particularly the poor, the outcast, the little ones, the abandoned and the suffering. Compassion, which makes us share in the merciful heart of God and his burning desire for the dawning of his kingdom, will be the criterion for knowing where we must be and with whom. We do not have to be numerous nor have much strength in order to be in places where no one else wants to be and to organize ourselves in function of the urgent situations of suffering which our world presents to us.



Southern Sudan
(foto www.safe-democracy.org)

37th General Chapter
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 28

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to introduce you to a project in which our General Government has decided to become involved, even if in a limited way. It is the “Solidarity with Southern Sudan” project, an inter-congregational initiative designed and carried out by the USG (Union of Superiors General) and the UISG (International Union of Superiors General).

The steering committee describes the project as follows:

The “**Solidarity with Southern Sudan**” Project arose as a response to a request for help from the Bishops of Southern Sudan, after a war which has lasted for more than twenty years and has destroyed the country and cost many lives. This request was made to the Executive Councils of the USG and the UISG just after the Congress on the Consecrated Life

that took place in Rome in November 2004, the theme of which was "Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity." The two executive councils studied the request and saw in it a concrete way to respond to one of the most urgent needs of our time and to express, through their collaboration, the double passion spoken of in the congress.

The project's **general objective** is to help rebuild a society and a country devastated by war. In order to do that, the most important element will be preparing the local people. Concretely two activities have been chosen: one in the field of education and the other in health care. In the area of **education**, the project plans to organize a teacher formation program. It will be based in Malakal, and will have a network of satellite centers in the five dioceses of southern Sudan. In **health care**, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sudan wants to reopen the Institute for Healthcare Formation in Wau as a center for the formation for healthcare personnel. The Comboni Missionary Sisters have taken responsibility for administering the health care project and the education project will be administered by the Brothers of the Christian Schools (La Salle)

Fifty nine congregations have committed themselves to the Project offering personnel and/or finances. Before the end of this year 17 new missionaries will be working in Southern Sudan: 4 in Malakal, 5 in Rimense, 6 in Wau and 2 in Juba.

At first, our General Government considered the possibility of involvement in the project by sending personnel. This is a courageous response of the religious life to the urgent need of the most poor and abandoned of the earth. For more than a year we have been in dialogue with the project's executive committee. We wanted to send a complete religious community (i.e. at least three brothers) who could do pastoral work in connection with the project's two main activities. But at the present time they only need people for the formation centers for teachers and healthcare workers. We also saw how difficult it would be to find three brothers who would be readily available to go to Sudan. For that reason we ruled out the idea of sending brothers.

The Project Steering Committee asked the Congregations that cannot contribute personnel to at least make a financial contribution of 50.000 €. We have committed ourselves to do so, giving 10.000 € a year. It will be part of the ordinary budget of the General Government for the next five years.

Such a Project makes us think of the **apostolic vitality** and the **capacity for service** of religious institutes, including our own Congregation. Often we have to concentrate our energies on the renewal and support of our own Congregation (initial and ongoing formation, finances, care for the elderly, animation of communities etc.) but, as we are aware, we are an apostolic Congregation and the ongoing effort to care for the community is in function of the service we are called to offer to the Church and the world. The two things are inseparable.

Clearly the majority of our Provinces are confronted with the need to reduce ministries because of the diminishing number of brothers who are active. But it is also true that in not a few places in the Congregation brothers are trying to create new forms of apostolic activity and they are reorganizing their available resources in order to begin new initiatives. In other places, where there are vocations and the community is growing, they are beginning new works and even thinking of making foundations in new countries. At the present time, as far as I know, in different places in the Congregation three new parishes are being begun, a center of spirituality is being built, a special project to welcome young people is being set up, new ways of being present in the area of education are being studied, programs of preaching and family ministry are being strengthened etc. Clearly I am referring to new initiatives taken on as a community. Individual commitments are much more numerous but have a different character.

Our apostolic vitality will not necessarily depend on our number, our age or our health. The most important thing is that we keep ourselves attentive and available, with a strong desire to serve and an unfailing community spirit. We are often reminded in the Gospel that the Reign of God begins very modestly and is evident

in small things. Three things can really nourish **our SSCC apostolic impulse**:

- a prayerful awareness of our call to proclaim the merciful love of God,
- the freedom to not become attached to personal security, works or places,
- the clear acceptance as brothers that the whole Congregation is one body and that apostolic initiatives are not the exclusive affair of one person, of one province or one local community.

In that way, I am convinced that we can be more fruitful, faithful and creative in the service that we owe others.

Faternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Mission of the Congregation

February 10th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 35

Our Constitutions tell us that *“the consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is the foundation of our Institute.”* (BP), and that this consecration is the origin of our mission *“to contemplate, live and announce to the world God’s love which was made flesh in Jesus.”* (Const. No. 2) This concise way of expressing our vocation and mission must be assimilated and developed by our community at each stage of our history.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No.1



The door of the chapel
Damien House, Cootehill (Ireland)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Enlarged General Council last September proposed that the central theme of the next [38th] General Chapter be the MISSION of the Congregation or in the words of the EGC, *“missionary policy – perspectives for mission.”* In this letter I would like to raise some questions which I hope will create interest in reflecting on the topic.

Mission and the work we do

When we speak of the mission we are usually referring to something profound and theological that sustains and inspires who we are and what we do. In general, we are not referring to the different tasks that the brothers and sisters take on but the inner call that sustains us and give us direction.

More than forty years ago in his fourteenth circular letter dated January 1, 1964, Henri Systemans, seventh Superior General, offered the following reflection:

“So what is our specific task in the Church? Will we discover it in our apostolic activities? Most of them have nothing special about them.”

Then placing our mission in the context of Christ's redemption, he added:

“In that gigantic work of redemption...it is love that we want to emphasize to the point that we consecrate ourselves to that love.”

Then and now the apostolic works of the Congregation, our tasks, have “nothing special” about them. In other words, they were and still are just what many others also do: schools, parishes, social works etc. What is special is not the type of work but the style, the manner, where we place the emphasis in doing what we do. It's usually said that our mission is seen more in BEING than in DOING. What is important is that we be people who are really rooted in the love of Christ. That colors whatever work we do.

The Congregation has an abundance of written material on this way of understanding the mission. The Constitutions sum up our mission in the familiar expression *“to contemplate, live and announce to the world God's love, which was made flesh in Jesus.”* (Const. No. 2) In recent years there has been much theological, pastoral and spiritual reflection on the relation of that mission with different themes and from diverse perspectives such as the centrality of Christ, the Eucharist, service to the poor, the struggle for justice, community life, the contemplative dimension, compassion, gender equality and even ecological commitment.

There is no doubt that we always have to be reflecting on charism and mission. However those topics are already treated well in our Constitutions, General Chapter documents, letters of the Superiors General, the various PARLs, Cahier de spiritualité

and different publications on the charism. For that reason, the General Government does not believe that what we need to do most right now is produce new documentation on the broad aspects of the charism in relation to mission. It would be enough to assimilate a bit more what has already been said and written. What the Congregation needs above all at the present moment is action.

Tasks for mission

In a recent visit to one of the younger SSCC communities, a group of brothers in formation asked us, "What is the mission of the Congregation?" We responded with a short theological discourse based in the Constitutions and the General Chapters. The brothers were not really happy with our answer and insisted, "we've known all that since the novitiate and we keep studying it in formation but what concretely is the *mission* of the Congregation?"

What were those young people telling us? What restlessness is behind their seemingly simple question? As we see it, they were asking about their future: what am I am going to give myself to? What things will I be asked to do? Or more concretely, how will I spend my time from the time I get up until I go to bed? What will my "work" be? This is the real question and it's certainly not a trivial one. Can we respond to them in a way that speaks to their Gospel call and to the generosity that the Spirit has placed in their hearts?

There is no mission without specific works. The "zeal" and "usefulness for the Church" (that the Good Father wanted his children to have) do not exist without some specific occupation. We cannot BE without DOING something in a responsible, committed and intense way. And so along with theological-spiritual reflection on mission we have to find answers to the question, What does an SSCC religious give himself to? What does he do with his time? What work does he do?

The Preliminary Chapter of the first Constitutions of the brothers and sisters approved in 1817, the text of which is in our present

Constitutions, shows this idea of joining mission (the end of the Institute) and concrete tasks. That venerable text says that since the mission is to imitate the life of Jesus Christ (the four ages) and propagate devotion to the Sacred Hearts, the members of the Congregation give themselves to the following tasks: free schools, paying schools, seminaries, adoration, preaching, missions, exercises of mortification and propagation of devotion to the Sacred Hearts.

That list of works gave a visible face to the Congregation and made concrete the sense of being a "body." Each member, doing his or her work, could feel united to a community that was carrying out the "mission" all together as one.

Throughout its history the Congregation has given itself to works that very naturally came to be considered valid and necessary expressions of the mission, for example schools, foreign missions, enthronement, seminaries etc. The origin of many vocations was not in some attraction to a charism understood in a theological or spiritual sense, but rather the enthusiasm generated by a desire to give oneself to one or another of these works.

The sense of belonging to the Congregation has also been nourished by a consciousness of being companions in a common task. If we think of our own experience, we can see that an exciting work done together with others can really unify the participants much more effectively than the mere use of a common spiritual language. In other words, "common mission" understood only spiritually can be just a label placed on independent individuals. While a task shared in faith can help us to truly become companions and brothers/sisters in the Lord.

In the last forty years, some customary works of the Congregation have fallen by the wayside or have diminished significantly. Among the brothers, parish work has in large part become our principal occupation. Parish ministry is interesting and needed. It allows us to work with many people, journey with God's people, work for communion and proclaim the Gospel; however it also brings with it the danger of clericalization and stagnation in tasks

of maintenance with little missionary outreach. In other places the brothers cannot find parishes in which to work or where parish work will never allow them to support themselves. Whatever the case, limiting ourselves to parishes causes us to neglect the effort we need to make to discern and be creative in response to the needs of the world.

It also happens that when there are no longer common works, many brothers give themselves to commitments chosen by personal decision according to what they might think is good. In fact, this can result in their pulling away from the community. In many such cases it is no longer the provincial authority who assigns a place and work to a brother, but rather each brother seeks his own commitment, therefore weakening the sense of the Congregation as an “apostolic body.”

However are there not works that can unite us as an apostolic community, tasks discerned in common and to which we can be sent in virtue of our vow of obedience, works in which we offer the Church and humanity that aspect of the Gospel that the SSCC charism can contribute to the work of the Spirit?

What should an SSCC religious give himself to?

This is the question we present for your consideration. In answering we have to consider the charism and mission, the needs of the Church and the world and our real capacity to respond. Together with discussion on mission and general criteria for action – discussion that the Congregation has already developed to an extent – we need to come to some idea of common concrete works in which we can effectively serve others as religious of the Sacred Hearts.

Other congregations are asking themselves the same kind of questions. Some responses could be helpful. Such as the congregation that, having reconciliation as an aspect of its charism, opened centers in various places in the world to help those getting out of prison get back together with their families, who often had rejected them. It is an interesting example of how an element of a charism can be translated into a common work.

As a result they are offering a service that responds better to a specific need, they clarify the apostolic work of many brothers and a sense of communion is reawakened in the institute.

It is true that in many parts of the Congregation we're responding to this question about particular works or it is on an ongoing subject of reflection. It is always good to return to it whether at the level of major communities or at the wider level of the whole Congregation as a "body." The real renewal of our enthusiasm will come above all from what we do. So let's talk about this and try to find light for the journey together.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Gift of Ordained Ministry

June 8th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 27

Might I say a special word of advice to you, our beloved brothers, who already possess the august character of the priesthood or who are destined to receive it, of how you must retrace the apostolic life of the God Man? Remember that the higher the dignity to which you are raised, the more reason you must try to become like unto Jesus Christ.

Good Father,
Circular Letter announcing
the approbation of the Institute,
April 14, 1817

Michiaki Chihara ssc
Bandung (Indonesia)
March 2009



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On June 19th, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, Pope Benedict XVI will inaugurate a year dedicated to the ministerial priesthood. The date coincides with the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney, the Cure of Ars. It is a good opportunity to stop and reflect on the gift of the ordained ministry (presbyterate) that the majority of our brothers have received for the good of the Church.

The brothers' branch is juridically "a clerical institute." In other words, the exercise of the ordained ministry is an essential part of its being and mission. This has immediate repercussions on

many aspects of our life: conditions for certain positions of authority, programs of study during initial formation, apostolic works etc. However the priesthood goes beyond practical questions of organization. It profoundly affects our identity.

I must confess that it is not easy to speak about this topic briefly, since the fact of being priests automatically provokes a good deal of controversy, ambiguity and tension. We think, for example, of the ongoing temptation to *clericalism*, the attitude of the priest who likes to emphasize how he is different from others and considers himself part of a superior caste possessing sacred power giving him the right to decide authoritatively, to impose his opinions on others without question, to keep a distance, to be arrogant and to treat the laity in a paternalistic manner. The ministerial priesthood makes us part of the Church's hierarchical structure and a whole system of norms and ways of acting that are at times sexist and can strain our relationship with women and with our own sexuality. Many think that being priests is an obstacle to living our religious vocation authentically as it can cause us to feel more committed to the diocese than the community (converting us into sort of freelance diocesan priests) and it puts a distance between us and the sisters and lay brothers of the Congregation, thus damaging the unity of our common vocation. "You are more priests than brothers!" is a common criticism, as if the ordained ministry and the religious life were opposed to one another.

The temptations and distortions that I have just mentioned are present more than we would like and not only among older or middle-aged priests but also among the young who are coming along at the present moment. Not long ago, someone well acquainted with the area of initial formation told me that our houses of formation seem more like diocesan seminaries or residence halls than religious communities and that the desire of many men on entering the Congregation is not so much to live religious life in community but to become a priest and exercise some clerical role.

That is all true. We always have to be careful not to fall into some kind of distorted clericalism that obscures the evangelical basis

of the ordained ministry. However, properly understood, the priesthood is not only not an obstacle to our religious vocation but, on the contrary, it is a gift of God meant to make present the saving love of the Heart of his Son in a way that is close, warm, human and effective. This is the very "raison d'être" of the Congregation. In the SSCC brother who has been ordained to the priesthood, the ministry is not only some kind of professional training but a part of his identity, shaping his inner being as a Christian and a religious. Damien signed his letters as "priest-missionary." We are "priests-religious," both things, according to our SSCC charism.

"Do this in memory of me" (Lk. 22:19). The ministry that we have received connects us profoundly to this command of the Lord. The priest acts *in persona Christi*, remembering Him, so that Jesus might become present and his grace and love reach humankind. Thanks to the ministry, as servants of Word and sacrament, we are present as privileged witnesses at moments of unspeakable mystery when the finger of God touches the hearts of his children and transforms them.

"Do you love me?" (Jn. 21:16). We remember one who is alive, *who has grasped us at the core of our being, at the deepest root of our being*, as Esteban Gumucio said. It is difficult to express the bond of friendship between the Lord and his minister, between Christ and this fragile sinful man who takes a place at his table to preside in his name. In this face to face encounter with the Lord the depth of one's heart is touched in a unique way in a relationship of unmerited friendship and trust.

"Tend my sheep." (Jn. 21:16). Out of love for Jesus, the true shepherd who draws everyone to himself, the priest becomes servant of the community, guardian of communion, builder of bonds of faith and love, man of forgiveness and reconciliation, minister of the Church who is mother, sister, teacher and Samaritan woman. And I am not only referring to the parish community, to which the exercise of ministry often seems to be limited, but also of the many other possibilities presented to us in the religious, ecclesial and human community.

In whatever circumstance, after the example of the One who went in search of the lost, the priest *according to the heart of Christ* will serve especially the defenseless and suffering, for whom he will be ready to give his life. His ministry will be an echo of the invitation of the Master, *“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened...”* (Mt. 11:28) In his ministry he will also welcome the weak and sinners and will be the presence of the life-giving forgiveness of God for them. He will find ways to be open to them, to love them and so invite them to never lose hope in the Father’s love and goodness.

The richness of the sacrament of orders is manifest in a particular way in the Eucharist. The bread that the priest consecrates, breaks and distributes to the congregation (the sacrament in which he will later adore his Lord) is the risen Christ who gives his life as “Servant of Yahweh.” *“With even greater reason you must try to make yourselves like unto Jesus Christ,”* said the Good Father to the priests of the Congregation. To make oneself like unto the one who is broken and totally given out of love: that is the true “dignity” of the priesthood. The servant cannot be above his Master.

This treasure of the ordained ministry should not be an obstacle to our religious vocation nor should it weaken our communities. Resistance to community life or other aspects of our call to be religious brothers is not caused by the ministry per se, but rather by our individualism, our desire for recognition, our search for power and personal conflicts. On the contrary, the fact that many members of our Congregation have received the gift of priesthood is a call to make all of our communities real “ministerial communities,” in which the presence of Christ and the desire to live and proclaim the Gospel of his love is the center and moving force of our lives.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Announcement of the 38th General Chapter

July 12th, 2011

INFO SSSC Brothers, No. 51



On July 1st, the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the brothers received the letter announcing the 38th General Chapter, which will take place here in Rome from August 30th through September 27th, 2012. The Superior General's letter was accompanied by the first preparatory questionnaire addressed to all the local communities. Below we have put the part of the letter in which the motto of the Chapter and its main theme are explained.

The Enlarged General Council that met in El Escorial in September 2009 proposed that the central theme of the chapter be the mission of the Congregation. The purpose would be to look for concrete orientations for our apostolic service, given the needs of the world and the Church and a realistic consideration of who we are.

Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitutions offer the general context for this reflection: *our mission urges us to evangelizing action...* (Const. 6) and we live that mission in community (Const. 7). We

are talking about what we do and how we live. Both things shape our mission.

To better understand the theme of mission, we have chosen as the motto for the chapter: *"Salt is good..."* It is a phrase taken from the Gospel of Mark 9:49-50,

*"Everyone will be salted with fire.
Salt is good,
but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you
restore its flavor?
Keep salt in yourselves and you will have
peace with one another."*

In this passage from Mark, Jesus invites us to keep salt in ourselves. This salt is something which is given us and whose quality we have to care for in order to experience the profound renewal caused by the fire that the Lord brings to earth. (cf. Lk. 12:49).

The image of being "salted with fire" evokes the sacrifices of expiation (cf. Ez. 43:24). We can see here an exhortation to courage in the face of difficulties and to tenacity in the enormous task of transforming the human heart, what we call reparation. Fire and salt speak to us also of the Heart of Jesus, inflamed with a love that burns, heals and transforms, and whose deepest desire is the coming of the Kingdom.

Precisely, our mission is participation in the *"Missio Dei"* (the mission of God, the mission of Christ) *to make the Kingdom of God present* (Const. No. 6). Fire and salt remind us of the zeal of which the Good Father spoke, which is a call not to be satisfied with mediocrity or situations where we are comfortable and settled.

Taking these rich and evocative images as a starting point, we would like this passage from the Gospel to help us understand our mission as "usefulness" and as "flavor," in relationship to the salt that Jesus hopes to find in us.

a) Mission as **usefulness**

Salt is something useful. It has many uses (to preserve, cook, heal wounds, produce fertilizer, prepare sacrifices etc.). The Good Father would often say that the members of the Congregation should be useful for the Church and the world. We are an apostolic Congregation and we are called to do specific ministries for the good of others.

What do we give ourselves to? How do we occupy our time and our energies? What works do we offer young people who are becoming part of the community? Why do we do these things and not others? What other things should we do but we are not doing? What are we good for? What is the impact of our community on the lives of others?

Obviously we are speaking of the theme of “usefulness” from the perspective of faith. So for example, we can be useful staffing a parish or a school, but we know that we are also (with a more hidden usefulness but just as real or more real) making adoration. We also want to speak of “usefulness” in terms of our SSCC vocation. For example, we can feel ourselves very useful leading a busy life in the style of a diocesan priest, but it can be that we become rather useless in terms of what the Church and the world have the right to expect of our Congregation. This leads us to the second aspect of “salt”: its flavor.

b) Mission as **flavor**.

If salt loses its favor, it becomes useless, even though we might continue to sprinkle it liberally on our food. Here we are speaking of the “religious and charismatic” flavor of our life. The usefulness of our mission does not consist in activism joined to a multiplicity of works without any distinctive charismatic identity. In fact, we often excuse ourselves for not giving attention to the essential elements of what it means to be SSCC religious by appealing to the amount of things that we have to do. Neither should we deceive ourselves thinking that

mission is only for the strong and active, those who are able to do many things, while the elderly and sick would be seen as “useless.” That is not so. We are useful missionaries in the measure that we preserve and taste the “flavor” of our SSCC religious life. If we lose that flavor, even though we do many things, we are useless.

How do we define this SSCC “flavor”? Are we able to name the nonnegotiable elements that we must attend to so that we do not become insipid? We know that the consecration to the Sacred Hearts is realized in the living of the vows, the common life, adoration, the experience of God, apostolic service, closeness to the poor, a simple and austere lifestyle etc. But we have to tell ourselves that again and again. We have to say once more in an intelligible way what is our vocation and choose concrete orientations so that we do not forget.

While “usefulness” raises the question of the impact our community has on the lives of others, “flavor” makes us look at the impact of our consecration on ourselves. Being religious of the Sacred Hearts, does it make us better people, better believers? Does it make us more human? Does it make us more joyful and loving? This means evaluating together to what extent our Congregation is a place where we can live healthily, where one can “taste” God and love deeply. To do that the witness of our older brothers is essential. For in them we can see if the saying “How beautiful it is to live to the end as a son of the Sacred Hearts” is true.

And so we want to look at the theme of mission concretely, incarnately and really, evaluating our flavor and our usefulness, in other words, examining how we live and what we dedicate ourselves to.

The chapter process has a penitential dimension. Frequently, when we speak of what we do, we have a tendency to justify ourselves and to defend ourselves against possible criticism. However if we want to find interesting directions for the future, we

have to evaluate ourselves humbly and hopefully and be open to the call to conversion.

At the same time we do not want to concentrate on the inevitable list of our real weaknesses: we are few, we do not have much money, many of us are older and sick. We already know all that. None of those limitations have a fatal affect on our mission. The real question is the following: being who we are, with the resources that each of us has, what must we do as religious of the Sacred Hearts to be "*flavorfully useful*"?

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Challenges for Our SSCC Mission

October 5th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 53

During the month of September the Superior General visited the brothers in Colombia and participated in the 14th triennial Assembly of the Interprovincial Conference of Latin America (CIAL). One of the sessions of the Assembly, which was together with the sisters, was given to a dialogue with the two Superiors General, Rosa and Javier, about the present challenges to our SSCC mission. This INFO begins with the notes from the talk that Javier gave on the topic.



Alejandro Mora ssc opens the door of the parish church in Algeciras (Colombia)

Premise

In the present circumstances, it does not seem possible to distinguish specific challenges for our mission as a Congregation. We are immersed in the overall challenges of the mission of the Church or the consecrated life. Or to speak even more broadly, our challenges go hand in hand with the challenges that humanity, either at the local or universal level, experiences. In fact, anything that affects what is called the "*Missio Dei*" (the mission of God in the world) affects us.

These general challenges become more specific according to the continents or geographical and cultural areas. For example, in the case of Latin America, we know that at present there is a common direction set out by the Conference of Aparecida. It takes concrete form when you speak of things like "the continental mission" and "pastoral conversion." So the challenges to our SSCC mission are the same ones that many others face.

Perhaps we would like to find something that would stimulate us or challenge us more specifically as a religious family. Maybe we would like to feel a call to mission that would mobilize us as a religious family and stimulate us to take up some specific kind of action, as is the case in some congregations when they were founded. But at the present moment, I cannot see something like that.

Inspiration to daring initiatives in mission can only be a gift of God through “the prophets” he deems to send us, prophets who all of a sudden open our eyes to a new (or renewed) kind of service, that creates passion within us and reawakens our zeal in a certain direction. In the meantime, while we move forward modestly without special insights, we have to tone down our language and humbly enter more deeply into everyday life, without aspiring to, “great matters, things too sublime for me” as the Psalm says. God can make great things come from small seeds.

Preparation of the General Chapter of 2012

The preparatory process for the next General Chapter has not presented any specific challenge to the Congregation. The letter of announcement and first questionnaire, already sent to the communities, raise questions: What are we doing? Why? How? What are we not doing that we should be doing? We trust that from the answers that come in, we will be able to identify specific calls that will help us move forward.

What we are looking for are *concrete orientations for our apostolic service (not so much discourse on “mission” but directions for “ministries”), given the needs of the world and the Church and a realistic consideration of who we are. We would like to understand our mission as “usefulness” and as “flavor.” Being who we are, with the resources that each of us has, what must we do as religious of the Sacred Hearts to be “flavorfully useful”?*

We have good formulations of our mission...

Certainly in the Congregation we have a well developed articulation of our mission. We do not have to go any further than the beautiful formulation that the General Chapter of 2006 came up with (Our Vocation and Mission, No. 35):

The work of evangelization, the ministry of preaching and spiritual accompaniment, offered to all who need them, is our response to the spiritual abandonment and the interior thirst of those whom we serve. This task inspires the work of transforming the world according to the criteria of the Gospel (Const. No. 5) and goes with the search for greater justice in solidarity with the poor.

There is also the concise formula, sort of a slogan, which we find in the Constitutions: *Our mission (is) to contemplate, live and announce to the world God's love, which was made flesh in Jesus.* (Const. No. 2) Many documents and texts for reflection are a development of these basic intuitions.

...But we need to have a clearer idea of concrete tasks (usefulness)

We have no lack of literature on mission. What we need is to define some concrete works in which we can carry out that mission in an effective and consistent way, being useful and with our own particular "flavor." For that reason, instead of responding directly to the question about present challenges to our SSCC mission, let me brainstorm a bit about what kind of tasks the brothers should expend their energies on. (I consider this a valid way to present challenges).

Works that are good for us:

- Make appropriate demands on us. They are sufficiently intense and do not allow us to be idle. They have a missionary outreach.

- Serve others, especially the very poor and vulnerable (so that we avoid getting trapped by the middle class that has money and cultural advantages).
- Make us earn our living from our work. Normally our work provides the money necessary to live and to share. In order to do that we have to diversify our “trades” (for example, just parish work will not provide enough to feed a community). The opposite would be to be unconcerned about earning our living thinking someone will always pay for us.
- In turn nourish community life. Work unifies the community if it is discussed, planned and evaluated as brothers. Work destroys the community if each one goes about his own thing independently.
- Speak of the love of God to which we are consecrated.
- Allow us to be free of the ordained ministry’s tendency toward clericalism. Being a religious priest is different from being a diocesan and even more different from being “clerical;” (i.e. a separate group with a certain use of power).
- Make us feel part of the Congregation. Works that identify us as a “body” active in the Church with something significant to offer.

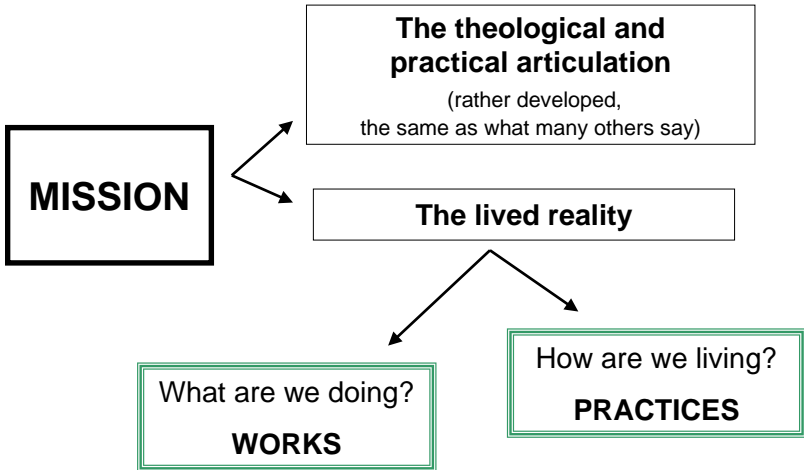
...Being SSCC religious (taste)

We do these kinds of tasks, of course, as religious of the Sacred Hearts. Because of that we at least try to:

- Maintain the basic non-negotiables of religious life, things of the “spirit” but also “practices” (vows, common life, community of goods, the real practice of adoration, times of personal and communal prayer etc.).
- Nourish in the brothers the desire for this practical living of religious life, so that brothers approach these “basics” not reluctantly but joyfully and spontaneously.

- Be one “body” with others in the Church and collaborate with all those with whom it is possible, avoiding at all costs becoming a community closed in on itself.

A little diagram of what I have been saying:



Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

A Congregation of Islands

April 8th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 37

Jesus recognizes that his hour has come, the hour for the grain to die, when some Greeks – foreigners – come saying, “We want to see *Jesus*.” (Jn. 12:20-24) Jesus dies and so his Spirit goes beyond the borders of race, nations and cultures... In a world characterized by nationalism, ethnic conflict and the rejection of foreigners, the hour has come for us to “die” to what we must die to in order to witness to the power of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, who is capable of creating fraternity and communion among people who are very diverse.



37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 15

Parish of Saint John the Baptist, Mataiea
First Catholic Church in Tahiti
(French Polynesia) 1858
Holy Saturday, March 3rd, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am away from Rome since the beginning of February until mid-April visiting the Provinces of USA-East and Hawaii and the Vice-province of French Polynesia. During a large part of Lent, Holy Week and the beginning of the Easter season I have been in **the islands of the Pacific**. (Hawaii, Tahiti and the Marquesas)

On March 27, I celebrated the feast of the Good Father in the Marquesas not far from the Gambier Islands, which the founder thought of in the last hours before his death. When in Hawaii I had the privilege of visiting Molokai again and remembering our brother Damien, whose first feast as a “saint” we will celebrate in a few weeks.

Leaving a Eucharistic celebration in the parish of Sainte Trinite in Pirae, Tahiti, a woman came up to me and said that in the name of her ancestors, her family and in her own name she wanted to thank me, as a representative of the Congregation, for the gift of faith. She said that, thanks to the missionaries of the Congregation, they had the immense joy of knowing Christ and belonging to his Church. That woman's gesture, at once simple and solemn, moved me and made me think of how we are bound to all the members of the Congregation from the very foundation. We are joined together across time and space as an evangelizing community, a body consecrated to the proclamation of the risen Christ. The words of that woman renewed my pride in belonging to this family of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary at a moment when I was feeling a bit of confusion caused by an awareness of our limitations, our weaknesses and our sin.

Being entrusted with the responsibility of evangelizing the Pacific islands by the Holy See was, for the Good Father, a sign of God's blessing on the Congregation and a source of great joy. It seems incredible that a religious institute that was so small, so new and so inexperienced was given such a large and risky task. As much as we read and study that page of our history, it's still difficult to grasp the great adventure that hundreds of members of the Congregation embarked upon in these islands so spread out over such a large ocean. In the midst of blunders and mistakes that were surely made, we see a striking witness of faith, generosity and an example of that "apostolic zeal" that the Good Father so wanted us to have. Our missionaries gave of themselves to the end, as we see in Damien.

I believe that we are still a Congregation of "islands", in a positive sense and also in a negative sense. The mission of evangelizing the islands mobilized us as one, gave us a clear model for our work and defined our way of being useful for the Church and humanity. At the same time, our mission in the islands accustomed us to working alone, to exercising power that was unchecked in many ways, to understanding life as an adventure of an individual. It also made us resistant to much that has to do with community life. Now, when there are no longer "islands to

conquer for Christ” and we find ourselves in established and organized local churches, we can succumb to the temptation of exchanging the “island” for a parish or another work to our liking, confusing ourselves with the world of the diocesan clergy and never coming to a renewed sense of our specific contribution to evangelization as SSCC. At times we go along “*each following his own way*” (Is. 53:6); *isolated* from one another to the detriment of our apostolic outreach. However, when we overcome barriers and are able to journey together and come together as a “missionary body” (as fortunately happens in different places and projects), we experience the peace and joy that is so much a part of our vocation.

The “islands” are a renewed call to realize that we are brothers (for it is the one Lord who calls us together) and to go out of ourselves to journey with “*those who are not of this fold*”, with that great part of humanity that is outside or at the margin of the ecclesial circles in which we spend the great part of our time. Could we organize our life together so as to find new ways of encountering so many in the human family who are seeking?

This year as I celebrate Easter in the islands of the Pacific, I ask that the risen Lord continue to entrust us with his mission, that he give us the joy of spreading his Gospel in new lands and that he strengthen the bonds that make us brothers with a common mission.

In the joy of Easter,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Ministry of Adoration

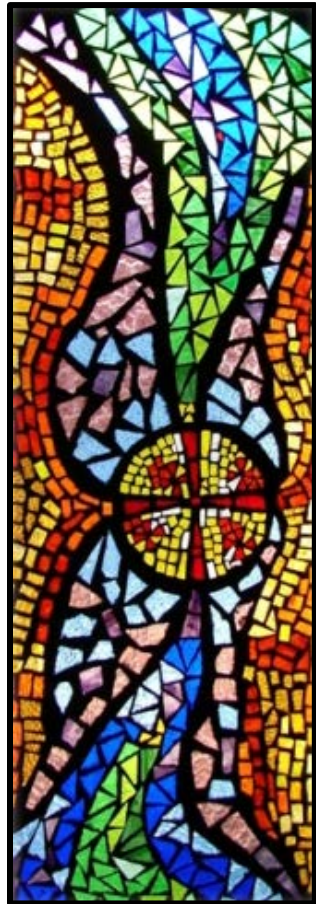
May 13th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 15

We want to make our communities places of prayer and contemplation; homes where the mystery of God, lovingly hidden in the Eucharist, is acknowledged and worshipped. In solidarity with so many of our brothers and sisters in the human family who feel themselves to be spiritual orphans, we desire to offer the warmth of God's love to a civilization which seems not to know its Father.

37th General Chapter (2006)
Our Vocation and Mission No. 34

Stain glass with Eucharistic theme
Fernando León ssc
Community of Concepción (Chile)



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The February edition of the sisters' INFO (INFO No. 2/2008) began with a quotation from their General Chapter in which they spoke of the ministry of adoration as one of the *"dimensions of our charism which unites us, strengthens our sense of belonging and gives us our identity."*

In last month's INFO [Sisters No. 4], Rosa, the Superior General, also spoke of adoration. In recent years the sisters have been reflecting on this ministry of adoration entrusted to our religious family. I think it would be good to take a moment to ask ourselves what is happening in the brothers' branch with regard to the topic.

I do not intend to offer a theological or historical reflection. I believe that there is no doubt that adoration, understood both as a ministry and as a specific exercise, was a constitutive part of the foundation of the Congregation. My question is more practical, what does it mean for us today that the name of our Congregation includes “...and of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar” (Const. No. 1)?

As reference we can take two recent texts of the Congregation that are still in force: the Constitutions and the Thirty-seventh General Chapter. The Constitutions remind us that *Eucharistic adoration is an essential part of the heritage of our Congregation and is reparative mission in the Church* (Const. No. 53). The article says that in adoration we unite ourselves to the intercession of the risen Jesus before the Father and we are urged to commit ourselves more fully to the mission. The Constitutions speak of adoration as “contemplative” and how it impels us to assume a ministry of intercession. (Const. No. 5) All of that leads to *a permanent attitude of adoration* that must be expressed communally (*each community will seek concrete ways to live the adoration*) and personally (*each brother commits himself to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament each day.*) (Const. No. 53.4)

The thirty-seventh General Chapter speaks of *the spiritual wisdom of our religious family* (of which Eucharistic adoration is a part) as *nourishment necessary for renewing enthusiasm for our vocation and mission* (Our Vocation and Mission, No. 5) and tells us that *we seek (Jesus), thirstily and with a contemplative gaze, above all in the Eucharistic celebration and adoration.* (Idem No. 6) It also reminds us of the communal dimension when it says that *we want to make our communities places of prayer and contemplation; homes where the mystery of God, lovingly hidden in the Eucharist, is acknowledged and worshipped.* (Idem No. 34) Speaking specifically of local communities, the Chapter says we want to give priority to *adoration of the Lord present in the Eucharist.* The chapter relates that to the awareness that we are members of one body and the constant call to let our hearts be transformed. (Living our Vocation and Mission, No. 8)

I know that some brothers consider these references to adoration in our official documents as all together too weak. The actual practice of adoration or, to put it simply, the amount of time that brothers spend in prayer before the Eucharist, seems to them quite inadequate. For others, however, just speaking about the topic makes them smile skeptically, as they consider it past history, outdated, something for those movements in the church that are conservative and nostalgic for a bygone era. In spite of everything, between those two extremes, I tend to believe that the majority of brothers are well able to identify with the texts I've quoted and find in them an expression of their daily experience of prayer, as a way of satisfying their thirst for encounter with Christ and as a particular way of offering God's love to the world. Am I mistaken?

What is different about my life because we are the Congregation *of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar*? Let me give a response, one that is simple, brief and incomplete. It changes my daily schedule (because I include a specific time, according to the clock, for prayer before the Eucharist). It changes my way of praying (there is an infinite number of ways of drinking from the spring, but this is ours, at this spring we are refreshed and drenched). It changes my feeling for the brothers (how many times we mean it when we say, "I will remember you before the Lord.") It changes my heart (because the Spirit is at work within us with the Father's love and the fire of the Son's heart, in the light of the Eucharistic mystery and we do not know everything that might cause or where it might lead us...)

The exercise of adoration is not just part of my personal spiritual journey. Nor is it just a communal activity that strengthens communion. It is also a ministry. In other words, it is a service that is mysteriously and hiddenly but certainly "useful," a service confided to us that we do not have the right to deprive the church of. In 1824 the Good Father expressed his sorrow at what he termed "*the negligence in fulfilling one of the principal purposes of our Institute: going to their hour of adoration.*" (Cf. Cahiers de Spiritualité 10, 451) It is a sweet "obligation" which only imposes itself only because we desire to be with the One who loved us

first, offering him the painful and hopeful cry of the world. In his presence we can say, in the words of the song, "You, and without you I am not." You and without You we (the community, the Congregation, humanity) are not. Or as Damien said, without his presence in the Eucharist, we cannot go on, we cannot serve, we cannot survive.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Night Adoration

May 6th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 38

We have established **Perpetual Adoration** in the two chapels of the leprosarium. It is true that it is rather difficult to maintain the continuity of the hours, as illness sometimes prevents the adorers from coming to the church for their half hour. However in the end it is edifying to see them at adoration, at their assigned hour on their bed of pain in their humble shacks. I hope that the brothers and sisters will not be saddened to know that they have imitators even among the lepers and that they will not reject them from among their number.

Letter of Damien to the Superior General, February 4, 1879



Window in the chapel of the novitiate in Chile (the chapel was heavily damaged during the earthquake in February 2010)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This May 10th we celebrate the liturgical feast of Saint Damien de Veuster for the first time. As is our custom here in the Generalate community in Rome, each time there is an important feast of the Congregation, a day or two before we make night adoration, each brother taking an hour. For some of us it is difficult to interrupt a night's sleep, but we are happy with this practice that we have made part of our community PARL.

Night adoration is a tradition related to the "perpetual" character of our adoration, as indicated in the first Constitutions of 1817. For a century and a half, it was a common practice in the whole Congregation: each brother or sister had their assigned hour of night adoration during the week. The sisters maintain the commitment to a weekly hour (Const. No. 43), while among the

brothers the commitment is found for the last time in the Constitutions of 1966 (No. 65) and disappears in the present Constitutions of 1988 which however do maintain the “obligation” of daily Eucharistic adoration by each brother (Const. No. 53,4b). Let us not forget that adoration is an essential part of our mission.

I know that there are brothers who have times of night adoration as part of their personal rhythm of prayer. In some houses, like ours in Rome, night adoration by turns is organized for some special reason on certain occasions. In other places adoration “chains” are set up that assure the presence of someone in adoration before the tabernacle at every moment of the day and night.

Even though it is not an “obligation” (for the brothers) the practice of night adoration has something special about it that can help deepen our way of being with Jesus and of participating in his mystery of redemption.

Night draws us into the prayer of Jesus, who was surprised by the coming of dawn as he prayed to his Father (Mk. 1:35), especially his prayer on that last night in Gethsemane where we hear his invitation to the disciples, *“Remain here and keep watch”* (Mk. 14:34).

Night in the presence of the Eucharist has something of Easter about it: Christ the prisoner, in agony for the suffering of the human family; Christ buried, visiting the tombs of humanity; Christ risen, light that rises in the darkness and overcomes it.

Night enwraps us in silence, the silence we have such need of in order to hear the tiny whispering sound of the Spirit.

At night, when we make adoration each brother taking his turn, our communion is strengthened, nourished by its one true source which is the Eucharistic Lord. The community is like a group of “conspirators” which, in the middle of the night, hidden from the eyes of the world, plot with their Head a “secret strategy” perhaps incomprehensible for many but deeply desired by those who thirst for God. That secret plan (μυστήριον in Greek) is none other

than the one hidden in the heart of Christ: the overflowing love of God that wants to heal, repair, restore, embrace, save, reunite...his wounded and dispersed children.

At night we do not do anything. At night the rhythm of our efforts stops but the decisions of our heart that give direction to our lives mature. At night we recognize *"the source from which we drink so that we can live dangerously."* (Brother Roger of Taizé)

At night appearances fade, the soul is stripped and the secret of the heart is revealed. Night is the time of truth. Alone before the Lord, disguises don't work. *"Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test"* (Mk. 14:38). For that reason night is the time to ask the gift of the Spirit, the only one capable of transforming our hearts and of liberating us from our deception.

At night, the bridegroom is one with the bride. Adoration is not an exercise of individual piety. At adoration we are ministers of the Church-bride. When we abandon ourselves silently in the presence of the Eucharist, we no longer belong to ourselves. We are delegates, sent by a body that is bigger than ourselves. The wedding night is a time of intimacy, covenant and offering. It is a time of joy born of a communion that does not need many words. At night the deepest desire of the soul is liberated, the cry of the bride, *"Come, Lord Jesus!"* (Rev. 22:20)

By day and by night we are called to watch and pray, to remain close to the risen Jesus and to adore him. *"Our whole life is under the sign of the Eucharist,"* and our adoration *"has the sense of constant intercession, the continual presence of the community before the Lord."* (Rule of Life No. 68)

In the Joy of Easter,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

IV

Damien

He Loves Them to the End

July 10th, 2008

Extracts from INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 17

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesús my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead

Paul of Tarsus
Letter to the Philippians 3,7-11



Brothers and Sisters,

The Pope approved the miracle attributed to **Damien** on July 3rd (and not on June 30th as had been announced). With that all the requirements for his **canonization** are complete. We now have to wait for the Holy Father to announce the date of the celebration during an upcoming consistory. We do not yet know when the consistory will be held and we prefer not to speculate. Patience.

What we can do is begin to prepare for the canonization. The General Governments of Brothers and Sisters have chosen a motto to guide and inspire us during this time of preparation:

he loved them to the end

Why this motto? Let me offer some reflections on what led us to choose it:

- It is a quote from the Gospel (Jn. 13:1). The subject is **Jesus** and it indicates the extent of his love as he prepares to enter upon his passion. It begins the account of the Last Supper. It is the moment when he gives the new commandment, when he washes the feet, when he offers the Eucharist. This is what was central to Damien's life and without which he cannot really be appreciated: his faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of his life, and his transformation into the likeness of his Master. Damien, in the Lord's image, is also the subject of the sentence.
- He **loved** them...We are speaking of love. Damien's "holiness" found its source in the love of Christ, in the loving Heart of the Lord. Damien drank from that Heart and also became a channel of that water. God shows his love in the passionate love of Damien. Love does not pass away. To be holy is to love. God is love.
- He loved **them**...In speaking of the love of Jesus, the Gospel refers to "his own who were in the world," to the disciples. In them we get some idea of the fathomless depth of Christ's love for all of humanity. Damien did not love in the abstract. He showed his affection very concretely, serving with everything he had "his own", those on Molokai, his brother and sister lepers, those who were the most abandoned and outcast.
- **To the end.** Love led Jesus to give himself entirely, to let himself be eaten up, giving his life, dying on the cross. God gives himself to us completely in his Son. He keeps nothing for himself. The "end" of Damien's love can be seen throughout his life: beneath the funeral pall at his profession, when he bid farewell to his family and homeland, his offering to go to Molokai, his acceptance of his disease, his death as a child of the Sacred Hearts...Damien paid the disconcerting "price" of charity with his very self. The image of Damien with leprosy is an icon of love, service and faith to the very end, to

the extreme, which marks his whole life with the seal of the "holiness" that the Church is now ready to proclaim.

We are counting on the spiritual resources and creativity of everyone so that, in the light of this motto, we can go much more deeply into the meaning and impact of Damien as gift and challenge for the Congregation, the Church and humanity. When the date of the canonization is announced we will also offer a logo and some prayers. Other materials have already begun to appear on our webpage.

We begin to prepare for Damien's canonization just as **the Pauline Year** opens, inaugurated by the Pope in the basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls on June 28th at first Vespers of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. Allow me to quote some words of Benedict XVI in his homily:

"For us Paul is not a figure of the past whom we remember with veneration. He is also our teacher, an Apostle and herald of Jesus Christ for us too. Thus we are not gathered to reflect on past history, irrevocably behind us. Paul wants to speak to us - today. That is why I chose to establish this special "Pauline Year": in order to listen to him and learn today from him, as our teacher, "the faith and the truth" in which the reasons for unity among Christ's disciples are rooted."

"Who is Paul? His faith is the experience of being loved by Jesus Christ in a very personal way. It is awareness of the fact that Christ did not face death for something anonymous but rather for love of him - of Paul - and that, as the Risen One, he still loves him; in other words, Christ gave himself for him. (...) His faith is not a theory, an opinion about God and the world. His faith is the impact of God's love in his heart. Thus, this same faith was love for Jesus Christ."

Lastly, the Pope recalled the words of Paul just before his death to Timothy: "*with the strength that comes from God bear your share of hardship which the Gospel entails*" and

pointed out that *"The task of proclamation and the call to suffer for Christ's sake are inseparable. (...)The one who desires to avoid suffering, to keep it at bay, keeps life itself and its greatness at bay; he cannot be a servant of truth and thus a servant of faith. (...) The Eucharist - the centre of our Christian being - is founded on Jesus' sacrifice for us; it is born from the suffering of love which culminated in the Cross."* He concluded the homily, *"We live by this love that gives itself. It gives us the courage and strength to suffer with Christ and for him in this world, knowing that in this very way our life becomes great and mature and true."*

I believe that we can say the same of Damien. Damien is also first and foremost a missionary, a preacher of the Gospel. His faith is an experience of love and his commitment to service leads him to immerse himself in suffering and there he grows and matures as a man and as a believer.

For us Damien should not just be a figure from the past or a reason for "congregational pride" giving us occasion to celebrate ourselves or brag about ourselves. No, Damien will be a master for us, someone who teaches us how to be Christians and religious, a challenge to our lack of enthusiasm and generosity, a stimulus to our desire to serve. Missionary dedication, giving of oneself, robust and courageous faith and love for the poor without compromise must not be aspects of some "heroic missionary past" of our Congregation but gifts which we humbly ask for and work with today.

In this time of preparation for the canonization, may Damien challenge us, may Damien disturb us, may Damien renew us, and may Damien awaken us.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Damien De Veuster:
Preparation for Canonization

Rome, October 11th, 2009

March 13th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 24

Dios de misericordia,
God of mercy,
We thank you for Damien,
brother to all,
father to lepers,
child of the Sacred Hearts.

You inspired in him
a passionate love for the life,
health and dignity
of those he found fallen
by the side of the road.

Thank you, for like Jesus
he knew how to love until the end.
Thank you, for like Mary
he knew how to give himself without
reserve.

Thank you Father,
for through Damien
you still inspire holiness
and passion for your kingdom.
Amen.



Dear brothers and sisters,

I am writing to you as I prepare to go to Indonesia where among other things I will participate in the SSCC Asian Mission Seminar. The question of our mission in Asia has a special urgency. We are not so much going to arrive at new concepts in theology or spirituality. Rather we are going to look for concrete ways that our young brothers and sisters can live and work in societies where,

apart from the Philippines, the Christian community is seen as a somewhat alien minority.

The other news is, as you know, we now know the date of Damien's canonization. Much is being done and we are happy with how the preparation is going so far. Considering these two events (the mission seminar and Damien's canonization) we could ask ourselves whether Damien can serve as an inspiration for our mission today in Asia and elsewhere. Recently I was asked that same thing for the next edition of *Apostel* (the magazine of the German province). With the permission of the editors I would like to share with you my attempt at a response.

The impact and meaning of Damien for the Congregation's mission today

I feel myself to be the happiest missionary in the world, wrote Damien in one of his letters from Molokai. Certainly he was referring to a "strange" kind of happiness considering that he was living in very tough conditions and had to endure sometimes bitter conflicts with his companions and superiors (caused by misunderstandings and his stubborn character). Inwardly he struggled with scruples and his awareness of himself as a sinner. Finally he suffered the terrible process of decomposition caused by leprosy, physical decay which would eventually lead to his death. A missionary and a happy one: we will try to appreciate his impact on us by looking more closely at those two words he used to describe his existence.

Damien understood himself as a **missionary**, according to the meaning of "mission" in the Congregation and Church of his time. In his letters he tells us that he drew inspiration from two great missionaries: J.M. Vianney (the Cure of Ars) in his tireless zeal "to save souls" and Saint Francis Xavier in his determination to go to far off lands and make new Christians. The great adventure of the evangelization of the Pacific islands, confided by the Holy See to our Congregation from the time of the Founder, provided the specific place for realizing this heroic sacrificial image of mission as an effort to save the many "pagans" lost at the ends of the

earth. Such a missionary vocation was in keeping with the sending forth at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...”* Mt. 28:19).

Understanding mission in that way, Damien demonstrated a special love for the people he served. He did that first with the Christians in the parishes in Puno and Koala. When he was transferred from one parish to another, he would go so far as to say, *“the separation from my dear Christians was more terrible, more painful for me than when I left my dear parents, for the heartfelt love I felt for my dear kanaka neophytes...”* A short time later that affection would show itself even more strongly with his beloved leprosy patients on Molokai, to whom he gave himself body and soul.

Damien considered himself a **happy** missionary. After a visit to Molokai the writer Charles Warren Stoddard, friend and biographer of Damien, wrote to him: *“I often think of you and your extraordinary life. You have always seemed happy, happier than those who are in the world. You have a right to be so, for no one does a work as noble as yours, and perhaps there is no one who does it in poorer conditions than you.”*

The most direct effect of Damien on the mission of the Congregation has been, and continues to be, the fascination so many of us have for him, to such an extent that many have entered the Congregation inspired by his witness. Surely few, or almost none, of those who were inspired by Damien to become religious have then lived as he did, that is, in such radical service of the poor and abandoned in far off lands. It is also true that nowadays we no longer understand mission as proselytism curiously related to cultural, political or economic colonialism (as it might have been in the nineteenth century). However with all that, Damien continues to inspire mission in the very basic sense already mentioned: a desire to proclaim the Gospel, moving out toward others (faith as more than just inner experience, allowing it to push us out of ourselves), having real love for concrete people (especially for those who suffer) and a deep experience of happiness that nothing can take away. This is the “heart” of who

Damien is and it is there that the Congregation continues to find inspiration for its mission today.

Seen from “outside”, Damien can appear as a giant of humanity in his generous service to the poor and rejected. Thanks to him the world’s attitude to leprosy patients was transformed. The figure of Damien helped many people grow in human values such as solidarity and commitment to justice in favor of the most abandoned of the world.

However, if you really want to know who Damien is, you have to try to get to “his inside”, to the sanctuary of his heart where that extraordinary happiness was conceived, the happiness of a man who was above all else a believer, priest, child of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and missionary of the God of mercy and compassion. As he himself often said, he found the strength needed to continue his mission in the mystery of faith, the Eucharist, and at the feet of his Lord.

Damien’s vitality came from within, from his heart, where God was at work offering us an outstanding image that recalls for us the merciful heart of his Son Jesus.

Even though mission is not understood today according to the “adventurer and baptizer” model of the nineteenth century, if we get to the heart of who Damien is, we can surely enter more deeply into the continuing adventure of generously serving the poorest of the poor and following the same Lord who inspired Damien. Let us ask that we also might experience that immense happiness that no one can take away, that joy that comes from being able to love without conditions and without measure.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Saint Damien De Veuster

May 8th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 26

Through beatifications and canonizations, the Church gives thanks to God for the gift of her children who have known how to respond generously to divine grace honours them and invokes them as intercessors. At the same time, she presents these shining examples for the imitation of all the faithful called by Baptism to holiness, which is a goal proposed to every state of life. In professing Christ, his Person and his doctrine with their lives and in remaining closely united to him, the Saints and Blesseds are as it were a living picture of both aspects of the divine Teacher's perfection.



Benedict XVI to the Postulators of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, December 17, 2007

Statue of Damien
Wareham (USA)

**Letter of the General Superiors
on the occasion
of the upcoming canonization of
Blessed Damien De Veuster ssc**



Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The Congregation is preparing for an exceptional event: the first canonization of one of its sons, Father Damien De Veuster, which will take place October 11th in Rome. All over there are initiatives

being taken to make Damien better known and to prepare to celebrate the Church's recognition of him as a saint. It is right that we rejoice, with a joy rooted in Easter, in the victory of the Risen one over evil, suffering and death. Damien united himself to his Lord in his gift of self. Like Jesus, he loved to the end and now shines with the light of the just in the banquet of God's reign.

We already know all about Damien. As Marcellin Bousquet, Superior General at the time, wrote announcing the death of Damien, *"the fame of this valiant missionary has become so universal that it seems almost useless to speak to you of his life."* And so we are not writing to remind you of what you already know, even though at this time it would be good for all of us to read again his biography, his letters or other writings about him. Damien's life has to be a constant source of mediation and inspiration for us.

We are also aware that Damien is not only "ours." Damien is a universal brother, a model of humanity, apostle of those with leprosy, a hero of charity, an inspiration for anyone wanting to serve the excluded and forgotten, a source of pride for Belgians and Hawaiians, a glory for the whole Church. The power of Damien and his influence in peoples' lives extend far beyond the limits of our Congregation.

Damien was a worthy son of the Sacred Hearts. His religious profession in the Congregation marked his life up to the moment of his death. This letter that we are sending as Superiors General is born of the deep joy that comes from being his brothers and sisters in the same religious family. What unites us to Damien is something very special. This word of ours is meant to be a simple and enthusiastic invitation to prepare ourselves as a Congregation for this exceptional event of the canonization of one who was and always is our brother: Damien of Molokai, priest, missionary and SSCC religious.

There is nothing exceptional in recognizing the greatness of Damien. Since his death 120 years ago, and even during his life, a multitude of men and women have seen in him a masterpiece

of love, service and faith. His life has inspired numberless commitments to suffering humanity and vocations to the consecrated life. We are not discovering Damien just now, though we can always appreciate more who he really is. What is new is the canonization, through which *“the Church gives thanks to God for the gift of her children who have known how to respond generously to divine grace, honors them and invokes them as intercessors. At the same time, she presents these shining examples for the imitation of all the faithful.”*¹

1. The Church gives thanks to God

First we look toward God. “Holiness” is an expression of the marvels that the Lord is accomplishing among his people. The saints are eminent signs of the action of the Spirit of the Risen One in human reality, the prolongation of the mystery of the incarnation that seals the covenant between the divine and the human. The glory of God is manifested in the depth and the dignity of humanity that God has created. Human life comes to fullness in friendship with the Lord.

Damien reveals this mystery with a particular radiance. As in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, in Damien we discover the face of God where people seem to have lost even a human face. The dedication of Damien to those with leprosy and his becoming a leper himself proclaim loudly the infinite dignity of each person and the love of God for his children. For that reason we praise God in his saints, who are reflections of his glory. We praise God in Saint Damien who is his son, the work of his hands, his gift to the Church and the world.

The canonization is not the exaltation of a hero or the giving of an honorary title to a group or an institution, or the mere illustration of a series of values or an ideology. The canonization is first an act of praise to the God of love and mercy, who, even though hidden in the misery of human history, pours forth his

¹ Benedict XVI to the Postulators of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, December 17th, 2007.

compassion upon us by transforming the existence of the saints through the power of his Spirit.

Damien is not “ours”. He belongs to God. He can only really be understood as belonging to the Lord of life who shaped him and made him his own.

Holiness is the work of the Lord. His love is what justifies us. From this perspective, the canonization becomes a confession of hope-filled faith. The love of God is at work among us, as it was active in the life of Damien. The love of God can continue to transform us in spite of our weakness and our shadow side.

According to Brother Joseph Dutton, his faithful companion during his later years, Damien may have had many character defects, but these faults were consumed like straw in the fire of his charity. That fire is the very fire of God, a love strong as death, a fire that even torrential rains cannot extinguish. It is the same fire we see in images of the Heart of Jesus: a pierced and suffering heart at the same time overflowing with passion and life. That was also Damien's heart.

With the canonization, it is not only the Congregation or those who have known Damien and been inspired by him who give thanks to God. It is the whole Church, as the body of Christ that turns to the Father and praises him for Damien. Canonization means that the one who is “blessed” until now is worthy of the veneration of the whole Church. Damien now takes his place in the heart of the Church-Bride in prayer before her Lord.

As a Congregation we experience the joy of being in communion with the universal Church and, on the occasion of the canonization of our brother, we renew our commitment to work for unity and fraternity as Christ prayed to the Father.

2. Honoring Damien

By canonization the Church honors Damien. She publicly and officially recognizes the outstanding value of his life and his work.

During his life and also after his death, Damien was praised and slandered, admired and condemned. In his letters he leaves us a witness of the moral suffering caused by loneliness and misunderstanding, to such a point that he begins to think that he is unworthy of heaven. We could say that canonization now dissipates these doubts and proclaims the deep truth of his existence: this is a man of God, the choices he made and the things he did pleased God and show him forth.

“Our behavior is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the saints did, those who, as “God’s fellow workers”, contributed to the world’s salvation.”²

Damien is one of “God’s fellow workers” who contributes to the redemption of the world. When we honor Damien, we recognize him as a model to imitate and so we make a judgment about what is good and what is not good. All actions are not the same. It is not the same to ignore the suffering of the world as to serve outcasts. It is not the same to focus on my own wellbeing as to sacrifice myself for the happiness of others. It is not the same to ignore the poor and live comfortably as to love those who suffer and live on the margin. It is not the same to remain distant from the unfortunate for fear of contamination as to touch and embrace a leprosy patient. It is not the same to have no interest in God as to seek him with humility and perseverance. It is not the same to preserve one’s life as to give it away through love.

To honor Damien is to admit clearly and categorically that his path is the right one, that what he did is what must be done, and that his genuine and tenacious compassion is what God desires. That is why Damien is great and honoring him is good for the Church and for humanity.

² Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* No. 35.

This way of honoring Damien will always be a source of inspiration for the Congregation. In the light of Damien's life, we should try to give substance to the "big words" that we use in speaking of our life and mission: the proclamation of God's love, reparation, Eucharistic adoration, the Consecration to the Sacred Hearts, the service of the poor... These were not just words for Damien, nor little activities pompously labeled to project a laudable image of himself. The charism of the Congregation was able to shape his entire life because he was able to concretize it in selfless service to his dear leprosy patients on Molokai.

At the end of his life, Damien felt "honored" by two crosses: the decoration given him by Queen Liliuokalani (a public recognition of his devotion and his work) and leprosy (that united him in a special way to the cross of his Lord). From the moment of his ritual encounter with death in religious profession (prostration under the funeral pall), Damien was ready to give his life to the very end. When leprosy brought him one step closer to death, he would say that he was *"the happiest missionary in the world."* Could it be then, that complete happiness really does come from God?

*"His death was really one worthy of a son of the Sacred Hearts; it was the death of a saint."*³

3. Invoking Damien

From the time of his death down to today, many people have confided their prayers and intentions to Damien and have experienced his protection. With the canonization, the whole Church invokes Damien as an intercessor. Through our faith in the risen Christ, victor over death, we trust that those who have suffered and died in the Lord, live and reign with him.

Evidently, we too, brothers and sisters of the Congregation, can invoke Damien and turn to him as our elder brother. In our case,

³ Marcellin Bousquet ssc, Superior General, June 3rd, 1889.

prayer takes the form of fraternal dialogue between members of the same religious family.

Damien is one of those valiant missionaries that left for far off islands to proclaim the Gospel offering the complete gift of their lives. Those missionaries lived frugally, often shared the poor conditions of their Christians, faced all kinds of dangers and were ready to die for their mission. For example, we think of the three brothers who offered to go to Molokai with Damien and so many others like them. And so it is in the Congregation. There are not many who shine like Damien, but the dedication of all and the humble and hidden work of the majority are needed so that we continue to be that good earth where God can make grow the fruit that he desires.

In the Congregation there were and have always been brothers and sisters that are not like Damien. Without looking any further, we think of Pamphile, Damien's brother (blood brother and religious brother), who dedicated his whole life to study and to the regular life of the community, incapable of an apostolic life as hard and exposed as his brother's. With a mixture of humor and reproach, every once in a while Damien would remind him of the dramatic contrast between the two, *"What good is it to envy the doctor's biretta if it would be at the cost of the salvation of the poor souls of the Kanakas?"...Forgive me if my hands are not as white as yours that you only use, I imagine, to turn the pages of books."*

When it comes down to it, the majority of us are more like Pamphile than Damien. Clearly each one of us, with our own way of being a religious, can find our place in the Congregation. We do not all have to be the same. Diversity is necessary and healthy. Whatever our situation, when we invoke Damien, we enter into dialogue with him and we let him challenge us, as if we were other "Pamphiles" receiving the humorous and demanding comments of the missionary who speaks with the liberty of someone who seeks nothing for himself.

What does Damien say to us today? How does he challenge us, his brothers and sisters of the Congregation? What would he think of the consistency of our faith, of the generosity of our dedication, of our love for the poor, of the solidity of our commitment? As the Reverend Hugh Chapman, an Anglican minister who was such a support to him said, a life like Damien's *"silently accuses us of being comfortable and selfish."*

Without a doubt, Damien is a source of pride for the Congregation but he must be much more. Above all his life should be a salutary lesson that shakes us out of our half-heartedness and reawakens enthusiasm for this vocation to which we have been called, a vocation that is rooted in the same things that nourished Damien's vocation. May Damien help us be better.

The SSCC family celebrating

One of the last letters that Damien received, less than a month before his death, was from Honolulu on the occasion of his feast day (Joseph) and the twenty-fifth anniversary of his arrival in Hawaii (March 19th, 1864). It was sent by Sister Judith ssc, who had made the crossing from Europe shortly before Damien in the first group of sisters to arrive in Hawaii 150 years ago this year. She sent greetings from Sister Marie Laurence and the other sisters who had made the voyage with him in 1864. Even though, according to the custom at the time, Damien did not keep much contact with the SSCC sisters (who helped him on various occasions sending supplies for the mission) this final word of friendship from a sister, companion on the long voyage to the islands, reminds us in a profound way of the bonds of affection which always must exist between the two branches of the Congregation.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us rejoice at the upcoming canonization of Damien. This invitation extends especially to the members of the Secular Branch and to everyone who lives their faith inspired by the SSCC charism, the source and nourishment of Damien's commitment. Let us give thanks to God and let us

share our joy with those among whom we live. It is the joy of the whole Church. It is the joy of the human family, thirsting for goodness, compassion and justice. Like Jesus, Damien went through life doing good. Let us ask him that that might also be our path to holiness.

To the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, honor and glory.

Rosa M^a Ferreiro ssc
Superior General

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Canonization of Saint Damien of Molokai

October 14th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 31



Canonization of Saint Damien at Saint Peter's Basilica
Vatican, October 11th, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Before leaving for once more to visit different parts of the Congregation, I want to send you a short word now that we have just finished the various celebrations of the canonization of our brother, Saint Damien.

More than 400 brothers (258) and sisters (160) came together in Rome from all 29 countries where the Congregation is present. There were also thousands of pilgrims, many part of pilgrimages organized by the Congregation. They were three powerful days of celebration, thanksgiving, prayer and just being together as brothers and sisters.

On Saturday the 10th of October 2009, at 7:00 in the evening, we had a prayer vigil in the basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. We had prepared booklets for 3,000 but there were many more present. The Church was filled, with people in both side naves and even in the sanctuary. In spite of such a large crowd, there was a great atmosphere of prayer. We recalled Damien with

readings from his letters and some symbols related to his life. Then the Blessed Sacrament was exposed and there was a time of Eucharistic Adoration, what Damien tells us was the source of his strength. The Archbishop of Seville, Cardinal Carolos Amigo, was with us for part of the vigil and spoke to us before leaving.

On Sunday, the 11th of October, there was the canonization. At the last minute Vatican organizers changed the program, seemingly for fear of rain, and moved the celebration inside Saint Peter's basilica. Outside on the square there were 40,000 pilgrims, who had to follow the ceremony on large screens. Most were not even able to receive communion. The change was very unfortunate, because as a result the celebration was left lacking. However, in the end, the Pope officially inscribed the five candidates in the book of the Saints and declared that they should be honored as such by the universal Church. It was a moment of great joy and of communion with all the Church and the Saints.

After the celebration in Saint Peter's, we had dinner at the Hotel Ergife for some 750 guests. It brought together, brothers and sisters, members of the Secular Branch, friends of the Congregation, bishops and cardinals, religious of other congregation close to us, persons associated with Damien from various groups etc.

We ended the celebrations on Monday, the 12th of October, with a Mass of Thanksgiving in the basilica of Saint John Lateran. Presiding was Cardinal Daneels of Malines-Brussels, Belgium. At the end of the Mass Frans Gorissen ssc, Provincial of Flanders, presented a relic of Damien to Bishop Larry Silva of Honolulu. It will be enshrined in Our Lady of Peace Cathedral there.

There were also other events and celebrations in Rome organized by various groups. Given the numbers participating, ones that stand out were the celebration and prayer vigil for more than a thousand young people from the Congregation's schools in Spain and the Eucharist that the pilgrims from Hawaii (more than 500 including some Hansen's disease patients from

Molokai) celebrated with their bishop on Monday evening in the basilica of Saint Paul outside the Walls.

Most of the brothers who came for the canonization were with pilgrimage groups and stayed in hotels and guest houses around town. However our Generalate also welcomed more than thirty brothers from four continents. It was a beautiful experience of brotherhood and SSCC family.

I will not go into more details about the three days. We know that throughout the Congregation brothers and sisters prepared for and celebrated the canonization in many ways. In the coming days there will be various kinds of thanksgiving celebrations in various places. Congratulations and thanks to everyone. We really have reason to celebrate, while remembering that Damien also challenges us to be converted and to grow in holiness.

I would like to finish with a short and incomplete word of thanks. Thanks to all the brothers and sisters that contributed in any way to preparing the celebration, here or in the various provinces and communities in different parts of the world. Thanks to all our friends who in one way or another have made Damien known and loved: members of the Secular Branch, media professionals, choirs and musicians, artists, travel and event coordinators, pilgrims etc. Thanks to the Generalate community in Rome, who with great talent and generosity welcomed visitors, took care of the many practical details and prepared the liturgies.

And very special thanks, in the name of the whole Congregation, to those who have given so much to advance the cause of Damien. I am thinking especially of the former postulators, Angel Lucas and Emilio Vega, who were with us in Rome during these days. I want to remember also Bruno Benati, who died last year just at the very time that the miracle for Damien's canonization was approved. I think of the former Superiors General, Pat Bradley and Enrique Losada who were also able to be with us. And Alfred Bell, our present Postulator General, who did so much to bring to conclusion the canonization process and who saw to the infinite number of details involved in the celebrations we have just had. Thanks from the bottom of my heart.

After my letter you will find the text of my meditation during adoration of the vigil on Saturday evening.

May Saint Damien intercede for his Congregation and may the example of his faith and his profound love for the excluded inspire us and help us be converted so as to better serve as God would want.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

MEDITATION BEFORE THE EUCHARIST

Vigil of prayer

Santa Maria sopra Minerva, October 10th, 2009

Lord, during this evening of vigil and prayer, contemplating the sacrament of your merciful and sacrificial love, we give you thanks.

We thank you, crucified Jesus, because you have borne our suffering and our pain. Because your wounds have healed us. Because you carry us and justify all, the great multitude, all of humanity.

We give you thanks for Damien. In him you created a masterpiece of the Spirit. Damien, who exposed his own life to death, who chose his friends from among the most abandoned and who was able to love to the very end. And all of that, for you, for your Gospel of mad unbounded love.

Thank you, risen Christ, conqueror of death, reward of all who hope in you. Thank you because Damien is not just a “famous dead man,” or a hero to be admired from the past. No, Damien is alive with your life, and now more than ever he is part of the

prayer of the Church, that hopeful and pleading prayer that ceaselessly asks for the coming among us of your Reign, Reign of peace and justice, Reign of life and truth.

Thank you, Jesus, for the strange happiness that inundated Damien's heart. The happiness of a free man who claimed nothing for himself. The happiness that no pain, no sickness, no disdain, no poverty, not even death could take away. The happiness of the sinner that knows he is loved and forgiven. The happiness of one who loves with profound tenderness those who can give nothing in return. The happiness of the missionary who speaks of you, who awakens in others thirst for your love, who consoles them with the balm of your grace. The happiness of one whose faults and failings are consumed in the burning fire of love and service. Thank you, Christ, merciful friend, for you did not leave Damien alone but led him by the hand right to the very end. Only from you, Lord, comes true joy and plenteous redemption.

Lord, look upon us gathered before you to adore you. Look at our littleness and our slowness and give us your joy. We are many and tomorrow we will be more. We are from different places, of different races and cultures. We are a small sample of beautiful suffering humanity, brothers and sisters but still divided, united but also with conflicts. What a joy it is to call one another brothers and sisters! But how we also make one another suffer with our pride, our indifference, our dark side, our hatred! How much sorrow and misery there is in this world! How terrible is the anguished cry of innumerable little ones of the world, the despised, massacred, outcast, their basic human dignity trampled on...! Teach us how to love as Damien loved. To look at one another with goodness of heart. To overcome barriers as Damien did, barriers of distance, race, religion, language, repulsion, fear, resentment...To freely commit ourselves, without always thinking of our security. Help us to love as you loved.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your wounded, loving redeeming heart. Thank you for the heart of Mary, obedient, disciple, mother. Thank you for these Sacred Hearts that made Damien a universal brother, model of humanity, apostle of those afflicted with leprosy, hero of charity, inspiration for every human being called

to serve the outcast and forgotten, glory of the whole Church, reflection of the loving holiness of God among us.

You, who passed through the world doing good, make fruitful our joy so that it might bear the fruit of goodness, justice and compassion to the glory of God the Father.

A Year After the Canonization...

October 6th, 2010
INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 42



Ceramics on the wall
Colegio Recoleta, Lima (Peru)

It's now been a year since the canonization of Saint Damien de Veuster. The date coincides with the 150th anniversary of Damien's religious profession on October 7th, 1860. We can't forget that Damien, who is the "universal brother," is our brother in a special way precisely because of that profession, which unites us to one another and to him in the same religious community, in one family sharing one charism.

Over the course of this last year Damien has been celebrated in many ways throughout the Congregation. There have been gatherings, publications, liturgies, symposia, works of art, projects with the poor etc. From different perspectives, we continue to try to understand this extraordinary man more deeply.

Damien is a person who is unique and unrepeatable. What he did was exceptional and no one, or very few, will have a similar adventure in their lives. Nor is Damien a "model" in all aspects of his life. For example, Damien, much to his regret, was not able to experience community life to the extent that we see it as

necessary today. However, nothing can stop us from taking Damien as inspiration or from nourishing ourselves at the same sources where he was fed.

Damien's commitment was fruit of his robust constitution (physical, moral and religious) and of the spirituality in which he was formed and which he lived as a religious of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Damien is not our "founder." It was not he who received the gift of the Spirit that gave birth to our religious family. But Damien is an outstanding example of what that charism can produce in terms of the radical following of Christ, total commitment in love and human fullness. So for us, Damien's brothers and sisters in the Congregation, this saint is both a great source of pride and a powerful challenge. We can be proud that God was able to model a man of such evangelical strength in our religious family. Damien is a challenge because he denounces our lethargy, comfort and mediocrity, aware that our charism calls us to love and give life just as he did.

For that reason, it would be good to ask ourselves about the *consequences* of the great celebration last year. Where do we see the influence of Damien in our Congregation today? What commitments does his canonization imply for the future? Having Damien as part of the family and his being a "saint" cannot leave us indifferent. Looking at the present and future of the Congregation, I can identify at least four dimensions in which the figure of Damien might give a new impetus to our commitment:

1. Turn our eyes toward Jesus

It is impossible to understand Damien without appreciating his deep friendship with his Lord. He felt the closeness of Christ in a particular way in the Eucharistic celebration and Adoration. Without that constant presence at his side, his life would have been unbearable, as he said so many times. In reality, Damien was not a superhuman hero or someone working with the poor from some deep sense of philanthropy. What spurred Damien on was his loving relationship with Jesus and his faith in him. That was his secret.

The Congregation invites all its members to do the same: to center our lives in Christ and to unite ourselves with him constantly in the Eucharist and Adoration. This inner process, which leads us to the mystery of God, is the key to our identity and our vitality.

After his time in the grain loft and enjoying a particular intimacy with the Lord in the Eucharist there, the Good Father went forth clearly disposed to give his life and to face death. Damien drank from that same source and understood the “dangerous” call of the Lord, *“The one who wants to save his life will lose it.”*

Can we turn our gaze to the One who first seeks us and who, with his undreamed of love, frees us so that we can give more of ourselves?

2. Priest Missionary

That was how Damien signed most of his letters. He appended to his name, what he thought identified him the most: priest missionary.

Damien understood himself as someone sent by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel by preaching, the sacraments and the attentive personal care of his faithful. He did not live for himself, nor did he measure the importance of things by the personal gratification they gave. What motivated his work was the conviction that people need Christ, that Christ needs to be brought close to his brothers and sisters and that the Lord was counting on him to build that bridge between God and humanity. In that way, Damien is a shining example of the kind of “zeal” that the Good Father spoke of. The founder was appalled at the thought of religious being lazy and self-centered, concerned for their own likes and needs.

The male branch of the Congregation is mostly formed by priests given to pastoral work in parishes, schools and other forms of apostolate. There is no doubt that the exercise of the ordained

ministry allows us to appreciate the heart of Damien in a special way. For their part, the lay brothers, the sisters, members of the secular branch and the many laity inspired by the charism also commit themselves in different ways in the pastoral ministry of the Church. This pastoral commitment, often silent, hidden and repetitive, if done with love and dedication, is one of the principal ways in which we follow in the footsteps of Damien.

Can we accompany people on their inner journey in a more effective way? Are we capable of encountering those for whom God seems strange and distant? Are we able to offer the fire that Jesus enkindles in us humbly, respectfully but also clearly?

3. Apostle of those suffering from leprosy

At different moments of his life, Damien opted rapidly and decidedly for the most distant, the most difficult and the most abandoned. He did not stay in Europe but went to the islands of the Pacific. He did not stay in his first parish they gave him on the big island of Hawaii but offered to take the place of another priest in a bigger and more demanding parish. He did not become part of a rotating group of priests who would visit Molokai but decided to stay there forever with his sick.

We have to acknowledge that this impulse toward the most abandoned is not necessarily the decisive criteria for the choices we make as a Congregation. There are other criteria that we also weigh in our decisions, such as staying in places with a certain tradition, the pastoral needs of the diocese or our possibilities in persons and resources.

Certainly in everything we do, even in pastoral work in areas that are rather quiet and comfortable, we try to sow seeds of a world that is more united, just and compassionate. But there is no doubt that where we are closer to the legacy of Damien is where we are really able to live alongside the most abandoned and

work with the little forgotten ones of the earth. Thanks be to God, there are some places in the Congregation where this is happening. However, if we let Damien challenge us, we have to ask ourselves:

could we be closer to the poor and abandoned? Don't we have to take bigger risks, as individuals, communities and as an institution so as to be able to live more poorly and to serve more decidedly the least of this world?

4. To know Damien

We have to continue to get to know Damien better and to let others know about him. My experience and that of others confirms that when people come in contact with Damien good things happen. You don't need a lot of theology or long explanations to understand this saint. He easily impacts the hearts of believers and non believers as well. Damien just has to be known. His story awakens a generous impulse which often lies dormant in the depth of many hearts. His life makes us better people.

We have to be careful not to use Damien as a flag to show our national or group pride. He is not a medal that we wear on our lapel as a people, Church or Congregation. Damien is not "ours." In fact Damien really does not belong to anyone. Damien belongs to God. That's what his canonization was all about.

If we use Damien in our vocational promotion, we have to avoid reducing him to "a marketing tool" to attract the young. Damien is first of all a challenge for ourselves. He calls us to be zealous missionaries and adorers in spirit and in truth. Only if Damien inspires us in our living of our SSCC vocation, can we honestly speak of him when inviting young people to live their Christian commitment in our religious family.

And so we have to present Damien with pride and with humility, with joy and with a certain fear. It's as if we were speaking of an older brother who has gone before us on a journey. If we bravely decide to join him, it's going to disrupt our life making the whole thing even more daring.

Finally, in order to really know Damien we have to get a glimpse of what went on inside him and try to retrace the spiritual journey that made him consider himself to be *the happiest missionary in the world*. Through that inner action, the Spirit of God realized in Damien a true masterpiece of grace and humanity. To know Damien will also be an invitation to go more deeply into our own spiritual journey, there where God is continually molding us.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

V

Liturgical Seasons

The Crucified Life

March 5th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 47

We are children of the cross and, in all humility and strength; we aspire to be where our Lord is. (Jn. 12:26) The contemplation of the humanity of Christ, of the body of the crucified, of his pierced heart, is our spirituality's point of departure.

37th General Chapter, 2006
Our vocation and mission, No. 8

Farewell to Sister Cécile Duffey ssc who was leaving Africa because of illness, after more than 40 years in Congo. Kinshasa (RDC), February 24, 2011



You will receive this issue of INFO right around the beginning of Lent. During this liturgical season, the call of Jesus resounds in a special way, *"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."* (Mark 8:34) We journey toward the Pascal mystery, at the center of which is the figure of Christ crucified. He is the Lord that we desire to follow.

From its very beginning, the spiritual tradition of our Congregation has included language and practices whose purpose was *the imitation "of the crucified life of Our Savior"* (as the Preliminary Chapter of 1817 says). Not long ago, a group of brothers, who work in the initial formation of our candidates, were lamenting the fact that this traditional language is almost never used any more. Expressions like mortification, renunciation, sacrifice, immolation, spirit of victim...have fallen into oblivion because they are associated with a spirituality that is individualist, perfectionist, focused on suffering as a way of bargaining with God, repressive

of the healthy desire for personal fulfillment, puritan and masochistic.

Nowadays we prefer to speak about following Jesus in a more “positive” way. We say that the Gospel and our religious vocation help us to be happy and to fulfill ourselves as persons, that they develop human values of solidarity and justice, that they create a happy and family-like atmosphere and that they contribute to building a better world. I hope that is all true but it is not “the whole truth.”

What I want to ask here is whether there is not also **“truth” to be found in our traditional language** about *the crucified life*, a “truth” without which that other language that I just mentioned might just be a way of making the Gospel more palatable, adapting it to a mentality that considers it an inalienable right to live a life that is pleasant and autonomous, a life free of serious conflicts and with an acceptable level of comfort.

A similar question had already been raised in the General Chapter of 1874. Father Euthyme Rouchouze, third Superior General (1853-1869), had defined *the spirit of victim, sacrifice and immolation* as an element proper and essential to the very soul of the Congregation. In the Chapter of 1874, some protested saying that the characteristic note of the Congregation was not that, but what they called “pleasant simplicity” (*aimable simplicité*), which would be similar to what we understand today as the family spirit and that simple, pleasant and welcoming style that characterizes our relationships with other people as well as our way of understanding the relationship with God.

Father Marcellin Bousquet (4th Superior General, 1869-1911) resolved the polemic affirming that “today as in the past, the spirit of sacrifice and immolation is and remains the essential principle, the raison d’être and the soul of the religious body to which we belong.” Was Bousquet exaggerating? What did he mean by insisting on this language of *the crucified life*?

The spirit of victim and of immolation are expressions taken from the liturgy of sacrifice. Christians do not understand sacrificial language in the ancient manner (that associated with the cult of the Jerusalem temple) but in light of the true sacrifice of Jesus, as

explained in the letter to the Hebrews. Jesus offered himself out of love, obeying the will of the Father to the very end, for the good of all. That “sacrifice” put an end to the sacrifices proper to an exterior cult and a privileged class of clergy. In short, both are false. So, to speak of *sacrifice, victim or immolation* is a way of remembering that our vocation calls us to give ourselves completely – as did Jesus – both in our important life choices as well as in our everyday ones. We do that without compromise, with courage like that of the Good Father when he offered himself at the foot of the oak tree as he left the *Motte*, even if that meant death.

This willingness to offer ourselves, to be able to love until it hurts, is essential for our SSCC religious life. Father d’Elbée (6th Superior General, 1938-1958) said **“there is a kind of loving union that is only achieved in shared suffering.”** The loving contemplation of Jesus crucified makes us desire to be with him, to share his gift of self, to taste his suffering, to know his passion, to imitate his poor life. Being a brother to the poor also makes us want to be close to them, to share their life, their hopes, to endure suffering with them and to renounce the things that create walls between ourselves and them. So, why *“a spirit of immolation and victim”*? For love of Christ and the poor, for the communion of love that nourishes faith in the Father of all. What makes us “better”, as in the case of Damien, is giving our life and accepting the burdens that are part of loving. Preserving our life for ourselves is dehumanizing.

Concretely, *the imitation of the Lord's crucified life* asks that we really prefer what is simplest, poorest, most austere and most risky and that we renounce what is most comfortable, pleasant, secure and showy...when what is at stake is love for Jesus and the poorest of the poor. To use an image from Ronaldo Muñoz ssc (died in 2009), it would be strange that when the fruit basket comes around the religious always take the best fruit...

This does not mean seeking suffering for suffering's sake, but accepting it peacefully and courageously when it comes our way as a consequence of our commitment to serve and to love. Jesus was offered the chance to escape the cross through success, comfort and power (we read that in the Gospel account of the

temptations). Jesus said “no”, and he gave himself freely to the Father’s will. Considering the life and death of our Master, we should not be surprised that our life also includes suffering and contradiction. It would be stranger if the contrary were true. The cross is the “price” of love.

The cross and the heart of Jesus are inseparable. The glorious Christ continues to carry the marks of his passion. His heart remains pierced forever. The same occurs in the Eucharist, which is not only the recreation of the Last Supper (a fraternal get-together in a spirit of “pleasant simplicity”) but above all the memorial of the Paschal event, proclamation of the death on the cross and communion with the body broken and offered.

There is no opposition between our SSCC “pleasant simplicity” and our equally SSCC *imitation of the crucified life of the Lord*. We need both to build our communion and to discern more clearly our vocation of service to the world in the Church. Fortunately, at the present moment we have a heightened awareness of the importance of cordiality, sympathy and kindness in our style of ministry. However, we must not forget that **the cross of Christ, which is paradoxically the source of true happiness and true redemption, must be at the center of our life**. This centrality of the cross calls us to conversion, which must be evident in our concrete manner of living and in the positions we adopt in regard to life’s conflicts, as shocking as that may be even for the people who are fond of us.

We need brothers formed in this *crucified life*, who are capable of making lasting radical choices precisely because of that. Such brothers help us open our eyes and flee the temptation to become well established ecclesiastics, strangers to the scandal of the cross (is it even worth living like that?) Let no one deceive themselves, to renew the radical character of our life, there is no other way than that of complete self-gift, *immolation*.

It’s not that we are going to be good followers of the Crucified by dint of our own effort. Not at all. All is grace but we can help one another to enter into “the inner suffering of the heart of Jesus” (according to the invitation of the Good Mother) and the commitment that entails. As a provincial said recently in a

profession homily: *we will certainly not always be consistent in everything we do, but at least we can be authentic in what we desire and how we seek to live.*

May you have a fruitful Lent.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Death of the Good Father : Easter Time

April 4th, 2007

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 2

Jesus' attitudes, choices and works led him to mortal conflict which culminated in the cross. Because of that, we are children of the cross (BP) and, in all humility and strength, we aspire to be where our Lord is. (Jn. 12:26) The contemplation of the humanity of Christ, of the body of the crucified, of his pierced heart, is our spirituality's point of departure.

37th General Chapter
Our Vocation and Mission No. 8



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Good Father died on Easter Monday. A week before that, sensing that death was near, he announced that he would not live to see Easter (*"certainly we will not be all here at Easter."*)

From all accounts we know that in the days before his death he had no problem in expressing clearly the concern he experienced given the fragility of his religious family. *"I think of the Congregation and who could be my successor: but I don't see anyone among you who could replace me."* And at another point: *"I am afraid that when I am no longer here, they will not love one another."*

With his critical eye he preferred to see things as they were, without deceiving himself. He recognized a wound at the very heart of the work to which he had dedicated his life: communion among the brothers and sisters and their ability to witness to God's love.

Nevertheless, his clarity concerning the poverty of the Congregation did not lead him to become bitter or disappointed but it made him emphasize all the more the need for mercy. Sister Adealia, who kept the record of his final days, writes: *"in his preaching the Good Father always was rather severe and we found that disturbing and upsetting; however in his last sermons he only spoke to us of mercy and the grace of God."* Before closing his eyes forever the Good Father spoke his last words to the Mother General, Sister Françoise de Viart *"Take my place with my dear family, love my children as much as I loved them."*

Clarity and mercy. **A critical eye and compassion.** We see the same in Jesus in the readings of these last days: fully aware of his conflict with the Jews, the hatred of his enemies, the betrayal of his friends, the power of darkness...but more than ever overflowing with love and mercy: *"Love one another as I have loved you, this is my body, forgive one another..."* This is Easter. This is the mystery of our redemption. When we look at the one they have pierced, we come face to face with evil at its cruelest. There is no avoiding it. We are asked to look at the one from whom all turn their faces. It's a strange request, like the one to the Israelites to raise their eyes and look at the serpent, the very thing that had poisoned them. Yes, look at the pierced one, look at the cross; for it is there we encounter the unsettling mercy of God, the only reason for our hope.

This is also our charism, a task for the Congregation today: to look clearly at the world's evil and our own evil, without dressing it up or denying it. But not so that we become bitter and discouraged but to do so with the compassion and mercy that makes all things new, knowing that we are redeemed by a Love greater than ourselves, a Love that forgives and reconciles us. This is Easter.

Happy Easter to all.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

The Three Gardens

May 2nd, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 49

Our origin, our identity and our hope are in Jesus Christ. Like all of the rest of the church, we too are fruit of that grain that dies... What we are has its center in the consecration to his heart, pierced and open on the cross, which is the revelation of the undreamed of gratuitous love of God.

37th General Chapter, 2006
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 6



It is the Easter season. The grain of wheat has died, been buried and borne abundant fruit. The one with the heart pierced and open on the cross is alive and comes to meet us. We, like the Greeks (Jn. 12:20-24) also want to see Jesus, to know him, to be touched by him and the power of his resurrection.

In the Bible, the image of the garden is used to speak of love, sorrow, of Easter. We find a garden at the creation of the first human couple in Genesis, in the play of the lovers in the Song of Songs, in the visions of Isaiah, at the agony in Gethsemane, at the sepulcher of Jesus, at the encounter of Mary Magdalene and the Risen One on the first day of the week...

An ancient homily for Holy Saturday, which we read at the Office of Readings on that day, tells of how Jesus descends into hell,

takes Adam by the hand to lead him out and says to him, *"For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden and I was crucified in a garden."*

Pat Bradley, in his letter on *Continual Conversion* (p. 51) speaking of prayer and our need to know Jesus intimately says,

"Unless we have walked in the garden [Genesis] with Him in the cool of the evening, unless we have watched and prayed with Him in that other garden [Gethsemane], unless we have cried with Him in our moments of feeling abandoned [on the cross], what Good News can we bring to our fellow men and women, especially to those who do not believe and feel abandoned?...We must be men and women who have experienced Christ. He must be doing for us what we claim He can do for others."

Consecrated to the heart of Jesus, our joy and our sustenance come from this experience of Christ, as mysterious, evasive and hidden as it might seem to us.

During this season of Easter, I pray that you enjoy the company of the Lord, at least in these three gardens:

1. *The garden where we walk with him in the cool of the evening*, the time to speak with the Lord as with a friend. It is a free moment, to enjoy his loving presence that banishes the fear of solitude and lets us know that we are loved. It is a place of trust, where we can be naked, without masks or disguises, free and redeemed.
2. *The garden of olives*, where we recognize that the Lord has gone before us in suffering, anguish and sorrow. When the drama of suffering humanity, of evil that seems all-powerful and of our own breaking heart becomes overwhelming, Jesus is present and his passion becomes balm and consolation.
3. *The garden of Easter morning*, so that like Mary Magdalene, in the midst of our tears we still know that we

are called by name and sent to our brothers and sisters. In that garden, the Risen One raises us from our hopelessness and entrusts us with the faith and joy of others.

In the joy of Easter,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

EASTER

I Will Live for the Lord

April 5th, 2012

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 59



Painting by Antoine Knibiehly ssc
Generalate (Rome)

All who sleep on the earth
will bow down before God;
all who have gone down
into the dust
will kneel in homage.
And I will live for the Lord;
my descendants will serve you
The generation to come
will be told of the Lord,
that they may proclaim
to a people yet unborn
the deliverance
you have brought.

Psalm 22:30-32

Psalm 22 (21) takes us by the hand as we celebrate the paschal mystery.

It begins with the cry of Good Friday, *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"* This is the cry from the cross, the cry of Jesus, our brother in his fragility and anguish. It is the Son's loving cry to the Father. The Son knows that, *"The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone"* (Jn. 8:29) and for that reason he continues to address the Father with love even when he seems to be most absent, when he could say *"a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet... they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots."* (Psalm 22:17,19)

During Easter, our gaze turns to the pierced body of Jesus. *"They will look upon him whom they have pierced."* We are children of the cross, as the Good Father would say. Love and redemption are revealed on the cross, a symbol of infamy and hatred; for on the cross the heart of Christ is opened, giving himself to the very end. We must look at the cross as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent, recognizing in evil (the poisonous serpent, the cross) the source of our healing. Love transfigures everything.

"But you, Lord, do not stay far off; my strength, come quickly to help me." (Psalm 22:20)

Psalm 22 ends with the song of the Risen One, *"And I will live for the Lord"* and the announcement of the birth of the missionary Church, *"my descendants will serve you. The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought."* (Psalm 22:31-32) The grain of wheat has died and so it does not remain alone but bears much fruit.

Our thirty-seventh General Chapter said:

"Jesus did not remain alone. The fruit of his Pasch is the community of believers, his Body in the world. We are a religious family within the People of God. If we are together it is because we are branches on the vine, ears of this grain of wheat. 'And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.' (Jn. 12:32) The cross of Christ shows the strength of his resurrection, which breaks down barriers and makes us brothers. We are a Congregation because he has drawn us to himself. This truth of faith makes us look at one another with goodness of heart, thankful for the gift of each brother, without defenses or prejudices, in the freedom that comes from knowing that we have not chosen one another but that we have been called together by the Lord." (Our Vocation and Mission, 13)

The very last words of Psalm 22 are *"the deliverance you have brought."* Easter is the action of God, who makes all things new, who raises the needy from the dust and from the ash heap lifts

up the poor, who chooses the lowly and despised of the world, whose mercy is forever and whose love is stronger than death.

Remember how the Good Father experienced the power of God's providence, which filled him with confidence and allowed him to risk his life for the Gospel, ready to suffer and even to die if necessary. There is nothing more liberating than being called by someone who loves you to give yourself to something that does not belong to you. Juan Vicente Gonzalez says that the Good Father "never considered himself the proprietor of his community, but rather its humble servant. His clandestine congregation, which had to avoid any exterior sign of its presence, was always for him *l'Œuvre de Dieu* (the work of God). He never thought that his vocation as a founder made his personal ideas the expression of *God's will*. On the contrary, the need *to do what God wanted* made him always open to God's inspirations."¹

At the heart of Easter: bringing it all together, prolonging it, offering it is the Eucharist. The meal Thursday evening, when we are called "friends," the bread broken and shared on the way to Emmaus, when hearts were burning within and eyes were opened, the morning meal on the lakeshore, the long awaited meal when tears will be wiped away. "*The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the Lord will offer praise.*" (Psalm 22:27) The Eucharist is Jesus present- mysteriously close and hidden- and he continues to tell us, "*Remain here and keep watch with me.*" (Mt. 26:38)

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish you a very happy Easter. It is true; Christ has risen and has gone before us into Galilee.

In the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

¹ Juan Vicente González ssc, *Servidor del amor*, 1990, p. 472.

The Two Names of the Child

January 11th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 11

Indeed the world is hungry for the message of hope that the Gospel brings. Even in countries as highly developed as yours (Japan), many are discovering that economic success and advanced technology are not sufficient in themselves to bring fulfillment to the human heart. Anyone who does not know God "is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life" (*Spe Salvi*, 27)...

The message of hope that the Gospel brings can truly touch hearts and minds, leading to greater confidence in the future, greater love and respect for life, increasing openness towards the stranger and the sojourner in your midst. "The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life" (*Spe Salvi*, 2).

Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Japan on their "AD LIMINA" visit 15 December 2007



Our Lady of the Philippines
Caloy Gabuco, 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing this letter during the canonical visit of Japan and the Philippines. The visit coincides with the liturgical season of **Christmas**. The whole mystery of faith sustains and nourishes the spirit of our Congregation. How could it be otherwise? After all, "*in Jesus we find everything*" (BP) and everything that we are is born of Jesus. "*That is our rule.*" However we look at it, I believe it can be said that the mysteries we celebrate at Christmas speak in a special way to our family's identity: the profound mercy of God manifested in the Incarnation, the remembrance of the "birth" of

the Institute on Christmas eve, the Mother and Son intimately one, the adoration of the Magi...

The civil year begins with the solemnity of **Mary, the Mother of God**. Mary is the virgin-mother; a feminine contradiction that speaks to us of Jesus, the child born of her womb. For this child comes entirely from his mother, from our flesh, from our humanity, but he also comes entirely from God.

The Gospel for January 1 (Lk. 2:16-21) tells us that everyone was speaking of the child, while Mary "*kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*" The mother welcomes in her heart the one she had welcomed and shaped in her flesh. Mary is the culmination of the nuptials of word and flesh, of faith and body, of humanity and God. The celebration of the mystery of the Mother of God moves us to wonder and grateful contemplation and also invites us to overcome our "inner divorces," to close the gap between how we speak and act, to heal the rupture between what we do and what we would like to really believe. Or to put it more theologically, as does the recent encyclical *Spe Salvi*, the mystery is an invitation to make our faith not only "informative" (ideas to preach or discuss) but also "performative" (something that changes our life).

The Gospel text also says that "the shepherds made known what they had been told of the child." The shepherds speak of the child when they see him with Mary and Joseph. They come to know the child "with his family," in the arms of his mother. Together with the icon of the "Pieta" (Mary holding in her arms the dead body of Jesus crucified), the other great icon of the Sacred Hearts is Mary with the Child.

The reading for the feast ends with reference to the circumcision. "He was named *Jesus*." In the text of Matthew, which we hear a few days before Christmas (Mt. 1:18-24), we are told that **the child has a double name**. The angel tells Joseph that the child will be called *Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins. Strangely the explanation that follows refers to the meaning of a different name: *Emmanuel*, God with us. Two names that form just one. "Jesus" is the name of a function, Savior, which

answers the question, “what is the child for?” “Emmanuel” is the name of a presence that does not answer any question or perhaps “who is the child?” Jesus saves because he is God with us. God, who is love, can only be with us saving us.

Might we not also have “two names” as religious? The child’s two names make me think of the tension between community life and apostolate referred to in the Constitutions (nn. 40-43) and in the call of the last [37th] General Chapter to remember that “*the principal agent of our mission and of our formation is the local community.*” Some brothers protest that life in a local community is an impediment to apostolic work, to the service of the people or to the personal autonomy needed in our work. The apostolate would be our name for mission, our “*Jesus,*” our way of contributing to *salvation*. Then there are many who only see the “sacrifice” involved in living with others in community as something that can somehow be useful to the work they do. The community has utilitarian value and if it does not, it would be better to do without it. However we have to appreciate that being a concrete, local, tangible community is our presence name, our “*Emmanuel,*” our way of being present, of making ourselves present in the world, our way of being. The alternative is not either apostolic service or local community, either *Jesus* or *Emmanuel*. Today the real alternative is that we either live in local communities or we disappear as religious in the Church and the world. We can never have one name without the other. They go together.

The text from Matthew also tells us that the angel had work to do to overcome Joseph’s resistance. He is the “just one” who was afraid of taking Mary into his house. The words of the angel “**do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home**” have nothing to do with the doubt of a man who feels deceived by his fiancée. Rather they are meant to overcome the reverent respect of one who decides to withdraw in the face of something that is so far beyond him. Joseph thinks he must separate from Mary because Someone greater than he has entered into the life and the body of his spouse and he interprets that action of God as a call to get out of the way. Mary is no longer his, nor will she be. Mary belongs to Another. So it is then that the angel speaks to

Joseph and says to him, do not fear to take “your wife” unto yourself. Mary continues to be “your spouse,” do not think that she has been taken from you. God wants you to be with her. You will be a father to the child, a husband to the mother. You will give a name to the child to be born.

The same invitation is being made to us. Let us not be afraid to take the Mother and her Son, the two Hearts, into our houses and into our lives. Let us not be afraid to bring them into the very center of our lives even though we feel ourselves unworthy, even though we know rightly that the mystery we believe in is far beyond us and that we are incapable of being as faithful as we should be to what we have professed. Let us not be afraid to welcome them, because it is God himself who gives them to us. May Joseph the just one, principal patron of the Congregation protect us and intercede for us and like him *may we awaken from sleep* (cf. Mt. 1:24) and act.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

There was No Room at the Inn

December 12th, 2008

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 21

Injustice, violence, fear, those who have been abandoned, the plight of immigrants and the sick, persons who have been wounded affectively – all of these distress and hurt us. The spiritual emptiness of those who search without knowing what they seek, who lose energy following futile paths, who “still do not know what God’s love is” (BP) is also distressing. ...

Also painful are our own spiritual weakness, the sadness and darkness that we are not always able to explain, our confusion in the face of life’s experiences, our mediocrity, our difficulty in being contemplative, in being companions to each other and compassionate...

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 4



Holy Family
Window in the Chapel of the Bishops’ residence
Oslo (Norway)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are about to celebrate Christmas. During Advent the words of Isaiah tell us of God’s desire to seek out his dispersed children, to bring together his people, to relieve their suffering, to wipe away the tears from their eyes, to let the poor who wander in the wilderness enter the holy city there to trod its streets...

There are in our world, as there are always, immense masses of the defenceless, refugees, people being massacred, mistreated, alone, ignored. They are the ones not considered “important” by anyone. These are the ones for whom no one invests anything. No efforts are made to rescue them even though their plight is

much more enduring than the present financial crisis. The hope of Advent will touch us to the extent that the plight of these people *afflicts* us, as the text of our last [37th] General Chapter quoted above says. Distress at the suffering of others will only bear fruit to the extent that it draws us out of ourselves. It can't be that our compassion makes us haughty and we forget to be humble, something which is so necessary.

Christmas is here and Mary wraps her son in swaddling clothes and lays him in a manger *because there was no room for them in the inn* (Luke 2:7). Jesus and his family remain *outside*. We find Jesus with Mary, the two hearts together, *outside*. There was no room for them *inside*. We will find them together again at Golgotha (in the gospel of John), also *outside the city* not for lack of space but because they are expelled, put out in order to be eliminated. Mary is there with Jesus. The place of the Sacred Hearts is *outside*.

Jesus also spoke of God as someone *outside* of where it seems he ought to be. God is the Father from "heaven" and not the Lord who dwells in the temple. For that reason Jesus prayed lifting his eyes upward instead of prostrating himself toward Jerusalem like a pious Jew.

Interestingly, Christmas, at least in colder climes, is celebrated as an *inside* feast. It is a time to get together at home, to decorate the house, to eat together, to be at ease in the warmth of the family. It's as if we celebrate Christmas decorating and enjoying the *lodging* that Mary and her son were unable to find. As today in our world, the great feast is here and the poor are still *outside*.

Outside also are the shepherds, sleeping in the open. *Outside* are the magi from the east, who leave their homeland seeking the one their hearts desire. Herod is *inside*, feeding his fear, sending soldiers to kill. Also *within* are the priests and scribes, those who "know" about God, those who "know" the words of the prophets, but for all their knowledge are unwilling to search and unable to *go forth*.

As an adult, Jesus will rejoice and give thanks to God because he has hidden things from the learned and the clever (those *inside*) and has revealed them to the simple (those *outside*) to the “accursed crowd” (John 7:49) who knew nothing of nothing. These are the ones that Jesus looks upon with mercy, moved by their condition. This is the people he calls to himself to be freed of their oppressive yoke and receive rest from him, a rest that only He can give because he is meek and humble of *heart*. By contrast, the burden of the law that the scribes, those *within*, impose on the poor is a yoke that suffocates.

The child born *outside* is the joy of all the people. Mary offers him as nourishment (she lays him in the manger). The angels proclaim him Savior.

We religious, and even more so we priests, are those who run the greatest risk of being like those within, the wise and expert, those who can say many things of God, those who remind others of their obligations but neglect their own commitments. So let us be careful that we not speak much of the Sacred Hearts while being unaware of where the Mother and her Son are to be found.

Recently a brother told me that accepting his last assignment cost him a lot but that he did not dare refuse it, for if he did not accept what moral authority would he have to preach the Gospel to others. That brother knew the pain of venturing *outside* but he also had come closer to the place where we find the Heart of the Lord.

Sometime our resistance to essential elements of our religious life shuts us up *within* our own little world and prevents us from venturing *out*. As it is when we are not willing to live in community with others and we tell ourselves that it is not necessary or it does not interest us. We prefer to remain by ourselves, in our own little well organized comfortable lives and not expose ourselves to the “elements” involved in living with others in community. We are more at ease in the inn than in the manger.

But many in the Congregation can testify to how good it is to venture *outside* of our normal surroundings to go live among the poor. Even if we continue to be sinners and limited as always, the fact of leaving our *dwelling place* to be with those who live *in the open* puts us more in touch with the mystery of love uniting the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

If we religious remain *within* our own comfort zone and let our individual aspirations limit us, we risk killing our desire for life in community and solidarity with the poor. The suffering of others would affect us less and we would become more blind and insensitive to our own personal misery. We pray that this not happen. Let us help one another to remain uncomfortable, free, available and poor.

At the other end of his Gospel, Luke tells us that on one occasion Jesus did find a place to stay. It was the "room" where he would eat his last supper (the word used in Luke 2:7 and Luke 22:11 is the same). Jesus is *within* this room offering himself as nourishment, as when Mary laid him in the manger. He is Eucharist, food of fraternal love, of life sacrificed, of total gift. In the last supper, *within* the cenacle, he will prefigure his offering on the cross *outside* the city and the victory of the Risen one, who in the power of the Spirit will *go forth* from the sepulchre.

May you have a holy and happy Christmas.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

CHRISTMAS *no Place !*

December 10th, 2009

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 33

In the spiritual wisdom of our religious family and in the richness of our community life, we want to find the nourishment necessary for renewing enthusiasm for our vocation and mission and thus better serve a humanity that suffers and searches.

37th General Chapter,
Our Vocation and Mission, No. 5



Verónica Torres ssc
Bañado Sur, Asunción (Paraguay)
November 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the Synod for Africa, held here in Rome in October, there were several references to Matthew 2:13-15 and the image of Jesus being welcomed as a refugee in Africa. During my recent visit to Brazil I had occasion to meditate on that same mystery, when I visited our community in Campo Grande, where the brothers work in a parish called "Our Lady of Exile." I'd never heard that title of Mary and it took a while for me to realize that "exile" was not a reference to the text of the *Salve Regina (post hoc exsilium... after this our exile...)* but rather to her flight into Egypt to protect her newborn son. Mary was like many African mothers and other mothers around the world, uprooted by the horrors of war, catastrophe and other forms of violence.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph were homeless, hunted down, exposed to the elements. Luiz Mancilha ssc, Archbishop of Vitória, Brazil, says in one of his poems,

<i>Subindo a Jerusalem</i>	Going up to Jerusalem
<i>Contemplo o Teu Natal...</i>	I contemplate your birth
<i>Contemplo o Filho de Deus,</i>	I contemplate the Son of God
<i>Contemplo o Teu Lugar...</i>	I contemplate your place...
<i>O Teu Lugar...</i>	Your place...
<i>"sem lugar"!</i>	"You have no place"!

The place of Jesus and Mary is a "no place." The Gospel of Luke says it this way, *"there was no room for them in the inn"* (Luke 2:7). And the Gospel of John says, *"his own people did not accept him"* (John 1:11). Both texts are offered for our contemplation during **the Christmas season**.

I believe that we will never fully understand the meaning and implications of this astonishing and dramatic fact: the Son of God made man has no place, is born poor, is persecuted, becomes an immigrant and refugee and ends his days stripped and put to death on a cross.

The quiet yet hope-filled joy of Advent explodes at Christmas. But this joy is rooted in a story that is tragic and painful, born of the fear and hard heartedness (our sin) that causes so much suffering in the human family. The best Christmas image of this combination of joy and suffering is the pierced heart of the Mother (Luke 2:35).

Our Congregation is dedicated to two hearts united in the very mystery of the incarnation. *"Mary has been associated in a singular way with the mystery of God made man and with His saving work: this is what is expressed in the union of the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary"* (Const. 2). This union of the two Hearts is part of *the spiritual wisdom of our religious family*.

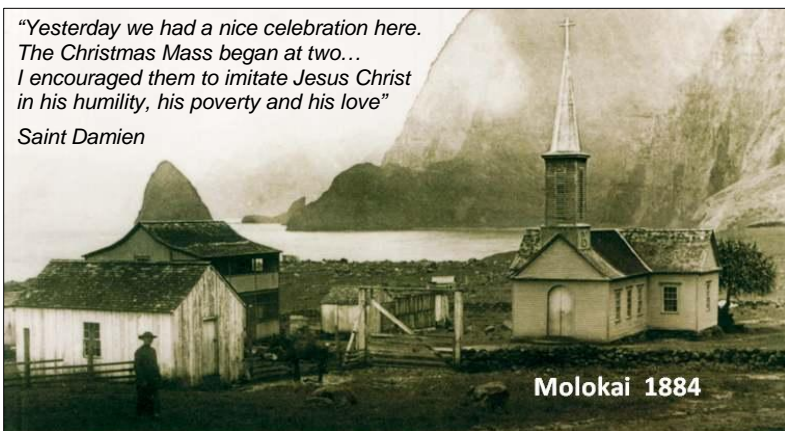
We speak of the heart, of the love of God, of salvation, of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of new life. There is certainly nothing wrong with that. But we should not forget that we are speaking of a *wounded* heart, of rejected love, of frustrated happiness, of life disfigured by inhuman suffering. The Lord allowed himself to suffer "exile" and so he was able to

"strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak..." (Is. 35:3) as did Damien on Molokai.

The joy that we experience and proclaim in the Sacred Hearts is the joy of the Good News that is only found interwoven in the life of suffering humanity. That is our place, right there in the "no place" of Christ.

Happy Christmas!

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General



The 'Hidden' Side of Jesus

December 9th, 2010

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 44

The purpose of our Institute is to retrace the four ages of Our Lord Jesus Christ: his childhood, his hidden life, his evangelical life and his crucified life; and to spread devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Preliminary Chapter
(of the First Constitutions of 1817)

The hidden life of Jesus
(Detail of wall hanging of the "4 ages")
Chapel of the SSCC Sisters
Boane (Mozambique)



The Christmas season draws near. The Gospel tells us that Jesus is born in the middle of the "night" (Lk. 2:8), hidden from the gaze of almost everyone. He will grow and mature in Nazareth (Lk. 2:39-40), a little unknown town far from the center of the country and empire. This is what our tradition calls the *childhood* and *hidden life* of the Lord. In Jesus, God seems to enter human history incognito. "*There is one among you whom you do not recognize.*" (Jn. 1:26). The action of God in Jesus is fundamentally mysterious, hidden. The Father, "*who sees in secret*" (Mt. 6:4) also acts in secret.

Saint Bernard, who is the protector of the Congregation that the Good Father was most like according to the Good Mother, emphasizes how hidden is the love with which God loves us in Jesus. He says that God's love is discreet, gratuitous and generous. God loves in such a way that he accepts the risk of being ignored. He prefers to love anonymously, so that the beloved does not feel the burden of repaying a debt for the good

received. In the incarnation God's love takes the path of silence, perhaps so as not to increase the scandal of indifference or even rejection on the part of those loved. He is like the father in the parable, who never reproaches his two sons who, in spite of having received everything from their father, abandon him and have little regard for him. (Lk. 15:20, 28)

The hidden life of Jesus is an anticipation of the gratuitous love that the Gospel asks of us, "*For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?*" (Lk. 6:32) To do good without expecting anything in return, to serve discretely without being seen, to help those who ultimately are hostile and to do so in a hidden way...This is the redemptive mystery of Jesus "hidden" in the night of Christmas and in his youth at Nazareth. As the language of the devotion to the Sacred Heart says, this is *the love that is not loved*.

"Holy and blessed Jesus Christ!" we sing on Easter night. He is blessed to participate in the blessedness that he himself proclaimed, "*Blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.*" (Lk. 14:14) Happy are you, Jesus, because we cannot respond to the love with which you save us.

The hidden life of Jesus is also an opportunity to learn from the inner Master, the Spirit, who speaks in a low voice, without a lot of noise and teaches us to grasp what is hidden, what is not seen. In Nazareth Jesus will learn to measure the inner power of a buried seed, to appreciate the value of a poor widow's offering, to take hunger and sickness seriously, to wait for the loaf of bread to rise, to savor the salt in a meal, to understand the importance of a building's foundation, to perceive the hope in a hand that reaches out in the midst of a crowd, to grasp something of the anguish and joy of a woman in labor, to imagine the metaphor found in the wind blowing where it will, to recognize under the appearances the truth and falsehood in the human heart...In his hidden life, Jesus will create the language of the Kingdom.

The *hidden side* of Jesus invites us to love without being seen, without trying to justify ourselves by the appreciation others

express or by the level of acceptance that we seem to enjoy. It is the path of freedom.

The *hidden side* of Jesus inspires us to serve discretely even those who make our life difficult and to forgive without keeping track of how they have offended us. It is the only way to build community.

The *hidden side* of Jesus reminds us that our place is not mainly among those who already know the Lord and acknowledge us as honorable and valuable persons. Our place is among those who are "hidden," those who do not let themselves be seen, those who go through life as orphans without a Father, at the margins where there is suffering, poverty and unbelief. As the Superior General of the Jesuits said to me recently, "*Our place is not that of the 'King of the Universe' (splendid and attractive) but that of the Ecce Homo (that people turn their faces from).*" The little child lying in the manger is already the *Ecce Homo*.

Finally, the *hidden side* of Jesus draws us to what is secret, toward adoration that is personal and silent, toward that intimacy – which our modesty protects- where we are alone with God, the door closed, free from having to prepare talks for others, learning from his heart the true language of his Kingdom.

May you all have a happy and holy celebration of Christmas.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

Approval of the SSCC Proper Liturgical Calendar and of the Ritual for SSCC Religious Profession

June 7th, 2011

INFO SSCC Brothers, No. 50

First profession of five
brothers and one sister
in Manila (Philippines)
May 10th, 2011



This past May 31st the Superior Generals have sent a letter to the Congregation announcing the approval by the Holy See of the Proper Calendar for the Congregation and the Ritual for sscC Religious Profession. We give here some extracts from the letter.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are writing to let you know that the Holy See, through the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, has approved two important documents relating to the liturgical life of the Congregation. They are our proper Calendar (approved on March 31st, 2011) and the Ritual of Religious Profession (approved on April 13th, 2011).

The approval is the fruit of the work entrusted by the two General Governments three years ago to a commission headed by Felipe F. Lazcano. We want to thank them for their constant dedication and good work.

The preparation of these two documents is one of the responses that the present General Governments wanted to give to the

request of the 2006 General Chapters, which recalled the importance of preserving and updating the Congregation's spiritual patrimony. What's more, celebrating in a particular way the same liturgical feasts and having one ritual for religious professions strengthens our communion, nourishes our faith and roots us as a Congregation in the mystery of Christ which is realized in the liturgy.

SSCC Proper Liturgical Calendar

The first liturgical calendar of the Congregation was approved on July 5th, 1825. Over the years, various changes were introduced. The most recent liturgical calendar was approved by the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship on January 8th, 1976.

With the development of the new Constitutions another step was taken as regards the liturgical orientations of the Congregation. In their 1985 Constitutions the sisters included Statute No.20, on the particular feasts that they celebrate. That Statute was modified in the General Chapter of 2000 including in greater detail the feasts of the protectors. On the brothers' part, the new Constitutions of 1990 also include Statute No. 18 on the celebrations proper to the Congregation.

The proper Calendar just approved takes those Statutes as the basic reference, incorporating the feasts that were not in the previous liturgical calendar (from 1976). Included are celebrations from the General Roman Calendar as well as others more proper to the Congregation.

(...)

The texts for our proper celebrations (Mass, Readings and Liturgy of the Hours) have already been presented to the Holy See. When we receive the approval, we communicate that to the Congregation and they will be published.

Ritual of SSCC Religious Profession

The Congregation's first Ceremonial was approved by Pope Leo XII on September 27th, 1825. It was a ceremonial for the reception of the habit, profession of vows, renewal of vows, the chapter of faults and the blessing of the red adoration mantle. It is interesting that the texts were the same for the brothers and sisters, with the exception of the blessing of the veil for the sisters. The formula of profession was essentially the same that we continue to use today.

(...)

That ceremonial was used for decades by both branches until the publication of the Roman Ritual of Religious Profession (1970) after the Second Vatican Council. The Decree of Approbation of that Ritual urges religious institutes to adapt it to their own spirituality, "*taking into account that the rite of profession must express the nature and spirit of each religious family, they can adapt this ritual so that it clearly shows their proper character.*" That adaptation is what has now been approved. In general, it maintains the structure of the Roman ritual, while introducing SSCC accents and nuances in the questioning of the candidates, the giving of symbols, gestures of welcome, in some prayers and, of course, in the formula of profession itself.

What we wanted was to have a profession ritual which would help us celebrate religious profession as consecration to the Sacred Hearts. We wanted a ritual which manifests and strengthens our identity, promotes communion and encourages us in our mission. The same motivations that the Good Father expressed in his petition in 1824 continue to be valid for us today.

The Ritual, which has been approved, is a ritual for the whole Congregation and that involves being attentive to the reality of the two branches, brothers and sisters, and to the variety of cultures in the places where the Congregation is present. The unity of the Congregation is something we give attention to right from the time of initial formation. In fact there are novitiates where the brother and sister novices receive formation in the

Congregation's history and spirituality together. In different places it is already the usual practice for brothers and sisters to celebrate first profession, final profession and sometimes renewal of vows together. For that reason the Ritual has three chapters: one for celebrations of the brothers, another for celebrations of the sisters and a third for celebrations together.

Both the Proper Calendar and the Ritual of religious Profession will be published by the General Governments in the three official languages of the Congregation.

Faternally in the love of the Sacred Hearts,

Rosa M^a Ferreiro ssc
Superior General

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General