

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



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CONVOCACTION OF THE ORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER XX **THE THEME “MSFS, WAKE UP TO THE BASICS”**

My Dear Confreres,

Benedictus Deus!

In this year of the 450th birth anniversary of St. Francis de Sales and on this feast day of our heavenly Patron, so dear to us, I come to you with this very important letter of

CONVOCACTION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER XX

With the consent of the General Council at its Meeting held at MSFS House Hyderabad, India from October 11 – 18, 2016, and in accordance with Article 194 of our MSFS Constitutions, I

CONVOKE

THE 20th ORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER **OF OUR CONGREGATION**

The General Chapter will take place in our MSFS Northeast India Provincial House, Guwahati, INDIA
From February 01 – 13, 2019

On the theme

“MSFS, WAKE UP TO THE BASICS”

THE SPIRIT OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

“The General Chapter is the supreme legislative and teaching authority in the Congregation” (Art. 191). “The General Chapter invites individuals and communities to a serious reflection on and evaluation of their life and mission, in the light of our religious commitment and apostolate” (Art. 196/2).

I invite all my confreres to look forward to the 20th General Chapter:

- as a spiritual event in the Congregation,
- as the principal sign of unity in diversity of the Congregation, and
- as a special moment of grace, offered by the Divine Providence to the Congregation, so that we may focus on the following objectives

OBJECTIVES OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER XX

- To review the implementation of the directives and decisions of the General Chapter 2013 in the areas of Consecrated Life in the Community, Mission, MSFS – ness, and Salesian Spirituality
- To evaluate thoroughly the basics of consecrated life as lived in Local Communities and apostolates in the Congregation
- To reflect on the current challenges in religious life and apostolate of the different units in the Congregation
- To draw up necessary measures/solutions for the appropriate renewal of religious life of the members, and
- To give specific orientations and guidelines for the future

INTERCESSION OF MOTHER OF SORROWS, ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, AND FATHER MERMIER

I entrust our General Chapter 2019 into the hands of Mary, Mother of Sorrows, and to the intercession of St Francis de Sales and Father Peter Mermier. We pray that they may, through their intercession, obtain for every MSFS an interior renewal of his consecrated and missionary life for the mission to the poor. Kindly recite the prayer in preparation for the General Chapter 2019 in every community and by every confrere.

OUR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

We have reached the 20th General Chapter at this time in the history of our Congregation. Each General Chapter is 'God's work'. It gives guidelines and takes decisions, which influence the life, structure and future of the Congregation. I want to highlight that a General Chapter is not simply the business of a group of elected Delegates and ex officio members who are called Capitulants. Although the Capitulants exercise their function and role in the name of all the members in the Congregation, the Chapter is a community exercise of every confrere in the Congregation.

ORGANIZATION AND CALENDAR

The success of the General Chapter depends on the measure of clarity and the strength of determination we have, to make things happen by God's grace. This community exercise of General Chapter demands detailed and in-depth preparation. I

do not refer to the technical and managerial preparation – which obviously is important – but to a long preparation of hearts and minds by every confrere. Hence, this 2 year period of preparation to prepare the hearts and minds of us all.

INITIAL PREPARATION OF GENERAL CHAPTER 2019

The Superior General, Assistant General, and the Four General Councilors will do the initial preparation of the General Chapter. The PRE-CAPITULAR commission will be constituted after the next General Council Meeting in May 2017.

ELECTION OF THE DELEGATES TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER

The election of the DELEGATES to the General Chapter will take place from June 15, 2018 to September 15, 2018 and the names of the Delegates are to be submitted to the Superior General on or before September 25, 2018. The Provincials will initiate the process of election of DELEGATES based on the appropriate articles of the Constitutions and the General Directory and as per the further guidance given to them by the Superior General on the advice of the General Council.

IMPORTANT DATES TO BE NOTED

- **Election of the Delegates:** June 15 2018 to September 15, 2018.
- **Names of the Delegates submitted to the Superior General:** latest by September 25, 2018.
- **Capitulants report to the Venue:** February 01, 2019.
- **Opening Day of General Chapter XX:** February 02, 2019.
- **Free Day for the Capitulants:** February 07, 2019.
- **Closing day of General Chapter XX:** February 12, 2019.
- **Departure:** Any time on and from February 13, 2019.

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME: 'MSFS, WAKE UP TO THE BASICS'

The theme, “MSFS, WAKE UP TO THE BASICS”, expresses our resolve to reinforce our missionary and religious identity as MSFS. Basics/Essentials of MSFS life are the four pillars of Consecrated Life in Community, Mission, MSFS – ness, and Salesian Spirituality that define our identity and purpose. These pillars should enhance the entire structure/system of our MSFS family in the spirit of our charism handed over to us by Father Peter Mermier. This is a journey we have already started with General Chapter 2013 (which clarified these basics to us) and we must now continue this journey and bring it to completion.

Hence, there is a 'Wake Up' call through General Chapter 2019 to look at the present system/structure of our Congregation and ask tough questions that will help us to bring

a systemic change. The focus here is on Consecrated Life in Community, Mission, MSFS – ness and Salesian Spirituality rather than on any specific issue. The focus is on the bigger picture of the Congregation that should alter structures and support mechanisms, which will make the system operate in a particular way, with thrust on the 4 pillars. The focus is on inter - personal relationship and collaboration within the different units in the system. Congregation is a living system composed of members and Provinces who do not function independently of one another but as a unified whole.

My experience of the Congregation in the past 4 years tells me that in the midst of fast growth and expansion of our Congregation all over the world with almost 1500 professed members in 28 countries, 10 Provinces, 1 Vice Province, 2 Regions, 2 Delegations, 2 missions in Africa, and confreres scattered in different units, we face challenges from within and without. We thank God for all what we have accomplished by God's grace and by our committed service to the People of God. However, in our Congregational system, we have developed certain patterns of functioning, without thrust on the 4 pillars, that seem to produce serious challenges today.

THE CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED ARE:

- Increasing number of exclaustation, departures, allegations and scandals.
- 'Heightened individualism, crisis of identity, and cooling of fervor'.
- Addictions and addictive behaviors.
- Technology taking over theology.
- Lack of integration of prayer and spirituality with apostolate.
- Lack of animation of religious life and more of administration and business tendencies.
- Campaigning on the basis of Caste, Region, and Language at the time of election of Provincial and Provincial Councillors.
- Growing number of dysfunctional members and communities.
- Deteriorating spirit of religious life and missionary spirit.
- Family and needs of family taking over community life and needs of the community.
- Money laundering, stealing, and embezzlements.
- Personal preference only for institutions and institutionalized ministries.
- Craze for ministries in developed countries and less interest in the poor and mission countries and frontier missions.
- Reluctance to honor the personal plan and directive of the Major Superior after serving in the developed countries.
- Driven by personal projects and interests rather than sharing the vision, charism, and mission of the Congregation/Province.

To address these challenges and to bring in a renewal of consecrated life in the Congregation through the General Chapter 2019, nothing less than a systemic

change - with focus on commitment to Consecrated Life in Community, Mission, MSFS-ness, and Salesian Spirituality - is necessary. A renewal will only happen when we engage in a tough and important conversation about what we visualize for the Congregation for the next 6 years and next 25 years. A renewal of religious life that leads to renewal of apostolate will definitely contribute to the renewal of the Church.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

- o How can we purposefully intervene to bring in a systemic and paradigmatic change instead of a piecemeal change? (Our paradigm is Consecrated Life in Community, Mission, MSFS – ness, and Salesian Spirituality)
- o How can we use all our available human and material resources in the Congregation to strengthen these FOUR thrusts of the Congregation?
- o How can we bring in PARADIGM SHIFT that will help the Congregation and our confreres reach their potential for the mission of the Church?
- o How can we bring in a systemic change that will take into account and address the serious challenges (listed above) we face today?

PREPARATION BY THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION

Further preparation of our hearts and minds for the General Chapter 2019 will be done with the help of **Three Reflection Papers** on the theme, prepared by competent members, mandated by the General Council. These Reflection Papers with questions will be studied personally and collectively by confreres.

1. **Understanding the 4 Basics of MSFS life** (focusing on the essentials or the new paradigm – consecrated life in community, mission, msfs-ness, and salesian spirituality to address the current challenges in the Congregation)
2. **Outstanding Contradictions of our MSFS Life today** that negate our basics and are to be uprooted, in order to return to the basics (mention predominant ones)
3. **A New Paradigm: MSFS, wake up to the basics:** Visible expressions for commitment in view of addressing the challenges (A few will be prioritized in importance)

A three-to-four-page reflection material, with pointed questions, will be sent to you for your study and reflection.

Live Jesus!

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General

January 24, 2017
Feast of St. Francis de Sales