



CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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February 25, 2013

LETTER FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO ALL THE CONFRERES

My dear Confreres,

Fraternal Greetings, Happy Jubilee Year, and a Blessed Season of Lent to all!

On February 2, 2013 - the World day of Consecrated life and also the second day of our XIX Ordinary General Chapter - I said YES to God's will and surrendered myself to God's call to shoulder the huge responsibility as the 14th Superior General of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. It was an overwhelming and at the same time humbling experience for me to assume the office in the presence of 38 Capitulants of the General Chapter, representing the entire Congregation. The spirit of our Patron expressed through his own words, "when we abandon all to Him, He takes a tender care of us, and His Providence for us is great or small according to the measure of our abandonment", was a source of inspiration and comfort for me. I request your prayers and support for myself and my ministry. We shall, as a Congregation, continue to be at the service of the Mission of Christ and His Church in the renewed spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and in the missionary fervour of Father Peter Mermier.

The General Chapter 2013

The month of February has been a month of grace and blessing for us Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. The supreme legislative and teaching authority in the Congregation, the General Chapter consisting of 38 Capitulants, gathered together from February 1 – 15 in Hyderabad to re-visit the clarion call of our Founder and the theme of the General Chapter, 'I want Missions: MSFS - Mystics of God's love for Prophetic Ministries Today. The 19th Ordinary General Chapter was also a special and historic moment in the life of our Congregation as we celebrate the 175 years of the Foundation of our Congregation, 150th death anniversary of our Founder, 25 years of our Mission in Africa, and the Year of Faith declared by Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. The outcome of our 15 days of prayerful reflections, fraternal sharing, Salesian community living, spiritual journey, group exercise, healthy debates, and united search for clarity regarding the 28 core issues that emerged from the life experiences of the confreres, is given in the form of Statement, Orientations, Directives and Decisions.

I invite us all to spend time personally and in communities in studying these documents and implementing them in our religious community living and in our apostolate.

The General Chapter has given us a road map to our missionary journey in the next 6 years, inviting us to collaborate readily with our God-given graces and talents and to commit ourselves to our vision and charism, while remaining open to the inspiration of God's Spirit at work in our Congregation. We shall not allow ourselves to be distracted from our missionary identity and template bequeathed to us by our Founder and our pioneering missionaries. Let the words of Pope Benedict XVI to the Religious on the World Day of Consecrated Life - 2013 motivate us: 'Religious men and women, you do not listen to those who say that Religious Life has no future and it has no meaning in today's world. You religious must live your lives seeking the face of God'.

A Word of Appreciation and Gratitude

Rev. Fr. Agnelo Fernandes

On February 2, 2013, Father Agnelo Fernandes laid down his office as the 13th Superior General after 12 years of total gift of himself to mission of the Congregation. The person of Father Agnelo presents to us an icon of a true MSFS imbued with genuine Salesian spirit. His gentle and firm determination to stabilize the Congregation in its missionary and religious identity, his cheerful availability and patient listening to the confreres, and his simplicity of life and sense of optimism in a culture of religious

indifferentism, moral relativism, individualism, and pervasive materialism have made him a true steward of God's mysteries. As the spiritual leader he has been a source of encouragement and inspiration to every confrere. Under his able and unfailing leadership the Congregation has experienced a deepening of spiritual renewal and strengthening of missionary identity through Constitution retreats, re organization of all confreres into constitutionally erected religious communities, through greater awareness of pioneering mission and sharing of human resources with Provinces and missionary units in need of confreres. He has spared no efforts to facilitate the implementation of the New Governance in the administration and animation of the Local Communities, Forums in the Provinces, different Administrative units, Provincial Administration, and General Administration. The New Governance with different Forums has united the confreres in the different Provinces and in the entire Congregation under the umbrella of one family. We are proud of Father Agnelo who identified himself with the mission of the Congregation and we are ever grateful to his leadership. We look forward to his expertise and inspiration as we move on with renewed fervour and trust in the Lord. On behalf of the entire Congregation, I sincerely thank Father Agnelo for his unwavering commitment to the Administration and Animation of the Congregation during the last 12 years.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Cherukat

Fr. Cherukat, the first Assistant Superior General in our Congregation, with his long years of service to the Congregation as Provincial of the South West India Province for 9 years, General Councillor, Mission Superior of Chad Cameroon and as the Assistant Superior General has brought clarity and solidity to the different administrative units of the Congregation. He is known for his excellent administrative skills, commitment and love for the Congregation, far-sightedness, missionary planning and execution. Together with the Superior General, Fr. Cherukat made sure to implement the orientations and directives of General Chapter 2007 and guide the Congregation through its challenges and tensions. During the past 6 years, he has placed himself in different locations and situations of the Congregation where immediate decisions had to be made for the welfare of the confreres and the Congregation. His deep insights into the missionary history of the Congregation and his rootedness in the Salesian traditions are assets to the Congregation that helped him in his office as the Assistant Superior General. We are immensely grateful to him for all what he is and he has done for the growth and development of the Congregation especially during the past 6 years.

General Councillors and General Bursar

The General Councillors Rev. Fr. Noel Rebello, Rev. Fr. George Parampukattil, and Rev. Fr. Thumma Mariadas Reddy have succeeded in evolving a system of network to coordinate the Secretariat of Mission, Formation, Education, and Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries. We are grateful to them for their visits to the Forum meetings and animating the Forums by clarifying their roles and functions under the New Governance. They have brought sufficient clarity to the administration and animation of the Forum with the spirit of the new governance; commitment to the mission of Christ in and through a religious community marked by collegiality, subsidiarity and fraternal collaboration. I thank them sincerely for their commitment to the mission of the Congregation. I thank sincerely Rev. Fr. Augustine Mangatt for his animation of the Stewardship Forum and his service to the Congregation as General Bursar, ensuring accountability and transparency in handling the material goods of the Congregation. Father Augustine has made a consistent and determined effort to prepare a summary of the Financial Statement of the Provinces and of the General Administration.

New General Administration

I am happy to announce once again the new team of the General Curia:

Fr. Abraham Vettuvilil: Superior General

Fr. Thumma Mariadas Reddy: Assistant Superior General

Fr. Noel Rebello: General Secretary of Formation

Fr. George Parampukattil: General Secretary of Education

Fr. Jose Kumbolickal: General Secretary of Social Apostolate and Innovative Ministries

Fr. S. Jayaseelan: General Secretary of the Apostolate of Mission

Fr. Augustine Mangatt: General Bursar

I thank our new team for their readiness to be at the service of the Congregation. I am grateful to the Capitulants for giving me a vibrant team bubbling with experience and youthfulness to serve the

Congregation in the next 6 years. We hope to arrive at more clarity of our roles and functions to fulfil the mission entrusted to us.

Spirit Team to disseminate the message of the General Chapter

The Statement, Orientations, Directives, and Decisions of the General Chapter (GC) 2013 are to become part of our lives in the coming years. The core values and spirit of the GC need to be disseminated to every confrere and every Local Community in the Congregation. The General Administration through the services of the General Councillors in link with the Provincial Administrations and Capitulants of the GC will form a Spirit Team. This Team will carry forward the core message, orientations, and directives of the GC to every confrere in the months of April and May 2013.

175th Jubilee Celebrations and Pilgrimage to Yanam

Immediately after the General Chapter, the Capitulants travelled to Ross Hill, Visakhapatnam to re-visit the memories of our pioneering missionaries. After praying the rosary of the seven dolors, we proceeded to the first MSFS School in India, St. Aloysius School Visakhapatnam, for the Eucharistic celebration at the Jubilee Nagar. MSFS Confreres, priests and religious in and around Vizakh gathered in hundreds and had a thanksgiving Eucharistic celebration presided by the Outgoing and New General Administration. Nearly 750 priests and religious joined together to thank the Lord for the good things that happened through the MSFS missionaries in the Central India for the past 168 years. Archbishop of Visakhapatnam, His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Mallavarapu Prakash was present for the felicitations and the cultural evening. Father A. Jeyaseelan and his Classical dance team from Chennai presented an outstanding performance depicting the life and history of Father Peter Mermier and the first missionaries in India. Congratulations to Father Jeyaseelan, Father J. Stephen and the team for keeping the audience fascinated with their exhilarating performance, telling everyone the story of Fr. Mermier and the first missionaries through dance and music! Jubilee celebration and the spiritual journey started at the General Chapter ended with a pilgrimage to Yanam, an MSFS mission, where Archbishop Prakash celebrated the Eucharist with all the capitulants. It was a moving experience to be at the mortal remains of Fr. Jacques Martin and at the tombs of our pioneering missionaries in Yanam. I thank Rev. Fr. Simon Paicatt, the Provincial of Visakhapatnam, for the hospitality and organization of the Jubilee celebrations and Pilgrimage.

Communication with the Superior General

During this period of transition, I have authorized Fr. Agnelo Fernandes to attend to all the correspondence that will be addressed to the Superior General. If you want me personally and specifically attend to any matter, please contact me at abmsfs@yahoo.com or dispatch your communication to MSFS Provincial House, Vinayalaya, Malleswaram West P.O., Bangalore 560055, INDIA

My Program:

March 1 – 24: Visitation to Chad Cameroon

March 25 – April 1: Personal time

April 2 – 4: General Council Meeting in Vinayalaya, Bangalore

April 8 – 15: Mermier Bhavan, Malkajgiri, Hyderabad

April 16 – 21: Vinayalaya, Bangalore

April 22 – May 14: MSFS Generalate Rome

By the end of June 2013, I plan to move into my office and residence at the Generalate.

I sincerely thank Fr. Agnelo and you, my confreres, for your understanding and support.

MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES CALL OF GENERAL CHAPTER 2013

We, the Capitulants of the XIX Ordinary General Chapter of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) also known as Fransalians, assembled at Hyderabad, India, from February 1-15, 2013 extend our fraternal greetings to all our beloved Confreres. We are keenly aware that this event coincides with the 175th year of the Foundation of the Congregation, the 150th year of the Death

Anniversary of our Founder Servant of God Father Peter Mary Mermier, the 25th year of the Founding of our African Mission and the Call of the Universal Church to celebrate the Year of Faith.

The Theme of the General Chapter: ***“I want Missions: MSFS – Mystics of God’s Love for Prophetic Ministries Today”*** is the re-affirmation of the historic religious-missionary commitment of our Founder. Being rooted in the Spirit and Spirituality of Saint Francis De Sales and remaining in fidelity to the Charism of the Congregation and its spiritual heritage this General Chapter, the supreme legislative and teaching authority in the Congregation, gave special attention to the Contemplative and Active dimensions of our life. We made serious efforts to read the signs of the times, to respond to the needs of the Universal Church and to discern the working of the Holy Spirit in fellowship and communion keeping in view our life and mission. We hereby resolve to commit ourselves the following Statement, Orientations, Directives and Decisions.

STATEMENT

As a Fransalian family we are gathered by God, from diverse languages, cultures and nations to live as brothers united in heart and mind, so as to **‘Live Jesus’** according to the Spirit and Spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, our Patron and in the footsteps of our Founder Fr. Peter Mary Mermier.

Our world-wide Fransalian (MSFS) Identity consists in the Fraternal Communion of members from all over the world, and in our Missionary Commitment to all nations serving the Universal Church.

Our religious life and missionary commitment is lived in a local community and through community based ministries. We wish to deepen the mystical dimension, leading to personal and communitarian transformation. The joy of Religious life and the Fransalian characteristics of life are embodied in our life together and in our ministries.

We re-affirm our resolve to evangelize the world by reaching out to people of different cultures, religions and languages and by being faithful to our Foundational Apostolates: The Renewal of Christian life, Mission Overseas - Pioneering Evangelization, and Education and Formation especially of the young. To realize this we resolve to promote Spiritual Leadership, after the example of Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to be counter witnesses to religious indifference and materialism. Filled with missionary zeal, in fidelity to the Universal Church, we engage ourselves in the mission of evangelization. Being challenged by the sufferings, especially of the poor, in a world marred by falsehood, injustice and conflicts, we commit ourselves to be instruments of Truth, Justice and Peace.

As a religious family, we resolve that our life in community at the service of the Mission, shall be marked by **‘MSFS-ness’** radiating Salesian dimensions of life with a spirit of sharing, critique and transparency. True to the vision of the new Governance of the Congregation, we commit ourselves to the vision of ‘One body one Mission’ in the spirit of collegiality, collaboration and net-working of ministries, resources and personnel.

We seek to initiate and pursue new and creative ways to be effective missionaries for the sake of God’s Kingdom in season and out of season. We are committed to the short-term and long-term missionary needs of the Universal Church, while being open to the growth of the Congregation by ensuring our stable and juridical presence.

As a Fransalian family---we resolve to live the clarion call of our founder: “I want Missions” in our Being and Doing, so as to be ‘Mystics of God’s Love for Prophetic Ministries today’.

ORIENTATIONS

Our Fransalian vocation is a call to be a religious and missionary. This demands that we become Mystics and Prophets in our own times. In the midst of active mission, we intend to give more room for contemplation and thereby assuring each member of the space to grow in intimate union with God. This call to Mystical life and Prophetic mission is to be lived in personal, community life and is to be reflected in our mission and apostolate.

1. The Triple Foundational Apostolates of our Congregation flowing directly from the Founding Charism must embody our religious and missionary life and commitment today.
2. Every Province community / local community is called to make self-critical, objective evaluation of the various ministries, centers and institutions to ascertain their evangelical efficacy.

3. In all our ministries the specificity and uniqueness of '**MSFSness**' is to be made visible through optimism, simplicity, availability, gentleness and trust in the Providence of God.
4. Attentive reading of the signs of the times is the matrix of innovative, prophetic mission. They are to be the new responses of the Fransalians to the new needs, life situations and problems of people today.
5. In the planning of our mission and ministries, we must exercise vigilance through the help of competent authority, to prevent the emerging trend of 'Institutional Mentality' that tends to endanger the 'charismatic dimension' of our ministries. This would entail orienting our Institutions to benefit the poor and the marginalized.
6. Integral growth of the mission in accordance with our missionary charism and legacy is to be the criterion in new missionary undertakings.
7. Stabilizing the existing mission units and establishing juridical presence of the Congregation are to be integral part of our missionary planning.
8. Long-term and short-term Vision-Mission plan of each center is to be formulated, and the competent authority must ensure its realization and continuity after periodic evaluation based on objective feed back
9. Pioneering/Frontier Missions should be part of an immediate missionary-plan for every new priest. Exposure to Pastoral ministry is also an Integral part of the mission plan for every new priest.
10. As a Missionary Congregation, responding to the short-term needs of the local church is as much a concern as the implantation of the congregation.
11. The Provinces with 'missions abroad' must organize them to be community based, and juridical structures are to be established to safeguard and to foster the religious life of the members.
12. The historic-heritage sites of the Congregation are to be developed into spiritual-centers to disseminate the spirituality of St. Francis De Sales.
13. The General Administration will ensure that efforts are being made to live and promote Salesian spirituality. It will evaluate such efforts being pursued and will indicate further steps to be undertaken in this direction.
14. Every unit of the Congregation will prepare a team of confreres in view of rendering spiritual guidance and animation in Salesian method/spirituality.
15. Identifying and Training of Formators at Congregational Level is the concern of the General Administration.
16. This General Chapter firmly resolves to strengthen the presence and the ministries of the Western Provinces. The Chapter mandates them to come up with a Vision-Mission-Action Plan within three years. The sending provinces are expected to make generous and prompt responses to the request.
17. The congregational focus on the Mission in Africa is the urgent need. In this regard Inter-Province collaboration and pooling of resources are called for.
18. We commit ourselves to collaborate and contribute finance and personnel to promote and realize the Common Projects of the Congregation (Inter-Provincial/ under Generalate).
19. All our missionary undertakings at the local/ provincial/inter-provincial/global levels should enable us to promote our collective visibility as a missionary congregation in the universal church.
20. The General Chapter exhorts all the members of the Congregation to:

'THINK CONGREGATIONALLY and ACT PROVINCIALY'.

DIRECTIVES

We, the capitulants of the 19th Ordinary General Chapter, came together on your behalf, prayed, reflected and shared the concerns of our life and mission and are to understand that these Directives are important for our life and mission ahead. Hence in communion with all the confreres of the Congregation we have resolved to commit ourselves to these Directives for our personal and communitarian living.

RELIGIOUS LIFE / COMMUNITY / SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

1. Give primacy for personal and community prayers.
2. Simplify personal and community life – see luxuries as they are and not as needs.
3. Establish Local Communities in all Mission-units as per the Constitutions.
4. Organize spiritual leadership programmes.
5. Organize Community life strictly as per the Constitutions and General Directory.
6. Study and interiorize/personalize the works of St. Francis De Sales and Fr. Peter Mary Mermier and form the daily programme of our community living, making use of modern means of communication.
7. Make Salesian and Mermierian Literature available for people of different walks of life.
8. Initiate steps at province/community level to establish units of Friends of Fransalians/Lay Associates of St. Francis De Sales.
9. Intensify the efforts to promote the Cause of the Beatification of Fr. Peter Mary Mermier.
10. Evaluate Periodically the vision-mission plan of the local community.

FORMATION

1. Involve a team of experts of different specialization to assist the Formators at all levels.
2. Foster Inter-Province collaboration for Inter-cultural/regional/Provincial formation for MSFS Mission.
3. Make the optimum use of the existing formation houses. Seek the permission of the General Administration prior to initiating the process of any new formation house in India and Africa.
4. Implement the Formation Guidelines at all stages by the competent authority, with special focus on Vocation Promotion and Grading in the given Format.
5. Organize periodically Ongoing Formation Programmes for the Confreres.

MISSION APOSTOLATE

1. Every Province must make efforts to have a Renewal / Spirituality center to promote and strengthen Parish Missions and other ministries. The Provinces with scarcity of members must form Retreat Teams / designate one or two members for renewal ministry.
2. Evolve and implement the profile of an “MSFS Parish” and “MSFS Parish Priest”.
3. Undertake New Parish/Mission with clear mission-plan.
4. Establish a Mission Institute in India to train personnel for Overseas Mission.
5. Foster new ways of Evangelization, making use of modern means of communication.
6. Form and Train Personnel for Preaching Ministry at mission-units/ Province.

EDUCATION

1. Ensure ‘Fransalian Culture’ / Fransalian way of life in all our educational institutions.
2. Implement strictly the Fransalian Policy of Education and evolve an appropriate mechanism for periodic evaluation of the Educational Institutions.
3. Explore the possibility of partnership of networking with the students and parents for the cause of the poor.
4. Make the staff sharers of the vision-mission plan of our Educational Apostolate.
5. Evolve the mechanism to ensure financial transparency in our educational institutions.
6. Give preference to the poor and Catholic students in our educational institutions.
7. Twin the Schools in urban/semi-urban areas with schools in rural areas.
8. Disseminate Salesian virtues and values through our educational institutions.

9. Commitment to Excellence is to be the hallmark of Fransalian Education.
10. Utilize the existing infra-structures for the benefit of the poor.
11. Appoint a Professional Counselor in every Educational Institution

SOCIAL APOSTOLATE – INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES

1. Equip / empower confreres with sufficient skills for Social Apostolate – Innovative Prophetic Ministries.
2. Organize Retreats / Recollections on the theme of Prophetic Leadership.
3. Revitalize:
 -  Justice and Peace Commission and Legal cell.
 -  Theological Commission.
4. Establish the commission on Family Life.
5. Promote Ecological care and Environmental protection.

ADMINISTRATION

1. Invite wider participation of the members of the Province in the decision-making process in starting new institutions by (appointing) a Study-committee.
2. Take up more of Inter-Province projects to give a collective visibility and to ensure effectiveness as MSFS.
3. Assist English / Franco-Swiss / Brazil/East Africa Provinces, USA vice-province and Chile Mission with more personnel.
4. Work out within three years a vision – mission plan by the provinces with diminishing numbers.
5. Take steps to inform / to educate every confrere about the code of Ethics of MSFS and sign the document.
6. Create a “user friendly soft copy” of the Constitutions, Directory and Salesian Literature.

FINANCE / STEWARDSHIP / RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

1. Appoint a Mission Procure at the Congregational Level.
2. Create a mechanism to ensure financial accountability and transparency and periodical presentation of the accounts at local community and province community levels.
3. Appoint accountant(s) for smooth transitions and continuity.
4. Train confreres in Finance Management and Book Keeping.
5. Use common Software for accounting in all the provinces.

DECISIONS

1. The General Chapter 2013 elected the New General Administration – Superior General, Assistant Superior General, 4 General Counselors and General Bursar.
2. The General Chapter 2013 decided to raise the USA Region into a Vice-Province.
3. The General Chapter 2013 decided to constitute the Confreres in Germany and Austria (GA) into different Provincial Delegations under their respective Provinces. The confreres will be grouped into local communities with Local Superior under their own Major Superiors. Each Provincial will then appoint a Delegation Superior after due consultation with members of their Delegation. The Delegation Superiors will be formed into a Forum and elect a chairman and propose his name to the PIF – PEA to be appointed as the Chairman of the Forum. The Superior General will appoint the Chairman of the Forum as proposed by the PIF-PEA.
4. The General Chapter 2013 made certain Corrections, Amendments and Additions to the General Directory (to be published shortly).
5. The General Chapter 2013 empowered the General Administration to constitute a Committee to study some Proposals approved by the General Chapter 2013 in view of presenting them to the Congregation before the XX General Chapter 2019 (to be published shortly).

6. The General Chapter 2013 empowered the General Administration to initiate discussion at the Congregational level for some other Proposals that involve Constitutional Amendments (to be published shortly).

Vive Jesus

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S HOMILY AT THANKSGIVING MASS ON THE LAST DAY OF THE XIX ORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER, 2013

My dear Confreres:

At the end of the 19th Ordinary General Chapter 2013, we have good news and bad news. The good news is that the 19th ordinary General Chapter is coming to an end. The good news is that we have arrived at clear, focused, and promising Statements, Directives, Orientations, and Decisions that give a definite road map to our Congregation in the next six years. The good news is that we have re-affirmed our unshakeable resolve as MSFS, "I want Missions", the words of our Founder, and our decisive course of action to be mystics of God's love for prophetic ministries in the coming years.

We have a bad news too. The bad news is that we are challenged to take this spiritual journey and group exercise of the General Chapter to every confrere, every Local Community, every missionary unit, Region, Province, and the General Administration. The bad news is that we are challenged to actualize the Statement, Directives, Orientations, and Decisions in the next six years; otherwise it remains a cerebral exercise. The bad news is that we are challenged to renew and let our lives be transformed before we call for renewal and transformation in the entire Congregation. Only transformed people can transform others.

Our vision for next six years is threefold: to be Missionaries with Salesian spirituality, to be Mystics deeply rooted in our spiritual heritage, and to be Prophets being faithful to the voice of God speaking to us through this General Chapter.

We are Missionaries and we are Missionaries of St Francis de Sales with Salesian spirituality. Our mission is the mission of Christ and the mission of the Church. Our identity is a missionary identity. Our template is a missionary template. We will resist any temptation that distorts our vision and that distracts us from our unshakeable resolve to pioneering missions and being missionaries in the Local Church. We will not compromise on our missionary identity and template no matter what the cost is. We will live our 'MSFS ness' wherever we are and whatever apostolate we are engaged in.

We are Mystics and do not be scared by the word Mystic. It simply means one who has moved from mere believing to knowing, from belonging to a system or school of spirituality to inner experiencing. A mystic is someone who knows, and not someone who merely believes. A Mystic would say: I know God instead of I believe in God. A mystic would say I experience God's love and instead of I believe in God's love. A mystic would say I belong to God and God alone, instead of saying one day I will belong to God after I am made worthy.

A mystic does not think in 'either or' categories like good or bad, right or wrong, perfect or imperfect, human or divine. A mystic sees life as a paradox and as a contradiction and is not afraid of the fact that reality is always mixed. A mystic knows life is a struggle to hold together good and bad, right and wrong, perfect and imperfect, and human and divine. A mystic knows that integration happens through this inner tension to blend the paradoxes and contradictions in life. Mystic believes that truth is in the coincidence of the opposites.

Francis de Sales advises us: 'Let us not be disturbed by imperfections, because our perfection consists in fighting them. And we cannot fight them unless we see them, nor can we overcome them if we do not come across them'. Our mysticism is Salesian mysticism. St. Francis de Sales suggested that we should say at least thousand times a day that I belong to God and God alone. That is the centre of

Salesian mysticism. It is our ability to stand back and calmly observe our inner dramas, without rushing to judgment, and say to ourselves: 'Be what we are and be at its best'. Salesian mysticism teaches us that our identity comes from God, and not from what we do and what we have. Salesian mysticism teaches us that we do not allow ourselves to be determined by what we do or what we accomplish in life. Our identity comes from our belongingness to God and our communion with God.

We are called for prophetic ministries like Father Peter Mermier. Who is a Prophet? A Prophet is someone who looks for faithfulness to the voice of God. A prophet experiences a specific calling that comes directly from God and a prophet's message comes from an experience of God. A prophet voices not his own idea but voices the mind of God. In the Bible, whenever prophets spoke they said: 'Thus says the Lord God. The role of a prophet is to topple down and de-construct the false Gods and false identities and to re-construct our true identity in God. This General Chapter calls us to topple down our own preferred identities and agendas, instead deepen our missionary identity resounding through the call of our Founder, 'I want Missions'. This identity has to be lived through Frontier and pioneering mission and radiating 'MSFS ness' in every apostolate.

Very early in the Judeo Christian tradition there was a split between the Exodus tradition and Priestly tradition. The Exodus tradition is full of drama, pioneering, adventure and risk. The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home and go to a land that I am going to show you. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing to many'. Abram set out on his missionary journey as the Lord had told him. The Lord said to Moses: I have seen the affliction of my people and I have heard their cry. I know all about their sufferings. I am sending you so that you can lead my people out of Egypt where they are treated cruelly and will take them to a rich and fertile land. The Exodus tradition is all about prophetic ministry and missionary journey. As we move into the book of Leviticus and Numbers, we find that a priestly tradition develops. These books reflect what happens when priestly mentality takes over. Priestly mentality controls and organizes temple, sanctuary, and sacrifices in the temple. Priestly mentality can even stifle prophetic mentality.

It was almost 8 centuries before Christ that we meet spiritual geniuses – the Jewish prophets. These prophets desperately tried to link the Exodus and Priestly traditions, the inner God experience and outer work for Justice and Truth. Almost all the Religious Congregations were founded with an Exodus tradition where the Founder responded prophetically to a felt need of the people of God at a particular historical context. But gradually priestly mentality creeps into the minds of the religious men and women stifling their missionary fervour and charism. Our Congregation was founded 175 years ago with an Exodus tradition when Father Peter Mermier gave up his parochial ministry and decided to begin the parish missions with a focus on renewal of faith. Later he wanted the first missionaries to go to Africa with the mission of the Lord. But he had to send the first 6 MSFS to India in 1845. That was an exodus event in the history of our Congregation. They left their country, family, relatives, and culture. This is what Father Martin, the leader of the first group of MSFS said as they were about to leave for India: 'In a few days we shall have left Europe. Our former motherland is no more our own. Our motherland is now the district of Visakhapatnam. India is our Europe'.

After 175 years we are evaluating ourselves in the light of the Founder's call for Mission. We need to ask ourselves whether we have allowed the priestly mentality to take over our charism of parish mission, pioneering mission, and education of the young in the spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales. We are not only priests, but we are religious and missionaries. That is our identity. That is our template. The General Chapter 2013 has given us an opportunity to blend the exodus and priestly tradition as mystics of God's love for prophetic ministries today. We have decided that we will not compromise on our exodus tradition and missionary heritage. As Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, let us live our Salesian heritage and spirituality. As MSFS, let us think congregationally and act provincially. The administrative units in the Congregation exist for the mission of the Congregation and the mission of the Church.

May the good Lord bless our orientations, directives, and decisions in this Eucharistic celebration!

May God be blessed!

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abraham', with a horizontal line underneath.

Father Abraham Vettuvil MSFS
Superior General