

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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1st June, 2013,

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION

My dear Confreres:

Fraternal Greetings on the eve of the Feast of Corpus Christi!

In this year of Faith we are called to give witness of our Faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament and in our life and ministries.

We are at the peak of celebrating the foundation of our beloved Congregation and the missionary fervor of our Founder, Servant of God, Fr. Peter Mermier with great joy and gratitude. Founded in Annecy on October 24, 1838 we have grown into a Congregation with 10 Provinces, 1 Vice Province, One Region, and Two Delegations with almost 1300 confreres including the temporarily professed all over the world. We continue to place our MSFS vocation at the service of the Mission of the Lord in the Church through our three-fold charism: **Renewal of Christian life, Education and Formation especially of the Young, and Mission Overseas and Pioneering Evangelization**'.

In the transformed social and ecclesial context of today, our General Chapter has re-positioned us in the perspective and spirit of our Founder, Patron, and our pioneering missionaries after a critical evaluation of the past 175 years. The STATEMENT (the Call of the General Chapter – 2013) spells out the perspective: **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.** Being and Doing, Contemplation and Action, Mystics and Prophets, Religious and Missionary, Salesian spirituality and Mermerian Missionary Heritage- are all indicators to guide us in our consecrated life as Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. Consecrated Life (with Salesian spirituality) and Missionary Life (with Mermerian fervor) offer an indisputable base for our MSFS vocation. What makes us MSFS and what gives us '**MSFS ness**' is that we are not only Missionaries but Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales with a Salesian spirituality. The General Chapter calls us for a fresh start and a renewed spirit especially in the areas of religious life lived in communities and in our thinking congregationally.

Let me place before you four invitations in our journey toward 'Mystics for Prophetic Ministries':

(1) Turn away from a 'tired' Religious Life toward a dynamic response to Religious Life

We are at a time in the history of the Church where we have a new form of leadership in the person of Pope Francis. He has already expressed a new style of leadership which can be defined as evangelical, revealing a Church that is free, poor, humble, close to people, and that bears witness to God's Mercy. With every new Pope, there is a change in the characteristics of leadership in the Church. It is said that Pope John XXIII responded to the crisis in the Church

with Vatican Council II; Pope Paul VI manifested an aspect reflecting the dialogue of the Church immediately after Vatican II; John Paul II presented an image of a 'triumphant' church which he dreamed of for the Third Millennium; and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI presented the portrait of a Church that was 'tired' as he himself defined it when speaking about the Church in Europe. His successor, Pope Francis, is now on his way from a tired and worn-out leadership to a new leadership that is thriving and being renewed.

How can we break away from a tired and worn-out Religious Life?

Consecrated Life is gift of the Holy Spirit; and, in other words, of divine and charismatic origin, and it belongs to the intrinsic part of the life and holiness of the Church (LG, n.44). Therefore, the progress of Religious Life always matches that of the Church. When one faces a period of crisis, the other does so as well, and whenever one flourishes, the other receives an impulse of renewal and vitality. A tired Church matches a tired religious life and vice versa.

There are tensions in Religious life : between apostolic work and community life; between those who want to live with the poor and work for the poor and those who want rich institutions and cater only to those who can reward us; between those who want to bring laity to apostolic life and those who find it difficult to involve laity; between those who see leadership as organization and management and those who see it as servant and service; between the charism of the Congregation and institutional structure of the Congregation. These tensions invite us to go back to our roots and build a strong base. We tried to address these tensions in the last General Chapter as core issues that demanded immediate attention. Our six year journey, after the General Chapter, will focus on becoming aware of and accepting these inevitable tensions and contradictions in religious life and in growing mature in our commitment by facing these apparent contradictions.

(2)Our Visibility today should be through the visibility of our charism and our life-witness through community life

There should be a dialogue between our charism and our institutionalized approaches to ministries. We cannot and should not compromise on a creative fidelity to our charism through a dynamic and stimulating response to the call of our Founder **"I want Missions": "Our Founder, Father Peter Mermier, presents to us St. Francis de Sales as our Patron and model. Living the spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales in our mission is the Charism that gives identity to our Congregation and is its distinguishing mark" (Constitutions No. 7).** Consecrated life is not about blindly following the charism but it is about re-living the charism in today's context of the secularization of religious life.

Pope Francis has already begun his assault against the secularization of religious life, attacking the current tendency to separate religious commitment from the Church in order to serve the spirit of the world. Ecclesiastical careerism is creeping into the Church. The Pope condemns this threat of careerism and professionalism that tends to highlight the organizational dimension of management over ethical and evangelical aspect of leadership. **"...when you give too much importance to organization, when offices and bureaucracies assume the dominant place, the Church loses her real substance and risks transforming herself into a non-government organization. ... The Church is not an NGO. It is a history of love".** These words also apply to the exercise of leadership in our Apostolates and in our communities, reaffirming the importance of Mystics of God's Love for Prophetic ministries today.

Apostolic works without **MSFS ness** (charism) can do a lot of harm to Religious Life. We can be efficient and productive in managerial and organizational skills to produce the best results in our own specific area of ministry. We might think that our visibility as a Congregation is in

the magnitude of our Apostolates and institutions. Leadership, authority and Apostolic works without service, humility and love can destroy religious communities and apostolates. **“We think of the harm inflicted on the People of God by men and women of the Church who are careerists, social climbers, who ‘use’ the people, the Church, brothers and sisters – those they should serve – as trampolines for their own personal interests and ambitions. But these do great harm to the Church” (Pope Francis)**

Our MSFS charism is to be made visible. It is to be like a ‘lighted lamp placed on a lamp-stand’. Our visibility is not to be mistaken for going on Television Program or media coverage for our ministries or for our institutions. Visibility of our MSFS apostolate is about the visibility of our charism and of our **MSFS ness** lived in communities which is an essential element of our religious consecration.

(3) Go out of city and go into the periphery of the society.

We need to often ask ourselves: what is important? School or Charism? Parish or Charism? Apostolic work/Specialised ministry or Charism? Institution or Charism? Ecclesiality is one of the constituent dimensions of consecrated life. In the words of Pope Francis: **“Your vocation is an essential charism for the journey of the Church, and it is not possible that a consecrated woman and a consecrated man not ‘feel’ along with the Church”.**

Our Charism is not our private property but it is first and foremost given to the Church. The Lord set the heart of Father Peter Mermier on fire for the mission of evangelization and he and our pioneering missionaries kept that fire burning. They kept this passion for the mission alive throughout the years. They have handed over the baton to us.

The ‘tiredness’ in Religious Life and in the Church today calls us for re-living of our charism. If you are MSFS, ‘fransalianise’ the parish, school, formation house, specialized ministry and whatever apostolate you are in. Instead of placing institution or apostolate at the centre, we need to place our charism and our **MSFS ness** at the centre of our Apostolates. General Chapter -2013 document reminds us: **“In all our ministries the specificity and uniqueness of ‘MSFS ness’ is to be made visible through optimism, simplicity, availability, gentleness, and trust in the Providence of God”.**

Bernardo, a Cistercian monk was elected Pope in February 1145 and he took the name Eugene III. He was a student of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the abbot of a Cistercian monastery near Rome. After his election as Pope, he sought the advice of his teacher, Bernard. Bernard’s advice to Pope Eugene III being elected as Pope was: **“You are not the heir of an Emperor but you are the heir of a fisherman”.** These words of St. Bernard remind us of the need to accept a prophetic mind-set of opening ourselves to living life as the poor, with the poor, and for the poor.

We need to go back to apostolic times. We must avoid the danger of transforming our institutions like schools, colleges, specialized ministries, and institutes of various apostolates into mere suppliers of services of social assistance (education, rehabilitation, social work) and into NGOs. Consecrated life is not called to replace the State and its welfare schemes. Our preferential option for the poor and prophetic ministries must be evangelical. It must be a continuation of the proclamation of Christ Himself. Our vow of poverty invites us to move toward the periphery of the society and embrace the cause of the poor. **“Theoretical poverty doesn’t do anything. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ in the humble, the poor, the sick, and in children” (Pope Francis).**

(4) Our MSFS vocation is a call to be a Religious (Mystic) and a Missionary (Prophet)

Though today we are in the post-modern technological civilization, we face a structural change and crisis. The structures of the modern Industrial era have collapsed. Old models and structures have given way to a civilization with ethical relativism; decline of ideologies,

values, and absence of role models. We should acknowledge that together with the rest of the world, the Church has also changed. Fifty years after the opening of the second Vatican Council, the Christian community has grown. Yet during the last few years its enthusiasm has dwindled and it seems worn-out and tired. We see, on the one hand, a society in crisis, undergoing profound evolution; on the other hand, there is a Church that is weary and humiliated but moved by a strong desire for purification.

We need to strike at the root of religious malaise today with our resolve to be Mystics and Prophets. Pope Francis confronted the present day religious tiredness and malady at the International Union of the Superiors General on May 8, 2013 when he said: ***It is Christ who has called you to follow him in the consecrated life and this means to continually engage in an 'exodus' from yourselves to centre your existence on Christ and on his Gospel, on the will of God, divesting yourself of your plans, to be able to say with St. Paul: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'.***

The Pope elaborated saying that this exodus from oneself is to put oneself on a path of adoration and service. **To adore and to serve: two attitudes that cannot be separated but which must always go together.** As Mystics and Prophets we are called to tread a path of adoration of the Lord and service to Him in our brothers and sisters. Message of the Pope rightly coincides with our theme of the General Chapter – 2013.

NEWS – DIRECTIVES – DECISIONS

1. **Father Augustine Tharappel is appointed the Vice Provincial of the USA – Vice Province.** He will assume his office on July 3, 2013 at Tyler, Texas. Bishop Joseph Strickland, the new bishop of the diocese of Tyler will preside over the functions of inauguration and installation.
2. **Father Yves Carron is appointed the Provincial Superior of Franco-Swiss Province** for a second term of three years.
3. **The new Provincial Administration in the Brazil Province:**

Fr. Bugnon Gilbert Francois: Provincial Superior

Fr. Ladir Brondani: Provincial Councillor and Admonitor

Fr. Eldin Singarayan: Provincial Councillor

Fr. Joao Inacio Rodrigues: Provincial Bursar

4. **The new Provincial Administration of the South West India Province**

Fr. Jose Kumbolickal : Provincial Superior

Fr. Henry Kodukuthiyil : Provincial Councillor and Admonitor

Fr. Benny Koottanal : Provincial Councillor

Fr. Vinod Kanat : Provincial Councillor

Fr. Harold Christopher Crasta : Provincial Councillor

Fr. Joshy Thazhathukunnel : Provincial Bursar

5. **Role and Base of the General Councilors:**

(i) The General Council has further clarified the roles of the General Secretaries (as per the directive of GC 2013) as “animation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on the Forums”

in tune with the Constitutions and General Directory, Orientations and Directives of the General Chapter, Provincial Chapter/Congress, Province Statutes, and Superior General's directives.

(ii) General Secretary along with Provincial Councillor-In-Charge of a particular Apostolate in the Province will prepare the agenda for the Province Forum Meetings that should take place at least once a year.

(iii) General Secretary will set the agenda for the Regional Forum Meetings in consultation with the respective Provincial Councillor –In- Charge of the Apostolate

(iv) Animation of the Local Superiors Forum at least once a year by the Provincial

(v) Issues/Concerns/Crises in any particular apostolate are to be informed to the General Secretary of that Apostolate

(vi) Taking an effective animation of the Apostolates and certain health concerns of the General Secretaries into consideration, we have re-organized the roles General Secretaries as:

GENERAL SECRETARY FOR MISSION:	Fr. AGNELO FERNANDES
GENERAL SECRETARY FOR FORMATION:	Fr. NOEL REBELLO
GENERAL SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION:	Fr. GEORGE PARAMPUKATTIL
GENERAL SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL APO. AND INNOVATIVE MINISTRIES:	Fr. JAYASEELAN

BASE of the General Secretaries and Areas of Animation:

Since the permanent bases of the General Secretaries are envisioned in India for greater functional effectivity, the General Council in keeping with the proposal made by the 19th General Chapter decided to have the working base of the Mission Forum in Africa. This implies that the General Secretary for Mission will coordinate the work of animating and monitoring the work of the Mission Forum for all the Provinces from Africa, and with special delegated responsibility to all the other apostolates in East Africa Province and the other mission units in Africa. Accordingly,

Fr. Agnelo Fernandes will base himself at LCI Arusha and animate, monitor, evaluate and report on the Apostolate of Mission Forum for all the Provinces from Africa, with special delegated responsibility to all other Apostolates in East Africa Province and other mission units in Africa

For time being the General Secretary for Social Apostolates and Innovative Ministries will have the working base of the Forum at Malkajgiri, India. He has the delegated responsibility of animating and monitoring the work of all the apostolates in all the western provinces of Franco – Swiss, England, Brazil, Chile, and GAH. Accordingly,

Fr. Jayaseelan will base himself at Mermier Bhavan, India and animate, monitor, evaluate, and report on the Western Provinces (Franco – Swiss, England, Brazil, USA, and GAH).

Fr. Noel Rebello will base himself at Mermier Bhavan, India and animate, monitor, evaluate, and report on the Formation Forum of the Congregation

Fr. George Parampukattil will base himself at Mermier Bhavan, India and animate, monitor, evaluate, and report on the Education Forum of the Congregation.

Proposal for a Base for the Secretariats in India:

Till we find an operational base for the General Secretariat, Mermier Bhavan at Malkajgiri will continue to serve as the base for the General Secretaries in India. Fr. George Parampukattil is appointed Local Superior of the Community. Fr. Sathish Kumar Pudota, the Assistant Parish Priest, will help the community with administrative needs and maintenance of the community

house. I thank Fr. Simon Paicatt, the Provincial of Vizag Province and Fr. John Vadakkan, Superior of Malkajgiri parish community, for their understanding and co-operation. I thank Fr. Sathish Kumar for his availability to be at the service of the Secretariat in India.

6. Procurator General to the Holy See

Fr. Thumma Mariadas, our Assistant Superior General, is appointed Procurator General to the Holy See

7. Mission Office of the Congregation in Rome

We will set up a Mission Office of the Congregation in Rome in view of resource mobilization for the Missions.

8. Approval for Final Profession:

With the consent of the General Council I joyfully approve the following scholastics for Final Profession in the Congregation:

Nagpur Province: Bros. Peter Thomas and Sandeep Tirkey, Ansen Kaliath, and Henry Peter

Vizag Province: Bros. Regeti Anil kumar, Kavuluri Joshi, Yennabothula Amar, and Gaddam Annaiah Showry Kumar

Pune Province: Bros. Veda Manickam, Micheal Prem Kumar, Martins Manuel, G. John Paul and Y. Yedal Kumar

North East Province: Bros. Bibin Vadakekuttu and Libin Chiraparambil

South West India Province: Bros. Charles Periyannayagam, Roni Fernandis, Nelson Padikara and Jundie Sumagaysay

South East India Province: Bros. S. Santhanam and A. Maria John Franklin

East Africa Province: Bro. Clement Sudhakar

Bro. Felipe of Chile Mission: Renewal of vows in Franco Swiss Province

9. Congregational Retreat on General Chapter for 2014 - 2015

We will organize a Congregational retreat on the theme of the General Chapter 2013, **“I want Missions” – MSFS: Mystics of God’s love for Prophetic Ministries Today**. The objective of the retreat is to further personalize the missionary character of our vocation as MSFS, rooted in Salesian Spirituality, with the missionary heritage of our Founder and of our pioneering missionaries.

A Committee is to be formed from the Capitulants of the General Chapter for the preparation of the Retreat. **Retreat Preparation Committee:** Fathers John Karondukadavil, Jose Parappillil, Paul Sagayam, P.M. Joseph and George Koottinal.

Fr. Agnelo Fernandes is the coordinator of the Retreat Team and the Program. The committee together with other preachers will form a preaching team who will animate the retreat in the Provinces. You can contact Fr. Agnelo to schedule your retreats in your Province or Mission unit for the year 2014 – 2015.

10. Animation Program for Local Superiors:

Before and after the Triennial Mandatory Meeting in 2016, an Animation program for the Local Superiors is to be organized at the Province level. The date is to be finalized by PIF and PEA. The program will be animated by the General Administration. The objective of the

Program is to evaluate community life and empower the local Superiors to animate and to organize community life through regular community meetings, spiritual animation, and coordination of apostolates in the community.

For Western Provinces, Animation program will be organized at the time of General Council Meeting or at a time mutually agreeable. In GAH, it is to be done through the Coordinator of the Delegation Superiors and the Provincials. A date is to be worked out for the same.

11. Animation program for the Provincial Administration:

There will be two animation programs organized for the Provincial Administration by the General Administration, one before and one after the TMM. The objective is to provide necessary directives and orientation to enhance the quality of religious life and to foster fraternal love and team spirit within the Provincial Administration and for effective administration and animation of the Province Community through the Forums.

12. Ten year policy for those sent for ministry in the Western world:

Major Superiors are requested to own up the responsibility for the ten year policy (for confreres working in developed countries) as it is the decision of the General Chapter.

13. Profile of an MSFS Parish and Pastor, School/College Manager, Principal, Administrator, Formator, Formee, and Director of Social Apostolate, Local Superior

A Profile for various leaderships in Pastoral Ministries and Apostolates will be prepared for effective functioning of the Apostolates and communities. General Secretaries, in consultation with their respective Forum members, will work on these Profiles.

14. Vision and Mission plan of each community/Apostolate needs to be reviewed:

Mission – Vision Plan of each community and apostolate in the Province (that was started last year) is to be reviewed and completed. General Secretaries will work with the Provincials to complete this task:

Fr. Noel Rebello: North East India Province and Visakhapatnam Province

Fr. Thumma: Pune Province and Nagpur Province,

Fr. George Parampukattil: South East India and South West India Provinces. **Fr. Agnelo Fernandes:** East Africa Province and Mission Units in Africa

Fr. Jayaseelan: Missin – Vision Plan for Franco-Swiss province, English Province, Brazil Province, USA Vice Province, and other Mission Units.

15. Delegation of Mozambique:

With the consent of the General Council, I have the joy to announce the decision that Mozambique Mission is raised to a **DELEGATION** under Nagpur Province. Hearty Congratulations and prayerful wishes to the confreres in Mozambique mission!

16. Status Committee for 2014:

Fr. George Parampukattil, Fr. Jayaseelan, Fr. Philip and Fr. Ebin will work on the new STATUS for 2014 – 2015 to be published by December 2013

17. 175th Anniversary: Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, Annecy

Program

October 21, 2013: (Evening) Arrival and Installation, Annecy

October 22, 2013: (Morning) Talk and Lunch at La Puya Annecy
(Afternoon) Visit and Holy Eucharist at Chaumont (birth place of Mermier)
October 23, 2013: (Morning) On the Footsteps of St. Francis de Sales: Les Allinges (Chablais Mission), Lunch at Ambilly
(Afternoon) Visit Thorens (Village of Francis) and Holy Eucharist at Thorens

OCTOBER 24, 2013 (Morning) SOLEMN EUCHARIST AT THE VISITATION BASILICA, ANNECY

18. Jubilee Celebration at Suvidya College, Bangalore

Grand Finale of 175th Jubilee of MSFS Foundation will be celebrated in India at Suvidya College, Bangalore on September 23, 2013. Details will be announced later.

19. SFS Bible Diary with daily Reflections:

In order to disseminate Salesian Spirituality, we plan to publish a Bible Diary every year starting from year 2015 with daily liturgical readings and reflections with a Salesian flavour. This will be an Inter-Provincial Collaborative Project in the Congregation. A team has to be constituted.

20. Essay Writing for MSFS Scholastics:

An essay writing and presentation for MSFS scholastics in Philosophy and Theology separately - based on the theme of the General Chapter and their response to the theme - will be organized in view of the conclusion of the Jubilee celebration. The best article on the theme will be awarded a prize on the Jubilee Day (October 24).

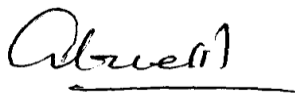
21. The Six Year Plan of the General Curia - with the dates and schedules of all the Visitations of Superior General, Assistant General, General Secretaries, General Curia - Provincial Curia Meeting, PIF-PEA Meetings, General Curia Meeting, MSAF Meeting, WUGC Meeting, TMM -2016, Province Forum Meeting, Regional Forum Meeting, Local Superiors Forum Meetings, Stewardship Forum Meeting, Animation Program for Provincial Administration and Local Superiors- will be made available shortly. Please do not plan any Forum meeting before you consult this Plan.

St. Francis de Sales reminds us:

"We must make two equally firm resolutions: one, to be ready to see weeds growing in our garden; the other, to have the courage to see them pulled up, and to pull them up ourselves; for our self-love which produces these miseries, will never die while we live".

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us as we serve His Church through our Congregation!

Faternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General