

YOUNG SACRED HEARTS TODAY

A reflection on the General Chapter

The last **General Chapter** of the brothers spoke about youth and young people today. One of the recommendations was that we approach young people, listen to them and invite them to adopt our life as Sacred Hearts, to share our life and our mission. And we, the elders, should also be able to change on the basis of their contributions and their being young people.

It's true that we adults know very little about the language of young people¹ (ki lelo,) your interests, your culture and your concerns. We are quick to brandish the expression "**in our time**". As if our "time" was the best of all. But you have something to give us, and we also have something to give you. It is this intergenerational dialogue that will produce the great wealth for the good of our society, and in particular for our religious family. Your presence among us must be a moment of mutual enrichment. Without your presence, you young people, we will only be "monuments, museums"; and without us, you young people will only be "villages without a future, without history".

Perhaps we could explain, in few words, a General Chapter is.

What a "General Chapter"?

It is the highest decision-making body of a Congregation. At provincial level, it is the Provincial Chapter. The General Chapter takes place every 6 years. It brings together the General Government, the Provincials and the delegate members. It is during this meeting that the Superior General and his Councillors are elected. They are given the guidelines to follow for the animation of the Congregation for the next 6 years.

A. Let's start by talking about generations

Leaving aside the so-called veteran generation, here is how the generations are divided up today²:

- 1. Baby-boomers** (born between 1946 and 1964). This is the generation that arrived just after the Second World War. They are a privileged generation. They lived in peace, prosperity, full employment and a belief in progress.

¹ Ki-lelo: a term coined in Kinshasa to describe everything that affects young people today: from language to habits, dress codes and so on.

² We found this article on the Internet.

2. **Generation X (1965 - 1979)** the forgotten generation. There was little research during this period. After the boom, there were enough unemployed.
3. **Generation Y (1980 - 1994)**: this is the generation that grew up with the Internet. It places great importance ethics (right and wrong). It is also characterised by its dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit. *"They would also seek to develop ideas, give their opinions and take a stand. They would hardly be sensitive to change; its absence would seem abnormal to them. They like the unexpected and the constantly changing landscape. They are constantly looking for new ways of doing things and have a strong propensity for innovation and creativity"* (Tapscott, 1998)". (Taken from the internet)
4. **Generation Z (1995 - 2009)**: This is the generation that was born **with and into** technology. They are ultra-connected. The generation of influencers. They think collectively or internationally. This is a generation that has no problem saying it thinks, even at work. **"Generation Z tends to attach greater importance to entertainment. They consume cultural content to distract themselves or boredom.** As a result, they have a particular interest in topics such as Internet culture/memes, humour and video games." (Internet). The media have a major influence on the identity of this generation. Their culture is linked to the media. This generation hates "formulas, because they are always looking for new things. They place a high value **on entertainment.** They are also very attached to music. Great social network specialists (Instagram, Tiktok, Snapchat, etc.)
5. **Generation Alpha (2010 - 2024)**: this is the 'glass generation, digitalised; the most connected and the most educated (I see, for example, that in Masina (a poor outlying commune of Kinshasa), the children speak French and there is no longer any complex with the other communes of the affluent). This generation was born **into** the digital age. (Look at the children, they already know almost all the applications). This generation even influences their parents' behaviour. It has an emotional approach (to a brand, a model) and not a rational one (we do what everyone else does). (We see dance, even obscene dance, everyone dances, without taboos). And from 2025 onwards, we begin generation Beta.

All these **generations coexist** in society, each with different expectations. The ideal would be to live in peace and to clean up the environment. The generations are called upon to "live **values and attitudes** better" in today' world.

Each generation can take the other into account to ensure emotional well-being. The generations are called upon to place the same value on "**standards**" in order to improve the health of society. (Let's just look at the behaviour of wewas³).

³Wewas are motorbike taxi drivers in Kinshasa.

In terms of **needs**, there is also work to be done in all these generations. The needs are really different in order to create harmony in society.

And each generation **behaves** differently. Which is also a good place to meet up and work together. Finally, there are also major differences **in opinion** (about authority, about work, about behaviour).

Despite all these differences, we all live in the same world and are all condemned to live happily and harmoniously. And the first thing to work on is the prejudices that each generation may have about the other.

B. What young people think of themselves

We asked a number of young people in the area to tell us how they 'define' themselves, both positively and negatively⁽⁴⁾.

Positive :

- We are highly adaptable
- We are capable daring any action
- We are good Entrepreneurs
- We full of desire for change in the way nations are run
- We are capable of martyrdom for the good of the nation and the Church (soon a young man will be beatified in DR. Congo by the name of Floribert Bwana Chui Bin Kositi, a layman).
- We are tenacious and determined to pursue our objective, without fear.
- We are sure of ourselves and find other reference points unimportant.
- We're creative, inventive and we love learning.
- We are afraid of risks (example of those who cross the Atlantic for a better life)
- We have a taste adventure (travelling is our dream)
- We love meeting new people and discovering new things
- We are polyglots
- We're always connected and sharing our lives with other "virtual" friends
- We are fighting to avoid making the same mistakes as our elders (parents).
- We like emancipation, freedom and autonomy (even if we stay with our parents).
- We can't live without the Internet

Negative :

- We love the easy way out (refusing to suffer) and the easy way to earn a living (, travelling to Europe).

⁴ A sample of 15 young people different ages, taken at random from our Mikondo neighbourhood in Kinshasa.

- We don't have much respect for our elders (we're quick to speak our minds without a filter)
- We have a great love of money (sometimes to the detriment of human life: selling drugs, etc.).
- We have an exaggerated taste for the good life and the good life
- We easily confuse dreams with reality
- We chase academic titles, but without a solid education. Some of us finish our studies by paying our professors.
- We are easily influenced by the information we receive social networks
- We read less and have little knowledge culture
- We're all about pleasure (sex, masturbation, porn, etc.).
- We pay a lot of attention appearance and are behind latest phone.
- We have less training
- We hardly follow the news (except those that affect him)
- We're big consumers of novelas⁵
- We are sometimes passive, wanting the solution to come to us effortlessly.
- We are behind fashion
- We 't have any references other than .
- We do the 'challenges' without thinking too much as long as everyone does it.
- We protect ourselves in evil and easily share unfiltered fake news.
- We hurt each other easily via the Internet without taking into account the other person's pain (sextape published on the Net)

All these elements do not represent young people, but they are not far from reality. Before listening to the Congregation, let's have a look at the Church is saying to you through mouth of Pope Francis.

C. Pope Francis talks about you, young people

In his "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: **Christus Vivit**", Pope Francis has this to say to young people (we're just picking up on a few ideas):

1. Everything **Christ touches** becomes young. Christ wants you alive. He is there to comfort you in your fears, your pain, your doubts. He is there to comfort you.

⁵This is the Portuguese term used in Kinshasa for "television series".

2. There are several figures of young people in the Bible to whom God entrusted a mission (Joseph, David, Solomon, Ruth, etc.). The hearts of young people are quick to change.
3. May true youth be called to have a **heart capable of love**, a heart that is purified of old leaven.
4. Young people must **have dreams**, see further ahead and open up new horizons.
5. Young people are **subservient to their elders**, because they have a wealth of experience that can help them to make the right decisions.
6. **Not to regret** spending their youth doing good, opening their hearts to the Lord and living in a different way.
7. Not to spend one's youth distracted (like foolish young girls), a path to a poor future.

If you have lost your inner strength, your dreams, your enthusiasm, your hope and your generosity, Jesus will come to you as he did to the widow's dead child, and with all his power as the Risen Lord he will exhort you: "Young man, I tell you, get up" (Lk 7:14). (n°20)

8. To be in relationship with others (not isolated), doing generous service
9. Let them understand that Jesus is not far from them. Let them **contemplate Jesus as a young man** and discover his qualities (friendships, relationship with his Father, better choices, clear-sightedness in the face of political authorities, compassion for the excluded, the poor, etc.).
10. **Like the Virgin Mary**, let young people be bearers a promise. Visit Mary's "yes" and her desire to serve were stronger than her doubts and difficulties (cf. no. 44). This desire to serve the Lord can also be found among **young saints** (Saint Sebastian, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Joan of Arc, Blessed Isidore Bakandja, etc.).

D. Vision of the Congregation today

The greatest temptation is to draw up a list of the positive points of young people today and alongside that, a list of negative points (**for example**: seeking an easy life, lacking respect for adults, shameless, concerned with appearance, easily influenced, etc.). This exercise undoubtedly helps us to implicitly compare ourselves to tell ourselves (adults) that we are better. We are mistaken. The General Chapter wants to invite us to see young people as the builders of today. That's why we're going to look at a few tools that can help us build our ss.cc. youth today.

1. Following the example of the Synod of Bishops, the Congregation invites us to **"walk"** together with our young people, giving them a place in the debate and in the mission. At the same time, we are aware that young people are called to mature their call according to the Tradition of the Congregation, its vocation and mission in the Church.
2. **To listen to our young people**, based on their current context, without too many prejudices on our part (adults). This is the path to their fulfilment in

our religious family. The Good Mother wanted our students to be happy here. We can also say this for our young people (in formation, in the parish or elsewhere). Let's work together to ensure that young people are happy.

3. **To create spaces** for their personal development, giving them a kind of coaching linked to the challenges they face today. One of the challenges is the use of social networks. That they remain open to the world while forming physical communities (places of mission and mutual love). The virtual is sometimes just an illusion.
4. **Accompanying young people** in their concrete history. Many of them may come from families in crisis. We also see that our own countries have been in crisis for years. All this can have a big impact on the way a young ss.cc. is today. So, accompaniment would be the place to touch **the concreteness of** each young person for the development of his vocation (religious or other). Our young people are exposed to vulnerability because of their personal history.
5. To paraphrase the Pope, may the Congregation always learn to be a "**mother**". Knowing how to weep as we listen to and accompany the challenges of our young people with a view to finding a better solution. These young people who come to us "broken" are rebuilt by us. Hence the conversion of adult hearts. In my book "de nos Mbuta à nos jours"⁶, I said "that the suffering of others provokes in me a
"Let's not let our young people feel abandoned, without a compass. May our young people not feel abandoned, without a compass.
6. May the Congregation help them to **deploy their talents**. It is said that every drop of rain is important in filling the sea (in **Mikondo**⁷, this is a concrete example).
7. May the Congregation teach you to **love God** and to let God love you. Following the example of the Good Father, may you savour God along the path of your life. Our religious family manifests God's love in this world. And God's love comes to others, through the world and through nature.
8. May you encounter, once again, **Jesus** (love, alive and life-giving) in the mission entrusted by the Church to the Sacred Hearts. When you have a good encounter with Christ, you come out of it transformed, new and full of life and happiness. Life in Jesus is always good news. You are helping to make Christ your great friend. Don't forget, if you live your youth very well, it will be a great help to you in your adult life.
9. Take advantage of this time to **grow in your personal experience** of Christ. Our communities offer a number of tools for this purpose:

⁶) Written by Father Camille Sapu in 2017, p. 102

⁷ **Mikondo** is the Professors' training centre, where everyone has learnt a trade at a Kinshasa Professional Technical Institute. We have carpenters, plumbers and photovoltaic technicians,

computer specialist, electrician, etc.

Eucharist, adoration, Liturgy of the Hours, retreats, recollections, etc. Discover every day this Christ, dead and risen, who loves you and sends you on mission. This experience allows you to grow **in discernment**: a time to choose what is better from what is good.

10. May your presence be **the "fuel"** that rekindles the fire of love, peace, reconciliation and justice in our religious family. This is the way to grow in family spirit. Youth is joy. As Pope Francis says, don't retire early.
11. **Be more inventive and creative** (I see, for example, our birthdays: we've been singing the same songs for 20 years. We do the same thing. Young people are inventive). Not just get lost in the music and then remain passive.
12. But just as one blind man can't lead another blind man, it's in your interest to benefit from wisdom, experience and open hearts of your various trainers, leaders and coaches. Let's not grow like the papaya tree, but rather like the palm tree.
13. Together with the Community, may you **experience the disciples Emmaus**. Having lost hope and enthusiasm, they meet Christ on their way back to Emmaus. Along the way, their hearts burn and in the breaking of the bread, they discover the Risen Christ and return to Jerusalem to proclaim the joy of the Resurrection. The joy of being sacred hearts must be proclaimed by yourselves. The joy of living as religious of the Sacred Hearts must be experienced by each one of you.
14. As our Constitutions tell us, the Congregation leads you to embrace the same attitudes, choices and works that led Jesus to his death on the cross, his heart pierced (Art. 3).

E. We put these questions to our young applicants:

A. What contribution can you make to the Congregation today?

1. Our wish is have some pastoral news
2. We also hope that the Congregation will found other missions on the Continent.
3. We want to strengthen and enhance our founding values
4. We want to bring a new socio-religious and economic spirit to the stability and prosperity of the Congregation in Africa.

B. What do you want to change in initial training today, as applicants?

1. In the brothers and sisters dimension: let the trainers help us to live in a healthy climate, without prejudice, because our way of life is already pastoral.
2. In the economic dimension: creating ways and means of increasing production to ensure the economic stability of our communities
3. In community life: we see a tendency towards individualism. Elders are quick to disappear during community activities, and there is a lack attention for each .

C. What do you want to add to the Postulate today?

1. Calling on the services of a qualified psychologist to provide psychological support
2. Enriching our libraries for better intellectual training
3. Renovating our training centres
4. Establish a curriculum norma of training which would serve as model for trainers.

D. What do you want to keep in the Postulate today?

1. Telephone use
2. Meetings between the two Postulates
3. The training process
4. Timetable for our training centres
5. Lay studies

All these answers are to be taken as a "desire", a wish and a dream of our young postulants. Listening to them can help us to get to know them and help them to become tomorrow's Sacred Hearts.

CONCLUSION

Young people, don't give up the best of your youth, don't look at life from a balcony. Don't confuse happiness with a sofa, and don't live your whole life behind a screen. Don't become the sad spectacle an abandoned car. Don't be parked cars. It's better to let your dreams take root and make decisions.

Take risks, even if you're wrong. Don't survive with your soul anaesthetised, and don't look at the world as tourists. Make some noise! Push out your fears

that paralyse you, so that you don't turn into mummified youngsters. Live! Give yourself to the best in life! Open the cage door and go fly! Please don't retire before your time! (no. 143), says Pope Francis.

To us elders, "let's not give young people their retirement before their time". A youth well lived is an old age well deserved.

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