

## ABSTRACT

### THE GENERAL CHAPTER: PREPARATION and CELEBRATION

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#### LEGAL CONCEPT OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

The General Chapter is the *supreme collegial authority* of the institute. It is subject to the norms that the religious institute establishes in this regard. The Constitutions are the reference in which the Chapter moves as also its limits. The *scope of authority of the chapter* will depend on the type and nature of the institution in question. During the time that the chapter lasts, it exercises as a moral person a proper and ordinary power. The Chapter also possesses a legislative power for the Institute (as does provincial or local chapter for its respective constituency). The power of the chapter is exercised in a collegial form, that is, among the members who, in possession of the requisites established by their own law, have acquired the right to take part in it.

#### TASKS OF THE CHAPTER

The Chapter is governed by the universal law (Can. 631) and by the proper law of each institute. We can classify the tasks of this type of assemblies as: *ex iure universali* and *ex iure proprio*. Based on its nature, its charism and its own goal, these norms constitute a single reality for each Institute.

Canon 631 §1 states: *The general chapter, which holds supreme authority in the institute according to the norm of the constitutions, is to be composed in such a way that, representing the entire institute, it becomes a true sign of its unity in charity. It is for the general chapter principally: to protect the patrimony of the institute mentioned in can. 578, promote suitable renewal according to that patrimony, elect the supreme moderator, treat affairs of greater importance, and issue norms which all are bound to obey.*

We can say that the tasks assigned to the general chapter essentially concern the correct functioning of the Institute as a whole. The legislator attributes to the General Chapter and can be applied to the other chapters in their measure and competence:

1. protect the patrimony of the institute referred to in Can. 578;
2. to promote an adequate renewal that harmonizes with it;
3. to elect the supreme Moderator;
4. deal with the most important affairs;
5. enact rules, which all are required to observe.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF PARTICIPATION AND CORESPONSIBILITY

Can. 631 §1 *The general chapter... is to be composed in such a way that, representing the entire institute, it becomes a true sign of its unity in charity.*

631 § 2. *The constitutions are to define the composition and extent of the power of a chapter; proper law is to determine further the order to be observed in the celebration of the chapter, especially in what pertains to elections and the manner of handling affairs.*

From this Canon we deduce that the Church as legislator leaves ample freedom for each Institute to establish its composition, on condition that the general lines established by the code are taken into

account. It is to be clearly understood that the norms concerning the members of the Chapter must be those contained in the Constitutions, not in additional codes.

In the composition of the chapter it should always be kept clear that the participants are exclusively those who have gained the right to participate. This happens "*ex-ufficio*", through the office they perform within the Institute or "*by election*". Members are elected from among those who enjoy a passive voice, by all the members who enjoy an active voice. Although under different titles – "*ex ufficio*" or "*by election*" – all participate with the same powers and tasks as the Chapter.

## **PREPARATION OF THE CHAPTER**

**Personal and community preparation:** The Superior General with his Council is primarily responsible for preparing the Chapter using the means deemed suitable for the purpose. He will especially make a wide consultation of the members of the Institute, through questionnaires and free proposals. He will present and distribute a work plan, make the topic of the Chapter known and offer some material for reflection and suggestions.

**Announcement of the chapter.** A year before, the Chapter is announced and the process of preparation and prayer for its outcome begins.

**Convocation.** It is done by the General Superior six months before the celebration of the Chapter event sending a letter of convocation.

**Elections of Delegates to the Chapter.** The election of the delegates must be done responsibly, after having prayed, and following criteria inspired by the common good. The election can be done on a single list or on lists according to the circumscriptions.

## **CHAPTER CELEBRATION**

### **Preliminary Sessions.**

Assignment of places in the chapter hall. Absences before and during the Chapter. Language and official text. Day of retreat.

### **First steps.**

What needs to be done in the opening sessions according to the chapter calendar and which will be approved by the capitulars:

- the election of the Chapter Secretary, the scrutineers,
- the approval of the Chapter Rules,
- the calendar and schedule,
- the designations of the moderator or moderators, the members of the various committees and working groups and services and invited / experts.

Chapter Secret. Agenda of the Chapter and programming. Presentation and discussion of the texts in the chapter hall. Presentation of special proposals. Report of the Superior General. Commissions or Study Groups. Voting. Canonical elections of the Government. Election of the Superior. Elections of the Councilors.

## **CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER**

Review and final evaluation. Closing of the Chapter. Promulgation of the Chapter documents.

Fr. Aitor Jiménez Echave, cmf.