



CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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

My dear Confreres:

I greet you in the joy of being united with you as one family of MSFS, though scattered in 26 countries, in the great missionary plan of God for our Congregation. We are approaching yet another significant spiritual journey through the liturgical season of Lent. We pray for each other as we are invited to walk through the wilderness of anxiety, frustration, inconvenience, old age, sickness, helplessness, pain, failure, loss, hurts, heartaches, anger, bitterness, rejection, conflicts, misunderstanding, hardships, lack of fund, loneliness, and discouragement – or wherever our desert lies. Our desert and wilderness can be different for each one of us. It is understandable that we grumble and rebel like the People of Israel in the desert. We might abandon prayer and devotion, and even the God who liberates us from our slavery.

God understands our anger and rebellion as our attempts to control our own destiny and to call all the shots. God knows that once we have faced the desert and confronted our own vulnerability and broken self, we will rush into His divine embrace. God shows us the depths of our emptiness and sin so that we have nothing more to humiliate us than to collapse into his mercy which alone will finally help us. This journey through our wilderness-experience is also an invitation to re-live the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

As a Missionary Congregation we do all we can to re-capture the spirit of our Founder and the spirituality of our Patron in order to re-live the Paschal Mystery in every area of our missionary and religious life. **“To be Mystics of God’s Love for Prophetic Ministries Today” is our objective in our efforts to make our Congregation the Congregation of the Lord envisioned by Father Mermier.** The inspiring and challenging example of Pope Francis is a confirmation of both what we like to do and what we want to do as prophetic Missionaries in the world today. Let me share with you my experience with Pope Francis on the third day of Assembly of the Union of the Superiors General from November 27 – 29, 2013.

“Wake up the World, the Church must be attractive”

...was the cry of Pope Francis to all the Religious in Consecrated Life in his address to the Union of Superiors General (USG) that took place on November 29, 2013 in the New Hall of the Synod in Vatican. USG had requested the Pope for a brief meeting with the

Superiors General on the last day of the Assembly but the encounter lasted for three hours as desired by the Holy Father himself. What caught everyone off the guard was when Pope sent a request to all the Superiors informing us that he desired to be addressed as '**Brother Francis**' and that he is comfortable with that title. The three hour meeting had no speeches, no exhortations, rather a brotherly and cordial conversation consisting of questions and answers that deeply concern core aspects of religious life.

Seated among almost 120 Superiors General of different Congregations with my eyes glued to the smiling Pope, I noted and absorbed every thought Brother Francis shared that was simultaneously translated into English from Spanish with the help of my head phone. I would like to share with you two areas from the Question-Answer session with the Pope that will throw light on re-discovering our MSFS way of religious and missionary life. Please use these inspiring thoughts in our Local Communities and Provinces for prayer, reflection and action.

1. Identity and Mission of Consecrated Life

The first question to the Pope was: What do you expect of Consecrated Life? If you were in our place today how would you respond to the call of evangelical prophecy of going to the periphery of society and to the frontiers? What is to be emphasized in Religious Life today?

- As Pope Francis often speaks "off the cuff", he began his answer saying that he is also a religious and he can very well understand from his experience what we are asking him. He said that the Church grows through witness, not by proselytism. Religious are men and women called to follow the Lord more in a special way than in a radical way. True witness is a different way of acting and doing things with attitudes like generosity, detachment, sacrifice, self - forgetfulness in order to care for others. This special way is the witness, the martyrdom of religious life. *"It is possible to live differently in this world. ... But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up"* through their witness and testimony.
- *'God asks us to leave the nest that holds us and to go out to the frontiers of the world, avoiding the temptation of domesticating them'*. Jesus has not chosen us to settle down in our comfort zones. We don't like to leave the nest and go to the frontiers of the world and periphery of the society. But that is what God is asking of us religious today. Prophetic dimension of religious life is the way to strengthen the Charism. Sometimes there is confusion between Charism and its practical implication. Do not confuse Charism with apostolic work and institutionalized ministry. Charism is creative and it continuously searches for

new paths and outlets. When we do not move on and look at the periphery, instead live at the center and in the comfort zone, we tend to live in a dogmatic world. Our vocation as Religious who have studied philosophy and theology is to step out and look at and see from the periphery and move toward that direction.

- How would you go to the periphery and to the frontiers? To this pointed question, Pope said, *"I am convinced of one thing: the great changes in history were realized when reality was seen not from the center but rather from the periphery"*. In order to truly understand the reality we need to move away from the central position of calmness and peacefulness and direct ourselves to peripheral areas. This invites us to continuously re-think our religious life. Pope at this point recalled a letter of Fr. Arrupe, the late Jesuit Superior General, who said: It is necessary to have a real life experience with the poor to go to periphery or outskirts of society. Brother Francis said: *"This is really very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order really to become acquainted with the reality and life-experiences of people. If this does not happen, we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy"*.
- What is the priority of religious life? The Pope answered that prophetic life for a religious is non-negotiable. The religious are called to a prophetic life by demonstrating how Jesus lived on this earth. The religious should never give up prophesizing because it announces the spirit of the gospel. The emphasis should be on being prophets and not playing prophets, not pretending prophets. One of the temptations the devil proposes to religious today is just to appear to be prophets and claim to be prophets. Pope invites us to take our Charism to the periphery and to the frontiers and announce the spirit of the gospel. 'Go to the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature' (Mk 16:15) can be accomplished by moving to the existential and geographical periphery. *"This is the most concrete way of imitating Jesus, who went toward all peripheries. Jesus went to all, really all. I would not really feel uncomfortable going to the periphery: you should not feel uncomfortable in reaching out to anyone"*.

Pope suggested that if the Major Superior realizes that Congregation or the Province should go to the frontiers; take the best men in the Congregation to the frontiers, and not the mediocre ones.

2. Formation is a work of art, not a Police action

Pope insisted upon the importance of formation for religious life. After listening to the questions on Formation, he answered immediately that the formation of candidates to religious life is fundamental.

- Formation, for Pope Francis, is founded on FOUR pillars: **spiritual, intellectual, community, and apostolic**. From day one to the last day in the Seminary, these four pillars (spiritual formation, intellectual formation, formation for community life, and formation for apostolic life) are to be there, incorporated into the life of the candidates. These four pillars are to be interactive and should not be arranged subsequently. Today the tendency is to focus on one pillar in each stage of Formation. Every stage of Formation should have all these four pillars every day. How can we do it? There is a need for dialogue and confrontation between Formator and Formee. This is what makes Formation mature. Pope commented that in some seminaries, there is no dialogue and confrontation, but only studies.
- The Pope is well aware of the fact that the problem of formation is not easy to deal with. *"...problems are not solved simply by forbidding doing this or that. Dialogue and confrontation are needed. To avoid problems, in some houses of formation, young people grit their teeth; try not to make mistakes, follow the rules smiling a lot, just waiting for the day when they are told: 'Good. You have finished formation'. This is hypocrisy that is the result of clericalism, which is one of the worst evils"*. Pope insisted that dialogue is very important. If the seminary is too large for personal accompaniment and dialogue, divide it into small communities. Without dialogue and personal accompaniment there is no formation.
- Dialogue is the essence of formation and the Formator has to be patient for dialogue with seminarians. This dialogue must be serious, sincere and without fear. We must form the hearts of young seminarians. *"Otherwise we are creating little monsters. And then these little monsters are called to leadership and to mold the People of God. This really gives me goose bumps"* (everyone laughed).
- **Do not focus on Number of Seminarians in Formation House but focus on the People of God:** Pope insisted that we think of the People of God at the time of recruitment and formation, and not the number of candidates we need to manage our institutions. Formation should not be oriented only toward the personal growth and development of the seminarian. The final goal of formation is always to be kept in mind viz. the People of God. While forming them,

Formator should have in his mind the faithful People of God to whom these persons in formation will be sent. According to Pope, we should always have in mind the People of God, and not merely the personal and intellectual growth of the formee. *“Just think of religious who have hearts that are as sour as vinegar: they are not made for the people. In the end we must not form administrators, managers, but fathers, brothers, travelling companions”.*

Pope Francis said: *“The ghost to fight against (in Formation today) is the image of religious life understood as an escape or hiding place in face of an ‘external’, difficult and complex world”.*

(Other questions and answers were around **Crisis in Vocation, Fraternity/Community Life in Consecrated Life, and Mutual Relations between Religious and Local Churches**, which I shall share with you in the up-coming newsletters)

3. What are we hearing from Pope Francis?

Pope asks us to live prophetically and not talking, not appearing, and not playing at being prophetic. He invites us to leave our nest/comfort zone to go to the frontiers and to go to the periphery of the society which is the reference point for religious life. None of us (including me) gets excited about this invitation but this is what God is calling us for.

General Chapter 2013 underscored the same invitation in its Orientations: *“Our Fransalian vocation is a call to be religious and missionary. This demands that we become Mystics and Prophets in our own times. ... This call to Mystical life and Prophetic mission is to be lived in personal life, community life and is to be reflected in our mission and apostolate. ... Pioneering/Frontier Missions should be part of an immediate missionary plan for every new priest”.*

In this regard I would like to suggest to you the following questions:

(1)What strategies should we use to spur and strengthen (within our Congregation) the awareness that we are called to live our prophetic mission?

The diagnosis has been already made in the General Chapter and now in the invitation of Pope Francis. We know the diagnosis and now it is the time for cure. So then:

(2)What concrete steps shall we take to further promote this call to prophetic and frontier mission of leaving the nest/comfort zone and going to the periphery with our Salesian resources of spirituality and missionary spirit?

"The complex minds of men and women of the 21st century can really understand only very simple things" (Heidegger). Let us then use simple language to name things as they are today in our MSFS life, in our own Provinces, and name also threats and challenges to religious life as they exist and lived by us in our own Local Communities, without being too diplomatic, dogmatic, and politically correct. I invite us all to respond to these questions and please feel free to send your valuable and concrete suggestions to me at superiorgeneralmsfs@gmail.com.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

4. New Provincial

Fr. George Panthanmackel has assumed his office as the Provincial Superior of North East India Province on January 23, 2014. We wish him and our confreres in the North East Province our prayerful support and blessings.

Fr. Antony Dharmaraj has assumed office as the Provincial of South East India Province for a second term on January 24, 2014. We wish him and our Confreres in the South East India Province our prayerful support and blessings.

5. Delegations and Delegation Superiors

The General Chapter 2013 decided to constitute the Confreres in Germany, Austria, and Holland into Local Communities and Delegations under the jurisdiction of their respective Provinces with Local Superiors and Delegation Superiors. Those Provinces (East Africa and Pune) that do not have the numerical strength to constitute a Delegation will remain as Local Communities with Local Superiors. The Local Communities and Delegations are already in place:

Delegation Superior of Nagpur Province Delegation in GAH: **Fr. Lalit Tigga**

Delegation Superior of South West Province Delegation: **Fr. Binod Puthenpurackal**

Delegation Superior of North East India Province Delegation: **Fr. Sabukuttan Francis**

Delegation Superior of South East India Province Delegation: **Fr. Joseph Amalraj**

Delegation Superior of Visakhapatnam Province Delegation: **Fr. Sylvester Ottaplackal**

Local Superior of MSFS East Africa Local Community: **Fr. Packiam Wilson**

Local Superior of MSFS Pune Local Community: **Fr. Christopher Rajamani**

6. New Rector of Suvidya College

Fr. Joy Mampally is appointed the new Rector and President of Suvidya Inter Provincial Institute of Philosophy, and the Local Superior of the Suvidya Local Community. We assure Fr. Joy and Suvidya Community of our support and co-operation.

7. New Governing Body Chairman of Suvidya College

Fr. Antony Dharmaraj, the Provincial of South East India Province, is appointed as the Chairman of the Governing Body of Suvidya College, Superior Delegate of the Superior General and Major Superior of the Inter Provincial Local Community of Suvidya College for matters of religious life and community life.

8. Word of Appreciation to Fr. Francis Thadathil

I thank Fr. Francis Thadathil for his valuable and committed ministry in the North East India Province as the Provincial for two consecutive terms from 2007-2013. We appreciate his dynamic leadership, missionary initiatives, and untiring service to the Congregation in strengthening the missionary spirit of the Congregation in the large Province of the North East. I place on record his service to the Congregation as the Chairman of the Governing Body, Major Superior of the Inter Provincial Local Community, and Superior Delegate of the Superior General to Suvidya College, Bangalore.

9. Young MSFS honored as VICARS GENERAL

We are glad that two of our Young Missionaries in the frontier missions are honored and appointed as the Vicars General. Father Joseph Kunjaparambil (K.P.) is appointed as the Vicar General of the diocese of Keetmanshoop, NAMIBIA and Father Joseph Mullenmadackal is appointed Vicar General of the Diocese of Vaimo, PAPUA NEW GUINEA in recognition of their long term and valuable service to the mission. On behalf of the entire Congregation, I extend our hearty Congratulations and Prayerful wishes to your dear Fathers in their new responsibility and ministry.

10. Congregational Retreat

The Congregational Retreat on the theme, **"I want Mission: Recapturing the Original Spirit of our Founder"**, begins from February 2014 with almost 34 retreats arranged in different Provinces and mission units of the Congregation. I thank the Retreat Organizers and the Retreat Preparation and Preaching Team for their well-

planned and detailed organization to make this retreat-experience available for all. I request all the Major Superiors/Regional Superiors/Delegation Superiors/Local Superiors to make adequate arrangements for all the Confreres to attend the retreat without fail. **The defined goal of the retreat is: How many of us are able to say ‘I want Mission’? At the end of the retreat each member should be able to re-capture the original zeal of our founder. Prayerful self-critique of the assessment that Fransalians are losing the original zeal of the Congregation as Mermier expressed in ‘I want Mission’ in order to give a re-direction”**

11.Mission Development Office

The newly established Mission Development Office (MDO) in Rome is the *Mission Procure* of the Congregation. It is a new venture launched by the General Administration responding to the call of the 19th General Chapter 2013 (cf. GC XIX, *Directives on Resource Mobilization*, 1). The MDO is set up at the CASA DI PROCURA of the Congregation at *Via del Mascherino 46/3, 00193, Roma, Italia*. The legal body or the juridical person holding the MDO is the “ASSOCIAZIONE MISSIONARIA DI SALES, ONLUS” (AMISALES). AMISALES is therefore an integral part of the MSFS PROCURA and as such it has been approved as a charitable and non-profit organization by the Italian State. For your kind attention and information:

- Provincials and Superiors delegated by the Provincials are welcome to contact this office directly for any assistance that they may need.
- Confreres are welcome to send projects or appeals to this office for any assistance that may be needed to process the same and submit them to donor agencies. However, all such requests are to be accompanied by a written recommendation from the respective Provincials or their Delegates.
- Please note that the MDO has a Website namely www.amisales.org. This site is not fully designed yet. Provinces and Mission Units are welcome to send relevant materials by way of short write-ups on the various projects and apostolates in their respective missions. I shall arrange to upload them to the new Website.
- Kindly forward all the existing Website-links in each Province/Mission/Delegation to amislaesroma@gmail.com if you wish them to be linked to MDO website.
- It would be helpful if you could send - copies of Province circulars, Periodicals, Journals or News Bulletins published in your Province/Delegation/Mission or any relevant data and informative material on the various apostolates in your Province or Mission – to the MDO.
- For additional information, please contact MDO at:
Fr. Thomas Cherukat, MSFS
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12. Visitation to Trinidad - Tobago and St. Lucia

My visitation to our confreres in Trinidad-Tobago Mission in the Caribbean Island (December 15-19, 2013) was planned in the month of October, 2013 and the Provincial of Visakhapatnam made it a point to constitute the four confreres in Trinidad (Fr. Bala Joji Reddy, Fr. Karan Kumar, Fr. Bhaskar Jayseelan, and Fr. Shijo Panthanlanickal) into a Local Community with Fr. Baskar Jayseelan as the Local Superior.

13. Visitation to St. Lucia

My visitation to our confreres in Saint Lucia Mission in the Caribbean Island (December 10 - 15, 2013) was planned in consultation with South East India Provincial and the newly appointed Local Superior **Father Victor, MSFS**. Four Confreres - **Fr. Victor, Parish Priest and Director of St. Lucy's National Shrine, Micoud, Fr. G. Arockiasamy, MSFS Parish Priest of St. Ann's Church in Micoud, Fr. John Milton, MSFS and Fr. Philomin Raj, MSFS** the newly arrived confreres in the Archdiocese of Castries - form the MSFS Local Community of St. Lucia.

A Brief Evaluation of the MSFS Mission in the Caribbean:

Let me put together the evaluation of my Visitation to our Missions in both Trinidad-Tobago and St. Lucia as these two missions have common or similar pastoral context, ministries, and background.

The purpose of my visitation was to meet our Confreres in their own mission context and be with them, to listen to them, to encourage them in the spirit of the General Chapter 2013, and to evaluate and reinvigorate their missionary and community life.

The days of visitation were packed with visits with Confreres personally and as a community, and with pastoral visit to all our centers, celebrating Mass with different parish communities. I had the opportunity to meet with the Parish Community of all the Parishes entrusted to the MSFS pastoral care and the people and the respective Bishops overwhelmingly expressed their satisfaction and gratitude for the pastoral services of MSFS Fathers in Trinidad and St. Lucia.

Strengths of our Mission in Trinidad and St. Lucia

- Confreres expressed their pride and contentment in their MSFS identity and belongingness to the Congregation
- Confreres expressed their sense of satisfaction and pastoral fulfilment in their ministries
- Confreres are well taken care of with decent accommodation, infrastructure, car, allowance, and facilities for fulfilling their pastoral commitment
- People in the parishes are supportive and financially stable and sound (mostly middle class and lower middle class)
- Confreres take initiatives to reach out to the people offering pastoral guidance and support and spiritual animation

Challenges and Recommendations:

- Need to integrate the local culture and accept the uniqueness of the spiritual and religious background of the people into the pastoral ministry
- Needs of the people are to be identified and pastorally addressed taking into consideration their vantage point
- Communication with the people (though English is the official language) needs constant efforts especially to speak English using their slang and accent.
- Lack of a Local Community and a Local Superior created a sort of confusion in the organization of Religious Life among the Confreres in the past and consequently representation and MSFS identity in the Arch diocesan level suffered. Establishment of Local Community with a Local Superior is welcomed by the Confreres and the Bishops concerned
- Confreres did not have opportunities to attend Congregational retreats and animation programs in the past; they expressed their concern that they do not get opportunity to attend renewal programs, Congregational retreat, and on-going formation programs offered at the Province level
- Make our Parishes more MSFS introducing Salesian spirituality to the People, constituting Friends of Fransalians, and sharing MSFS-ness in pastoral care
- Scope for Parish Mission and Retreats is immense and Pastoral planning could include retreat preaching and Parish Mission Ministry

I appreciate the hospitality and togetherness of Fr. Bhaskar and Community in Trinidad, and Fr. Victor and Community in St. Lucia during the days of visitation. Hospitality was outstanding. Community spirit was exceptional. Lots of sunshine and delicious Caribbean ethnic food! I thank our Confreres for the well planned organization of visitation and making time to spend 4 days together as a family. It was indeed a home- feeling of MSFS-ness for me and I thank them all for their time and efforts to make my stay a memorable one.

15. Books authored and released by our Confreres in the Past year.

On behalf of the Congregation, I congratulate our confreres for their contribution and innovation in publishing their expertise and resources:

Fr. Mathew Kalathil, MSFS: *Vive Jesu: Live Jesus!*

Fr. Kurian Karickal, MSFS: *Vanchakante Panchathanthrangal*

Fr. Darline Joseph, MSFS: *Follow Me*

Fr. Darlene Joseph, MSFS: *Unmai Ippadiym Irukkalam*

Fr. Justin, MSFS: *Uma Hora De Oracao: Com Maria, a Mae de Jesus*

Fr. A. Santhiyagu, MSFS: *Gospel Meditation for Lent: Coming to the Father*

Fr. A. Patrick and S. Raj Kumar, MSFS: *A Hermeneutics of Relevance: Biblical Reflections of Prof. Dr. A. Gabriel. MSFS*

Fr. S. Alexander, MSFS: *Way of the Cross: For the year of Family*

Fr. Alphonse Arokiaswamy, MSFS: *A New Paradigm for Youth Ministry Today*

Fr. Kurian Kollapallil, MSFS: *Through the Year with St. Francis de Sales*

Fr. J.B. John Thadews: *DEIN LEBEN: Heute und Morgen*

Fr. Mathew Thazhathukunnel, MSFS: *INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AT GRASSROOT LEVEL: A Pastoral Theological Approach to Christian - Muslim Dialogue in Tanzania*

Fr. Joseph E. Pauvath, MSFS: *My Missionary Journal*

Fr. Suresh Babu, MSFS: *A Spoonful of Honey Vol. I: Priceless Quotes from the Introduction to the Devout Life*

Fr. Suresh Babu, MSFS: *A Spoonful of Honey Vol. II: Priceless Quotes from the Treatise on the Love of God*

Let me conclude with an inspiration from our Patron:

“We are like birds which fall at once to the ground unless they increase the movements and strokes of their wings to keep themselves in flight. That is why, dear Philothea, it is necessary that you renew and repeat very often the deliberate decisions you have made to serve God” (St. Francis de Sales)

Wishing you a grace-filled Lenten journey and a Joyful Easter 2014,
Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvellil, MSFS
Superior General

February 15, 2014