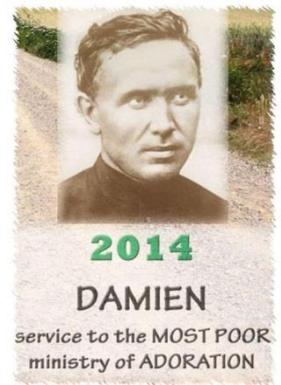


# Enlarged General Council 2014

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio SSCC  
Superior General

INFO SSCC Brothers No 84 – 9 October 2014



**Derek Laverty** (Ireland-Egland), **Marcus Vinicius Maciel** (Brazil), **Javier Álvarez-Ossorio** (Superior General), **Kenji Honma** (Japan-Philippines), **Andy Healey** (Kenji's translator), **Juliaan Vandekerkhove** (Flanders), **Heinz-Josef Catrein** (Germany), **Pankras Olak** (general councilor), **Johnathan Hurrell** (USA), **Enrique Losada** (Iberia), **Christian Malrieu** (France), **Camille Sapu** (general vicar), **Nugroho Krisusanto** (Indonesia), **Salvador Carlos Mendoza** (Mexico), **Piotr Budrewicz** (Poland), **Alberto Toutin** (general councilor), **Felipe F. Lazcano** (general councilor), **Jean Blaise Mwanda** (Africa), **Alex Viguera** (Chile), **Arley Guarín** (Colombia), **David de la Torre** (Ecuador), **Raúl Pariamachi** (Peru).

## **“At home”**

It was the first time that the Enlarged General Council (EGC) was celebrated in the General House on Via Rivarone (Rome). The work done in the house in recent times afforded a bigger room for meetings and a dining room a bit more extended as also a community room where a large group could relax and get together. Moreover, with the number of major superiors reduced in recent years, it seemed doable to have this meeting in the General house. And so it happened.

We didn't have sufficient bedrooms for all and so some stayed with our neighbors, the General House of the Brothers of Christian Instruction (Ploërmel) whom we thank for the great service rendered us.

The fact that we met in our house received a positive evaluation. We were at ease, relaxed, a family. The welcome of the local community was excellent. The persons whose services were contracted were just fine to work with. Working conditions were very good. And besides, all was less expensive than if we had met at a conference center.

## **A “Counsel” meeting**

The meeting did not have as its objective making decisions or producing documents. It was more about a dialog together on themes impacting the life of the Congregation. The major superiors had come as “counselors” to the General Government, (GG) to interact and to illuminate from different viewpoints the work which the GG is doing.

What stood out in the evaluation of the encounter was the good climate of dialog which continued throughout the whole meeting. One could speak tranquilly, freely without annoyance. For this outcome the professional interpreters, charged with the simultaneous translation to English and Spanish also helped, as did the effort of the brothers who had to use a language other than their maternal one.

Only Kenji (Japan-Philippines), Nugroho (Indonesia) and Arley (Columbia) had not participated in the General Chapter of 2012. The others were already known to each other.

Beyond the general meetings with their own agenda, these days in Rome were occasions for other kinds of encounter of the major superiors among themselves, for bilateral provincial endeavors or undertakings of Interprovincial Conferences, or conversations with the Superior General. All of this made the eight days in the General House a privileged time of mutual assistance among those to whom has been confided as Major Superiors, the service of authority in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts.

The GG sincerely appreciates the quality of the exchanges on all the themes presented; it helps greatly to evaluate and orient its work at the service of the Congregation.

## **The Major Superiors**

By way of introduction and getting to know each other, the Major Superiors shared in turn on three simple and direct questions: in the service of authority, what gives the more joy, what gives the more grief, and how is one refreshed and renewed?

Without pretending to resume what was a deep and sincere dialog, it can be said that much joy comes from the encounter in depth with the brothers, from the process where you can see that the community is advancing, from enthusiastic religious and that there is good evidence in every age group, from the feeling of being appreciated and supported by the brothers themselves...

Much sadness comes from conflicts with the brothers, lack of vocations, frustration when unable to carry out decisions, negative attitudes, loss of zeal in some religious, loneliness, perplexity in not knowing what ought to be to be done, the fragility of persons and works...

Resources are found in prayer, in the help of the Council, in dialog with wise brothers, in caring for one's theological formation and in one's good physical and mental health, in documents which inspire etc. ...

Beyond the dialog around these questions, the GG offered some information on the canonical procedures having to do with brothers moving away of the community. The superiors often ask for help in this regard.

## **The General Government**

In its report to the EGC, the GG told of what it has been doing in the two years since the General Chapter: pulling together its own team and organization, designing a plan of spiritual and missionary animation, the general commissions (of initial formation, of the historical and spiritual patrimony, of the animation of the Secular Branch), the work of postulation, canonical visits, participation in chapters and assemblies etc.

In all these actions the GG is insisting on some key points like the importance of local communities, the ministry of adoration, the call to keep up and renew our presence to the margins, and a concrete presence to the brothers (with particular insistence on problematic cases which require canonical processes and/or the application of the directives on the abuse of persons.)

The GG continues also with the permanent duty of adjusting structures where necessary. In this moment there is work on the erection of a new province, fruit of a union of Peru, Colombia and Ecuador; and there are dialogs going on between the delegation USA West and the US Province as between Ireland-England and the same US Province. The idea of the GG is that it works out better to have solid provinces and avoid excessively small and weak groups.

We shared also with the superiors some of the fundamental questionings which we have as GG. In general it seems to us that we have good exchange on the MISSION but it is harder for us to imagine a VISION on how to bring it about and above all to concretize the TASKS which get us going. The question that often perplexes us is this: what must we do? What tasks can call forth generous and solid responses from the brothers?

## **Application of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

How is the application of the General Chapter going in the various Major Communities? Each Major Superior commented on the impact of the capitular decisions in his respective community and in the regions which depend on some of them (India, Paraguay and French Polynesia). I added short reports on the delegations (Holland and USA West).

It was clear that the document on the "Mission" is what is proving more interesting and inspiring in its various dimensions: to strengthen community life; new initiatives to go to the margins, confronting the risk of the clericalization of our life, preparation of old age and accompanying our old and infirm brothers; and the renewal of our ministry of adoration. We have still four years to continue working on these orientations of the "Mission" document to try and put them into action in concrete and practical ways.

Some asked that the issue of the impact of our SSCC mission on our manner of running the schools in our charge be taken up. The Congregation, we reminded ourselves, has now 15 schools throughout the world. The issue is on the table.

There were other topics which we could not address such as the steps leading younger communities to financial autonomy, the SOS about the extremely weak situation of the community in French Polynesia and the quality of our relation with the laity.

## ***Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) of Pope Francis**

How does the papal exhortation affect the life of our Congregation? This question guided the flow of the dialog of the EGC. We wanted to search out together how to benefit from this programmatic document of Francis' magisterium which has raised up so much hope in the majority of us. This has to do with a present day discerning along with the Church.

Many communities have already studied the exhortation. Among the points made often I note the following: the necessity of leaving ourselves open to being evangelized to renew the energy of our consecration and the joy of the Gospel; to go for the essential relationship with Jesus; to get out of ourselves; pastoral conversion for a major missionary spirit; the revolution of tenderness; to touch the real situation of the marginalized; to embrace the changes necessary to go out and not back to what helps us to survive, a healthy decentralization to avoid up rootedness and to reinforce the local community and concrete commitment on the ground; to be attentive to the temptations of the pastoral workers, particularly to the selfish acedia and contagious disenchantment, to use a positive and cordial language, etc.

Many concerns and all worthy! As someone was saying, the exhortation is like a fire: burning, impulsive, spurring, giving rise to the necessary conflicts.

The reflection remained open. We concluded that we ought to follow up using *Evangelii Gaudium* as inspiration for the coming months and years, probably up to the next General Chapter. Let's take care that EG not remain only in our slogans but that it produces real change in our present ways of doing things.

## **New International Community in Louvain**

The creation of a new community in Louvain, asked for by the Chapter, singularly got our attention when evaluating the implementation of the General Chapter. More time was asked to inform ourselves better on the situation and to dialog on the issue. Two whole sessions were dedicated to it.

The GG explained what has happened up till now: many dialogs with the Province of Flanders , with the Catholic University of Louvain and with the Belgium bishops. The Province of Flanders and the delegation of Holland have committed to financing the new community for two years; a project vision has been worked out (orientations and activities to be carried out); brothers have been called (9 have been personally contacted); an association, legal by Belgium law, has been established to give legal protection to the new community; a gathering for several days in Rome of the brothers of the new Louvain community; canonically the Delegation of Louvain has been erected.

Going forward, the GG made known the difficulties experienced at the present moment which are basically two: the loss of all ownership in Louvain and lack of personnel. According to the agreements between the Catholic University of Louvain and the Province of Flanders the new community may use the house at #3 St. Antoniusberg to live and the chapel with the tomb of Damien for pastoral use but the ownership of all the properties will pass to the University which will come to form part of the civil association of the Province. The GG has asked the University and the Province of Flanders that there be left to the new community a patrimony, immobile or financial, such that there is freedom in the future if the community wishes to change its place to live. As of now there is still no response to this request.

With respect to personnel, Fernando León has asked to return to Chile for personal reasons and Richard Lifrak is having great difficulties in getting a resident visa resulting in the fact that at this moment there are only two brothers for the community: Ferry Indrianto (from Indonesia) and Camille Sapu (who will take up residence in Louvain October 10).

For his part Juliaan, the Provincial of Flanders, gave additional information and made clear that the agreement with the University meets the expectations and concerns of the brothers of the Province given that the future of our installations and the memory of Damien are placed in the hands of a reliable institution.

This situation gave rise to debate on many questions: to what extent the decision of the General Chapter is binding? What happens to the historical places which have a high symbolic meaning for the entire Congregation? What capacities do we have for international projects? Are our present structures adequate for decisions of this type? Is it fitting to stay with a confederation of independent provinces? Etc.

Finally, the GG asked if there are provinces disposed to send brothers to Louvain. The Provinces of USA and Africa committed to sending someone. The Provincial of Iberia committed to asking for volunteers for this project. Other provinces made clear that it was proving impossible to offer candidates although some said that they would accept it were the Superior General to call one of the religious of his community.

The Superior General submitted to a secret consultative vote the following question: do you consider it fitting that the GG stay with the project of a community in Louvain during the next two years? Of the 16 major superiors, 8 said no, 6 said yes and there were two blank votes.

Having met apart, the GG communicated that despite the difficulties, it would maintain its decision to follow through on this project for two years, after which it would be evaluated whether or not the community of Louvain is following the envisioning of the project. We are confident of being able to add one or two more brothers. Thus we wish to honor the decision of the General Chapter, give this project a chance (which has not yet really started) and try to get a new missionary initiative, inspired by Damien, in Europe.

## **SSCC Sisters**

Mary McCloskey and Aurora Laguarda came one morning in the name of the GG of the Sisters to give -at our request- a presentation of the process which the sisters are living through following the fact that their General Chapter took a decision to move towards a "new face" of the Congregation, that is to say, a reconfiguration of the structures to arrive at one sole entity.

We are grateful to the Sisters' GG for their explanations and their availability to respond to the questions raised up in the dialog. It is entirely suitable that the Major Superiors be up to date on this important process for the sisters to sensitize the brothers of their communities and to support the sisters in prayer and concern.

## **Internationality**

The General Chapter stated that not all hold the same understanding of internationality nor of its implications for our lives and asked that, in the Congregation, the theme be gone into depth. For this reason the GG asked of the EGC to begin a reflection and had asked for suggestions on how to get all the brothers involved in the study and clarification of this theme.

The point of departure was a practical exercise which helped us realize that almost all the major communities have brothers who come from other communities and/or send brothers outside. At this moment, there are 113 brothers living outside their Major Community of origin (approximately 15% of all the brothers).

There followed a theoretical exercise designed by Alberto Toutin with a pair of direct questions: do you believe that in your major community there ought to be brothers who come from outside? What are the good and bad practices of internationality as you have known it?

The dialog which ensued was insightful. I recall three dimensions of the theme:

1. Interchange of personnel between major communities: This is what we are wont to call "internationality." It is guided principally by the necessity to shore up weak areas. In the past the movement was mainly from the North (strong) to the South ("mission territory"). Now the movement is in the main from the South (the young with few material resources) to the North (aged but with economic means). Some questions present themselves: who has the power to decide on these changes? To what type of community and missionary life are the brothers who are outsourced

sent? Does it have to do with merely "filling holes"? What impact for our personal and religious life does such a sudden shift have from one economic level to another which is richer or poorer than our own?

2. Inculturation: the Constitutions ask that we be inculturated where we are. Adaptation to local culture is a priority for the good of the mission. In general, those who do the mission of the Congregation better in a given place are the sons themselves of the local culture. Internationality ought not to be used as an ideology impinging on the deep rootedness of the brothers and the mission in any concrete situation.
3. Interculturality: when various cultures encounter each other, it can happen that one imposes itself on the others or that they respect each other and each one cuts back on its own territory (multiculturalism) or that people meet with each other in depth and together bring about something new. The Congregation has historical experiences of the imposition of dominant cultures (we need to humbly admit it) and also experience of juxtaposition of diverse cultural groups which succeed in respecting each other (which can happen in interprovincial houses of formation or in the General House, for example). However we have little experience of interculturality, that is to say, accomplishing something together, on an equal footing, overcoming prejudices, as a sign of fraternity born of faith.

Only 15% of the brothers live internationality at this time. However, many more and almost all live in multicultural societies and communities. What is the quality of our fraternity in these multicultural situations? Will we attain "interculturality" in the name of our faith? Or will we be enmeshed in models of imposition or mere mutual tolerance?

International programs of initial formation deserve special mention. There are good experiences when they serve to share criteria for formation and open out to missions beyond their own boundaries. However they are negative if they take candidates too soon from their own cultural roots, thereby impeding the blending of personal experience of faith and vocation. This can lead to a weak spiritual texturing, one not helpful in facing the challenges of a life poor and given over to the service of others in the name of Jesus.

This touches without doubt burning issues for all which affect how we love one another and how we announce the love of God. The GG will search out how to extend this reflection to the entire Congregation.

The GG had other questions which are left in the air due to lack of time. Would it be good for the GG to take other initiatives in terms of internationality? Would it be good for us to investigate the possibility of a foundation outside our known territories, a new frontier for ourselves and the Church as for example in the Arab world? Or promote foundation of young communities (from Asia or Africa) in Europe to reinforce the presence in Europe and at the same time help with the financing of these young communities? Difficult questions to face at this moment but which we cannot forget.

## **2015: the Year of Eustaquio**

As you know, the plan of spiritual and missionary animation of the GG has assigned a year to each of the three iconic figures whom the General Chapter proposed to us. 2013 was dedicated to the Martyrs from Spain, this year is dedicated to Damien and 2015 will be dedicated to Eustaquio.

There is now the fact that 2015 has been declared the year of religious life by the Pope. We see no conflict between the program which we had established before the announcement of this event and the program which is being prepared by the Holy See.

The GG presented to the EGC the orientations and actions it desires to share with the whole Congregation for the year of Eustaquio. To us it appears that these have been well received. We have heard the reactions and the suggestions which have been given which will help us to bring about the program of 2015.

We wish that this program helps to know Eustaquio better and to deepen knowledge in areas such as physical and spiritual health, the alleviation of interior hurts, reconciliation as a personal, communal and missionary responsibility, reparation within the mystery of redemption, the ministry of reconciliation, how to take a stance in face of violence, the care of the infirm and old; etc.

The symbolic actions which we will be proposing to the Congregation are fundamentally two: the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in each local community in a given moment in Lent 2015 and the celebration of the anointing of the sick in major and zonal communities in a given moment in Advent 2015. This is an invitation to turn to the sacramental fount from which flows true health and pardon: the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

The program for 2015 will be presented in more detail in the letter in INFO of next January.

## **Other Items**

Poitiers Session: Camille informed us about the session of formation on the charism which will take place in July 2015 in Poitiers (France). The session is targeted primarily on new formators and will be carried in conjunction with the sisters.

Secular Branch: Camille informed us also, while asking for suggestions, on the proposal of the commission for the animation of the Secular Branch (a joint commission of brothers and sisters) to effect a world encounter of lay coordinators of the Secular Branch in 2017, the year we will be celebrating the bicentenary of the Pontifical Approbation of the Constitutions of the whole Congregation. The theme of that encounter will be the secular vocation inspired by the SSCC charism.

Communications: We asked also for opinions on the means of communication of the GG: INFO, web site, our Facebook. Opinions with regard to the web are generally positive. We ask how the brothers might be more aware of all the material which one can get from the site [www.sscpicpus.com](http://www.sscpicpus.com)

Liturgy proper to SSCC: We have distributed to the Major Superiors the supplement for the memory of the Martyrs from Spain which is celebrated the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, approved by the Holy See and a subsidy for the funeral rites of our SSCC brothers and sisters. I take the opportunity to say that we have good liturgical materials, proper to us officially approved. I exhort you to know them well and use them.



## Perspectives

Within two years we will have the next EGC. The dates are already fixed: from 13 to 21 of September 2016 and again here at the General House. Many of the themes broached here at this EGC will have to be revisited, teasing out the agenda for the General Chapter of 2018.

The final evaluation of this meeting was quite favorable. Beyond the content and the development of the work sessions, the daily liturgical celebrations were appreciated (Eucharist in the morning, prayer in the evening), the atmosphere of the house, the relaxed schedule which left ample free time in the afternoons for personal prayer, other types of meetings, study of the themes and rest.

Also much appreciated was the guided visit which we made on the Saturday afternoon to the excavations below the Basilica of Saint Peter, where one comes to the level of the first century and there are seen the bones of the Galilean fisherman whom Jesus called "rock." These excavations make us understand why Rome is what it is for the Church and why we have the General House here.

United in the faith of the Church, in the hope of the people of God dispersed throughout the world and in the love of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, I greet all fraternally.



General House, September 29, 2014