

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



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SUPERIOR GENERAL TO ALL THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

My dear Confreres:

Fraternal greetings and good wishes to you from Rome! May I invite you to reflect with me on the Importance of this month, Our Witness to Consecrated Life, Preparations for the 20th General Chapter 2019, and a clear understanding of our Charism and Apostolate!

1. MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS

We are in the month of November. This month begins with ALL SAINTS DAY and ALL SOULS DAY. Our thoughts turn to all saints. **“Saints are our brothers and sisters who have received the light of God in their hearts and have transmitted it to the world, each according to their own "tonality" (Pope Francis).** Our thoughts turn also to those whom we have loved and who are no longer with us. This is the month of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, of those who have died in grace, yet who failed to make satisfaction for all of their sins.

Perhaps no Catholic doctrine has been more misunderstood by Catholics themselves than the doctrine of Purgatory. Many of us are uncomfortable with this doctrine and so we tend to talk lightly about it or sometimes even get embarrassed by it.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI clarifies this doctrine:

- *“I would go so far as to say that if there was no purgatory, then we would have to invent it, for who would dare say of himself that he was able to stand directly before God”*
- *Purgatory basically means that God can put the pieces back together again. That God can cleanse us in such a way that we are able to be with God and can stand there in the fullness of life*

Purgatory is where those who have died in grace, but who have not fully atoned for the temporal punishments resulting from their sins, go to finish their atonement before experiencing the fullness of joy in heaven. We travel in this world together with our brothers and sisters and so our salvation is related to the salvation of others. We come to the help of others, even after their death, by praying for them. In this month of Holy Souls we shall make time to pray for the dead: our near and dear ones, confreres, friends, and for all the souls especially for those most forsaken.

2. RELIGIOUS SHOULD OFFER THREE FORMS OF TESTIMONY

As we are preparing for the General Chapter 2019, we pray for an internal renewal of every MSFS through the intercession of Father Peter Mermier. This internal renewal should enable us to witness to our consecrated life. Pope Francis mentions three forms of testimony expected of a consecrated person:

a. ***'Seeing Jesus at the center of our lives'***

Our journey of consecrated life is following the footsteps of Jesus. This journey presents us with difficulties. But with Jesus, at the center of our lives, the difficulties are faced in a different way. We will find joy that no one can take away from us when Jesus is at the center of our life and apostolates. Pope reminds the seminarians: *"If you do not have Jesus at the center, delay your ordination. If you are not certain that Jesus is the center of your life, wait a while longer, so as to be sure. Otherwise, you will begin a journey without knowing where it will lead"*.

b. ***"The spirit of poverty"*** should mark our consecrated life. Consecrated people must never be business people. Our apostolates should not be commercialized to suit the competitive and corporate patterns of the world. The Pope says, *"I ask everyone to examine their conscience: how is my life of poverty going; also what do I receive from small things"*

c. ***'Resume the works of Mercy'***

The spiritual works of mercy are: instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, giving alms to the poor, and burying the dead.

3. GENERAL CHAPTER XX

Our 20th General Chapter (GC) is 14 months ahead of us. We begin our intense preparation for the GC 2019. At this point, we place ourselves in a situation of listening, first of all, to the Word of God. God's Word comes to us through our MSFS tradition and heritage and through what every MSFS is experiencing, perceiving, and saying. Again, God's Word comes to us through what the Spirit is saying to the Church as well as through the signs of the times.

Our next General Chapter should find means and ways, during its preparation and during its sessions, to allow all that is lived within the Congregation to find a voice. We will listen to the voice of those confreres who struggle under the heat of the day in the mission territories, in various apostolates, in remote places, and on the peripheries of the society. We will listen to those who plough and furrow new canals of hope and grace in unknown and unwelcome territories. We will listen to the cry of every anguished and unsatisfied confrere as well as to the melody of the satisfied. We will let ourselves be guided by the successes in our initiatives and be taught by our failures.

4. HOW DO WE DO IT?

i). Three Reflection Papers, prepared by our own confreres from different situations and mission territories, will be presented to you in PDF and PowerPoint presentation forms for your personal study and reflection, study in the Local Community, and reflection in the Apostolic Community. The same three Reflection Papers will be made available to you in a book form through Provincials/Superiors of administrative units. Please follow the guidelines given in studying the Reflection Papers and voicing your responses.

ii). We have constituted an *ad hoc* Preparatory Committee for General Chapter 2019 (PCGC) comprising of three confreres: Fr. James Pattarkalayil (Convener), Fr. Dola Velangani, and Fr. Daiy Sebastian. The primary function of PCGC is to collate three categories of proposals to the GC 2019 viz.:

Category one: *Proposals made by the General Chapter 2013 as given in the Call of the General Chapter*

Category two: *Proposals from the General Administration and Provincial Administrations*

Category three: *Proposal from individual confreres in the Congregation.*

iii). May I request every confrere in the Congregation to send his individual proposals (if any) for the consideration of the GC 2019.

Please note:

- **Your proposal should be stated clearly, with the name of the person who is making the proposal and the reason for the same as far as possible (Write your proposal, give the rationale/reason for the proposal, and your name).**
- **Your proposal should be sent to the Convener of PCGC, Fr. JAMES PATTARKALAYIL at pattarjam97@googlemail.com latest by December 10, 2017.**
- **The Convener, with the assistance of PCGC, will collate the individual proposals of the confreres, if necessary, under various headings, indicating the number of confreres who are making that proposal with the rationale for the same.**
- After receiving the collated individual proposals from PCGC by December 25, 2017, the Superior General will prepare a Document of Proposals for General Chapter 2019 in three parts:
Part A: The Proposals by the General Chapter 2013.
Part B: The Proposals made by the General Administration and Provincial Administrations.
Part C: The Collated Proposals of individual confreres.
- The prepared Document of Proposals for GC 2019 will be sent to all the Provincials with specific instructions on how to get responses from the confreres in the Province during the months from January through June 2018.

5. OUR CHARISM AND APOSTOLATE

Every now and then, I receive emails from confreres asking for clarification on the distinction between our Charism and Apostolate. I use this opportunity to clarify the distinction as best as I can.

Our Charism is to: **Live in a Religious Community, to continue the missionary task of the Church, and to live the spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales** (Constitutions: Prologue no. C and Article 7).

These dimensions of our life, intertwined and integrated, form the foundational charism of our Congregation. Without commitment to and living all the three, one cannot be a true MSFS.

Besides our charism, we can talk of our Foundational Apostolates or the early apostolates in which our Founder himself chose to express the charism. We can call them our Foundational Apostolates because they were first chosen at the time of the foundation of the Congregation. They are: **Apostolate for the Renewal of Christian Faith through Parish Mission Preaching, Apostolates Overseas and Pioneering Evangelization, and Apostolate of Education and Formation, especially of the young (cf. MSFS Const Art. 22).**

At times, the foundational apostolates are wrongly understood as charism; or wrongly spoken as foundational charism leading to misunderstanding. There is a common thread that runs through our foundational apostolates, coming from the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and the missionary dimension of our charism i.e. **Renewal of faith of those under pastoral care.**

Our Apostolates cannot be called typically MSFS without an active concern to bring people, under our apostolate and care, close to God in prayer, contemplation, and in a life of love and service as indicated to us by Jesus.

The charism of our Congregation can express itself in many other apostolates, new and innovative, provided they are undertaken by MSFS as **COMMUNITY, as MISSIONARIES, and through the SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY of St. FRANCIS DE SALES.**

*Of all the foundational apostolates, the primordial apostolate is **parish mission preaching** which Fr. Mermier started in the context of his time in the post French revolution period when knowledge and experience of God through prayer and sacraments were neglected.*

The present concern of our Congregation, to revive this Parish Mission Preaching Ministry, is to respond to the same type of situation we are in today as in Fr. Mermier's times, when so much of secularism, and materialism and relativism is holding sway over the minds and hearts of people. The Congregation feels that we need to revive this foundational apostolate of Parish Mission Preaching adapted to our times.

DECISIONS, NEWS, AND EVENTS

A. FR. JOHN BRITTO MUTHUSWAMY: NAGPUR PROVINCE

After having consulted with the confreres of Nagpur Province and with the consent of the General Council, I am glad to appoint Fr. Muthuswamy as the Provincial Superior of Nagpur Province with effect from August 15, 2017.

B. PROVINCIAL CURIA OF NAGPUR PROVINCE

Fr. George Kurickal (Councillor cum Admonitor), Fr. Patras Tirkey (Councillor), Fr. Anthony Amaladoss (Councillor), Fr. Lalit Tigga (Councillor) and Fr. William Athony (Provincial Bursar)

C. FR. JACOB KARAMAKUZHIL

On behalf of the General Administration, I sincerely thank Fr. Jacob Karamkuzhyil for his leadership to Nagpur Province as Major Superior for two consecutive terms. We appreciate his initiatives and commitment to the growth of the vast Province and toward the animation of the communities and apostolates in the Province

D. PROVINCIAL CURIA OF BRAZIL PROVINCE

Fr. Benedict Antonysamy (Councillor and Admonitor), Fr. José de Freitas (Councillor), and Fr. Jaganadhan Gnanadurai (Bursar)

E. PROVINCIAL CURIA OF EAST AFRICA PROVINCE

Fr. Jacob Thekkekara (Councillor cum Admonitor), Fr. Thomas Kochuparampil (Councillor), Fr. Kurian Kollapallil (Councillor), Fr. Thomas Kochalumchuvatttil (Councillor) and Fr. Jose Eriyanickal (Provincial Bursar).

F. PROVINCIAL CURIA OF PUNE PROVINCE

Fr. Johnson Gonsalves (Councillor cum Admonitor), Fr. Santosh Salve (Councillor), Fr. Tony Prem Anand (Councillor), Fr. Valerian Carvalho (Councillor) and Fr. A. Nelson (Provincial Bursar).

G. SPIRITUALITY PROGRAM IN ANNECY

“Our Franco – Swiss Province is happy and proud, as well, to welcome confreres from other parts of the world and to provide them some salesian insights. The Program will consist in a salesian (individually) guided retreat of 7 days, then talks, visits on salesian and mermierian places, meetings with confreres and the faithful in parishes, interaction with the Holy Cross Sisters of Chavanod, St. Joseph Annecy Sisters, and Visitation Sisters” (From the letter of Fr. Yves Carron).

We are grateful to the Franco-Swiss Province and to the Team of experts for 'this spiritual sharing to grow in the practice of this rich and beautiful spirituality, so relevant for our times'. We have 5 of our confreres participating in this program.

H. 'THE MSFS PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY'

The Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales (adapted version for the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales/Fransalian Associates) is released and will be made available to the entire MSFS family. I request all the Provincials to share this spiritual wisdom of our Patron with confreres and Fransalian Associates in your units with sufficient guidelines to use them. Fr. Joseph Thazhathukunnel and Fr. Suresh Babu will be at your service to present the Spiritual Directory in our Formation Houses and in our Province Communities.

I. 'FRANSALIAN ASSOCIATES'

The booklet, “Guidelines of the Fransalian Associates” is ready for the use of our Associates all over the world. Our Associates, who share our charism and spirituality, will receive the fundamentals and directives to strengthen their bond with us in our journey toward holiness. I request the Coordinators of Fransalian Associates in every Province to use these guidelines in animating them.

J. CHANGE OF DATES OF FORUM MEETINGS IN 2018

The following are the changed and approved dates for forum meetings in February-March 2018

NORTH-EAST PROVINCE

- 1st and 2nd February: Mission Forum, North East with the General Secretary, Missions
- 3rd and 4th February: Social and Innovative Ministries Forum with the General Secretary, SAIM
- 5th and 6th February: Education Forum with the General Secretary, Education
- 7th and 8th February: Formation Forum with the General Secretary, Formation

NAGPUR PROVINCE

- 9th and 10th February: Mission Forum Nagpur Province with General Secretary, Mission
- 11th and 12th February: Social and Innovative Ministries Forum with General Secretary, SAIM
- 13th and 14th February: Education Forum with General Secretary, Education
- 15th and 16th February: Formation Forum with General Secretary, Formation

PUNE PROVINCE

- 17th and 18th February: Social and innovative Ministries Forum with General Secretary, SAIM
- 19th and 20th Feb: Formation Forum with General Secretary, Formation
- 21st and 22nd February: Mission Forum, Pune Province with General Secretary, Mission
- 10th and 11th March: Education Forum, with General Secretary, Education

**REGIONAL (INDIA) SOCIAL APOSTOLATE
AND INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES FORUM MEETING**

20th and 21st March 2018: Regional SAIM Forum at Stella Maris in Visakhapatnam

K. NEW VATICAN POSTAGE STAMPS

The Holy See Press announced on October 31, 2017 that the Vatican will issue two postage stamps on November 23, 2017 to celebrate the 450th birth anniversary of St. Francis de Sales (2.55 euro stamp) and to mark 500th Anniversary of Reformation (1.00 euro stamp).

L. CONGREGATIONAL RETREAT 2017 – 2018

The Congregational Retreat, “Walk the Way and Live the Grace” in preparation for the General Chapter 2019, was attended by the members of the General Curia, Provincials of PIF – PEA, and the Regional Superior of Dibrugarh. I invite the entire Congregation to attend the retreat without fail as a preparation for the General Chapter and as a means of waking up to the basics of our consecrated life as Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. I express my deep sentiments of gratitude to all our young animators of the retreat for their creative and inspiring way of facilitating the retreat.

M. PRAYERFUL TRIBUTE TO OUR CONFRERES

Fr. Antony Lopez of Pune Province died on September 01, 2017 in Pune. He served mostly as an educationist and as a pastor from 1979 – 2017 in our schools and parishes in Goa and Maharashtra.

Fr. Théodore Vannay of Franco – Swiss Province died on September 12, 2017. He worked 8 years as teacher at La Corbière, 21 years as parish priest at Hérémence, 6 years as Provincial of Franco-Swiss (1989-1995).

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord!

Let me conclude with words of wisdom from St. Francis de Sales:

*“I have made a pact with my tongue,
not to speak when my heart is disturbed”.*

Live Jesus!

Fraternally yours in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General