

2013

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I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”.

Pope Francis
Evangelii Gaudium, 3 (2013)

2013 is coming to an end. In this letter for INFO I wish to sum up the principal lines of action of the General Government during this year. The General Government is at the service of communion of the whole Congregation, and knowing what the GG has been dealing with may prove to be a service to all the brothers.

1. Year of Faith, year of the martyrs.

In the January edition of INFO, the General Government presented a programme for the missionary and spiritual animation of the whole Congregation. This programme was inspired by the General Chapter of 2012, and it proposed three figures of the Congregation as a stimulus for us for three years: the martyrs in Spain for 2013; Saint Damien for 2014 and Blessed Eustáquio for 2015. These brothers 'knew how to incarnate the charism they received from our Founders and the first generation'. (Mission 4).

In 2017, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the approval of our first Constitutions by the Holy See.

An explanatory letter about this programme was sent to all the local communities. I hope everybody received it.

2013 has been an year dedicated to the faith in the whole Church. Because of this the General Government proposed that we focus in this year on the 5 martyrs of the Congregation in Spain (Teófilo, Isidro, Gonzalo, Eladio and Mario), who were beatified on October 13th. Their memorial will be celebrated each year on 6th November. The martyrs were witnesses to their faith to the point of dying for it.

We invited the whole Congregation to read the biography of the martyrs in order to know them better, to reflect in community on their faith and our own, and to celebrate the event of the beatification. The follow-up to this invitation has been diverse. Some brothers have been quite motivated by the martyrs. In other places, however, these occasion has passed by completely unnoticed. It is difficult to have complete harmony in the Congregation around an idea or an activity, even when dealing with something simple. Still, I believe that it is worthwhile to continue proposing the martyrs, Saint Damien and Eustáquio as icons who can inspire us to live our vocation in a more audacious way. Looking at specific persons can mobilise us more than having discussions around ideals, elevated though they may be.

2. Spiritual animation.

In keeping with the theme of faith and of the martyrs, the General Government sent you diverse materials during the year. A guide for meetings of community - based on the life of the martyrs - invited the brothers to talk among themselves about faith. For its part, the General Postulation sent out a book on the life of the martyrs, along with brochures and posters on the beatification.

Given that liturgy is at the heart of our experience of faith, it is good to recall that in December 2012 we sent out a guide to the reading of the document "Liturgy and our SSCC Vocation and Mission" which is an appendix to the booklet 'Masses and Readings from the Liturgical Calendar proper to the Congregation'.

The monthly letters of INFO have also revolved around this theme:

- December 2012 ("The Martyrs"): a reflection on the meaning of the celebration of the Martyrs.
- January 2013: presentation of the guiding vision of the General Government and its plan for missionary and spiritual animation.
- February: an invitation for local communities to share the faith.
- April ("That your faith may not be lost": to revive the faith and to promote the putting into practice of common decisions.
- May ("the Heart of Mary"): the heart of Mary is intimately united to Jesus and goes before us and accompanies us in the journey of faith.
- June ("The emblem of the Congregation"): the emblem is an expression of those aspects of our faith that are more strongly accentuated in our charism and spirituality.
- July ("The three tents"): faith makes us pilgrims in this land and free to walk the journey of life without any attachments.
- September ("A God who is Discrete"): regarding the passing on of the faith.
- October: a report was published on the ceremony of the Beatification of the martyrs in Tarragona, Spain.
- November ("Death"): about how faith illuminates our lives until the end ... and beyond.

Moreover, as requested by the General Chapter, a commission was formed for the historical and spiritual patrimony of SSCC. The first fruit of the labours of this commission has been the publication of the book, "A Conversation in the Family" which brought together the majority of the letters I wrote to the Congregation during my first term of office, 2006 - 2012.

3. Visits and interactions with the communities of the Congregation

During 2013, the General Government took part in chapters and assemblies of nine communities (Indonesia, Colombia, Chile, Ireland/England, France, Africa, Ecuador, USA, French Polynesia) and in meetings and some other activities of the three Interprovincial Conferences which are still active: Europe-Africa (CEA), Asia-Polynesia (CAP) y Latin America (CIAL).

Various members of the General Government have dedicated time to study languages and to make informal visits to distinct areas of the Congregation. We thank all the communities who gave us a fraternal and generous welcome on such visits: (Chile, USA, France, Ireland/England, Iberia, Germany, Colombia, India, Indonesia). To know the Congregation and to manage languages give us an enormous help at the times when we need to think around and engage in our service as a General Government

We decided to wait a year before beginning the canonical visits. The canonical visits are characterised by a one-to-one meeting with each brother and by a deep assessment of the life of the community. The first canonical visit of this present term of office to Japan-Philippines is happening as I write this letter.

In relation to the ongoing work of readjusting the structures of the Congregation, we would point to the erection of the USA West Delegation with effect from 6th September, and to the Netherlands Delegation with effect from the 3rd October and finally the erection of the Region of French Polynesia on the 14th October.

Another especially significant event was the formation meeting for new Superiors which took place in the Generalate from 29th October - 6th November. We wrote about this in last month's INFO. It was a very good experience.

4. New Community project in Leuven (Belgium)

In accordance with the decision of the General Chapter, the General Government is working to create an international community in Leuven, animated by a project connected with the person of Damien and all that he represents. For now, we have called four brothers from different parts of the world, who are preparing to integrate into this new community, which should start in September of 2014.

We are in conversation with the Provincial Government of Flanders and with that of the Netherlands, to establish the initial conditions of the new project. Another participant in this ongoing conversation is the Catholic University of Leuven, with whom the Province of Flanders is in dialogue with a view to reaching an agreement as regards the sale of property of the Congregation in Leuven. The Episcopal Conference of Belgium also has a bearing on this process, expressing its strong desire that the tomb of Damien not be sold.

The General Government is dedicating time and energy to this project with the hope that the necessary conditions can be established so as to ensure the continuation of the presence of the Congregation in Leuven along the lines of what was decided at the General Chapter.

For us, it is not only about ensuring a presence alongside the tomb of Damien, but above all it is about experiencing a new way of being in Europe. The new community of Leuven will be an international community, with a well organised SSCC community life and in direct service to people who are on the margins. This could be a valid model for the future of the presence of the Congregation in other places in Europe, where we could be in a few small communities, supported by the way of living our mission, our vocation and mission more explicitly charismatic, communitarian, and religious, and in direct service to people on the periphery. In this way we could be humble pointers to the mercy of God in a context of secularisation which asks for new missionary responses. Will it be possible to carry forward such a vision?

5. And then came Francis.

The year 2013 has seen the unusual image of two Popes engaging in a fraternal embrace. The resignation of Benedict and the arrival of Francisco have impact on the life of the Church. Francisco has brought us an unexpected moment of renewal and freshness. His approachable and easy style, his insistence that we must go to the margins of society, his method of teaching in an uncomplicated way, the many significant gestures, the accent placed on mercy and on the joy of the Gospel, his desire for greater collegiality and for a church of the poor, his concrete decisions to change things that seemed immutable... all of this invites everyone to a personal and pastoral conversion, in such a way that we return with renewed energy to the truth of our commitment to the Gospel.

As you know, Francis has just published his Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is in fact a presentation of his programme of service as Bishop of Rome: "I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are." (25)

Francisco wishes this conversion to have its beginning in what he calls "the heart of the Gospel": "In this basic core, what shines forth is *the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.*" (36)

I have no doubt that our Congregation, consecrated to the love of God recognised in the hearts of Jesus and Mary, has something valuable to contribute to this programme of renewal proposed by Francisco.

6. Looking towards 2014.

Following the plan for missionary and spiritual animation, about which we have already spoken, 2014 is dedicated to **Damien**, from whom we can learn to deepen our ministry of adoration and in service of the poorest.

The letter of INFO for January 2014 will present to you some direction for the year. A little later, you will receive some supportive material for the brothers and for the communities. The other letters of INFO will touch on themes related to this backbone of an icon of the year.

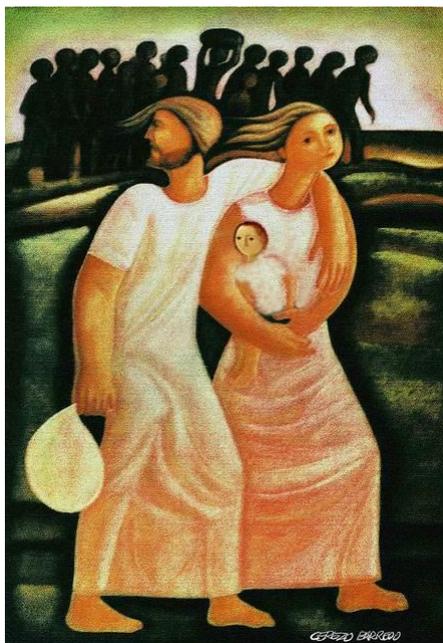
You are all very busy with many things and committed to various programmes of animation at provincial, diocesan, ecclesial, sectoral, or other types of levels. But I am sure that you will be able to find time and attention to connect to this proposal directed to the whole Congregation. Remember the fact that we are all thinking and doing the same thing, albeit simple and small, is an excellent contribution to the communion between all in the one body, that is the Congregation.

The animation programme of the General Government may also inspire the themes of your activities for ongoing formation: meetings of the community, retreats, assemblies, etc.

One other significant event in the life of the Congregation in 2014 will, without doubt, be the **Enlarged General Council**, which will take place from 16 - 24 September in the Generalate. The General Government will meet with the 15 Major Superiors (Provincials, Vice-Provincials) that we have in the Congregation at this moment. It will be a time to evaluate together the progress of the life of the Congregation, to review the application of the last General Chapter, and to give orientations for the immediate future.

In this time of Advent, we are preparing to celebrate the manifestation of the intimate mercy of our God. It is to this mystery that we are consecrated: a mystery that we contemplate in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. This year, the Christmas greetings of the Generalates of the brothers and sisters recalls the flight to Egypt of Joseph, Mary and the child. The family of Jesus shares in the plight of the many who are persecuted, emigrants, displaced, refugees and homeless. Moved by the love of God, our hearts turn to all who are without roots in this world, asking God to show us ways on how to share our lives with them.

May Mary, woman of Advent, woman of hope, introduce us to the good news of the tenderness of God. Happy Christmas!



"Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

Mathew 2:13

*the
migrants
displaced
refugees
martyrs
persecuted
banished
...*

With an eye toward the persecuted Jesus, we wish you a
Blessed and Merry Christmas 2013.