

MESSAGE OF THE XIX GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MISSIONARIES OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

We, the members of the Nineteenth General Assembly of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, have spent two weeks in Rome, in prayer, study, and dialogue. In the spirit of our Founder, St. Gaspar, we have attempted “to be alert to discover the signs of the times” (CPPS *Normative Texts*, C 32).

The theme of the Assembly has been “Leadership for the CPPS.” As we listened to the reports of the Moderator General and of the Directors of the Provinces, Vicariates, and Missions, it became clear to us how crucial good leaders are for the health of our community life as well as for the vitality of our mission. Our Directors shared with us the strengths and successes of their Provinces, Vicariates, and Missions, and were candid in assessing the areas where change and growth are needed.

During the first week of our gathering we prepared carefully for the elections. We wanted to have a clear sense of the challenges to our apostolic life as well as to our internal life as a Congregation so that we could identify those qualities that would be needed by leaders in our general government to help all of our members to address these challenges. We believe that we have elected men who will be servant leaders (cf. Luke 22, 25-27), helping us to be faithful to our charism.

To aid our new Moderator and General Councilors, we had a significant discussion about a model for the next six years of general government, trying to balance the need for a healthy community life at the Generalate with the need to invite people with a diversity of skills and gifts to serve on the general leadership team.

In the revision of our *Normative Texts*, we have tried to be faithful to the mandate of the XVIII General Assembly, which called us to “review the Constitutions and Statutes to include language of mission, reconciliation, and internationality as well as to better reflect who we are today” (Resolution 13.4, *Statement of Values and Proposals*).

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

After hearing the reports of the Major Superiors and Directors of our Missions on Tuesday and Wednesday of the first week, we spent a day in dialogue with Fr. Séamus Freeman, former superior general of the Pallotines, a society of apostolic life like our Congregation. He reminded us that authentic apostles are mystics and that they must incarnate the love of God through self-giving. He called us to remember the words of John Paul II: to make the Church the home and the school of communion (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 43). He also challenged us to deepen our sense of identity as members of the Congregation and to genuine collaboration with one another and with the lay faithful.

In response to his presentations, three of the members of the Assembly offered their response in a panel discussion, basing their comments on what they had heard in the reports from the Major Superiors and Directors of our Missions. Although there have been successes and substantial growth in many areas, there remain pressing issues that we should address.

EVANGELIZATION AND RE-EVANGELIZATION must be priorities for our Congregation. Proclaiming the Word is at the heart of our mission. Our *Normative Texts* remind us that we are dedicated “to the service of the Church through the apostolic and missionary activity of the word” (C 3) and also state that the Congregation “dedicates itself to the ministry of the word according to the spirit of our Founder” (C 24). Many spoke of the urgency of proclaiming the gospel especially among the young, who constitute such a large part of the population of many developing countries.

Evangelization is not limited to the ministry of preaching the word of God in the narrow sense. It also involves proclaiming the gospel in a variety of ways. Pursuing justice, seeking peace, and care for creation are all part of evangelization or re-evangelization. We have noted the need for a ministry of reconciliation, a work that certainly is central to our Precious Blood spirituality.

We recognized that the ministry of the word, of evangelization, also involves the powerful witness of the word of our lives, especially the witness of community. If we do not live the message we preach, our witness will not be effective.

VOCATIONAL AND FORMATION MINISTRIES continue to be areas that call for attention. For some areas of the Congregation, the decline of vocations has been significant. For other areas, vocations have grown. We need to explore together how to attract more men to the CPPS.

We also must seek ongoing evaluation and improvement in the formation of members, not only prior to their incorporation and/or ordination, but as a lifelong task. Issues of international or interregional formation must be explored, not only to provide a sufficient number of candidates for a good experience in formation, but also to foster that “vocational identity” named by Fr. Freeman. Members also noted the importance of formation for living a healthy celibate life for candidates and members alike.

OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST must be central to the lives of each member and to our communities. We cannot “concretize the desire of the heart of God” in our ministry unless we know God’s heart through our prayer, through the mysticism of contemplation which is our vocation. As a society of apostolic life we are oriented to action, but we must constantly remind ourselves that our action must be rooted in “the still point in a turning world” as one modern poet has written.

Along these lines, we have the possibility of developing the deep riches of our Precious Blood spirituality around the theme of *caritas*, self-giving love. This can be for us a significant stimulus to a more vibrant community life as well as enhance our ministry of proclaiming the word. As Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us: “the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning (*Deus caritas est*, 32).

The refounding of our Congregation – understood as the ongoing renewal that is the hallmark of any healthy religious congregation – must find its ground in personal spiritual renewal and the spiritual renewal of local communities. We recognize that refounding is not mainly a matter of modifying structures but rather of dreaming new dreams and having new visions (cf. Joel 3, 1).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “NORTH” AND “SOUTH” in the Congregation continues to be a source of both blessing as well as of some tension. The South, understood as those areas of the CPPS mainly south of the equator that are “developing” countries, has generally seen a growth in members and in a willingness of those members to leave their countries to serve in other cultures. This missionary spirit is certainly a wonderful testimony to all the members.

At the same time, many in the South wonder if those in the North really understand them, their cultures, their aspirations, and ask if their “older brothers” in the North trust them to carry forward the charism and mission of our Founder.

Beyond this, there is also the question of the sharing of resources and of self-sufficiency. Some units in developing nations or areas lack the resources to become completely independent. At the same time, older units in the North are concerned about the decrease in numbers and possible loss of the resources that help sustain the younger units in developing countries.

COLLABORATION received much attention in our discussions. True collaboration means trusting in the wisdom and skills of others, treating them as equals in planning and carrying out our mission. Developing collaborative models of leadership and of living and working together continues to be a pressing need.

In this regard, collaboration with the laity was an important thread running through the dialogue. The role of the brother in the CPPS could be especially significant in promoting such collaboration. At the same time, we recognize that the laity need to develop their own unique manner of living Precious Blood spirituality.

The recent experience of the meeting of representatives of our lay associations in June 2007 (“MERLAP II”) clearly demonstrates the growth of this important apostolate and the desire of many of the lay faithful to share in our spirituality and our mission.

Finally, the Assembly **REVIEWED AND REVISED OUR NORMATIVE TEXTS** in response to Resolution 13.4 of the XVIII General Assembly. In this task, of course, we have relied on the wisdom of our members, who have had the opportunity to collaborate in this work in the district meetings for the past two years. Among the more significant revisions, we have called Mission Directors to full participation with deliberative voice in the meetings of the Moderator General and General Council with the Provincial and Vicariate Directors (S 36). Missions will also be able to elect delegates to future General Assemblies (A 4). We believe that the revisions to the *Normative Texts* reflect what we aspire to be and how we wish to live and to minister together.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As we conclude our Assembly, we look to the future with hope. We have elected new leaders at the level of general government for the next six years. We trust in their collective wisdom, skills, and above all in their commitment to the Lord, to the people of God, and to our Congregation. We also trust that all of our members and lay associates will work with them as fellow servants of God’s word and God’s kingdom.

We propose the following tasks for the new Moderator General and General Council for the years ahead. We group them together under the categories that we have come to call the “three pillars” of our Congregation: *mission, community, and spirituality*.

We call on our general government to strengthen the pillar of **MISSION** by:

- a. Developing a Congregation-wide understanding of the theology and spirituality of mission today.
- b. Leading the Congregation into a deeper sense of vocation to the “new evangelization” or re-evangelization that gives primacy to preaching the word in all its forms, to the Eucharist, and to the option for the poor and marginalized.
- c. Calling all members to recognize that the ministry of the word of God must include being a prophetic voice for justice.
- d. Continuing to give attention to such justice issues as human rights, the integrity of creation, and migration.
- e. Addressing issues raised by the exchange of members between Provinces, Vicariates and missions.
- f. Promoting new initiatives in ministry even as we leave older commitments, recalling the words of Jesus, “*Duc in altum!*” (Luke 5, 4) and given special emphasis by John Paul II in his address to the XVII General Assembly in 2001 (Cf. also *Novo millennio ineunte*, 1).
- g. Fostering pastoral ministry with the burgeoning youth population.
- h. Giving greater attention to the victims of violence and to eradicating the causes of violence.
- i. Inviting the laity to authentic collaboration in our ministry and to helping the lay faithful to fulfill their role in the ministry of the Church in the spirit of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.
- j. Fostering discussion of and creative response to the declining numbers of active members in the North.
- k. Working toward reconciliation at all levels within the family, the Congregation, the Church, and all of society.

We call on our general government to strengthen the pillar of **COMMUNITY** by:

- a. Fostering the dialogue among all units of our Congregation by ensuring a healthy flow of information to promote accurate mutual understanding.
- b. Addressing issues of cross-regional and international formation of a CPPS identity as part of both initial and ongoing formation.
- c. Deepening the renewal of community life, for the sake of our members and as a witness to our mission.
- d. Assuring the ongoing education of our members regarding healthy celibate living and the prevention of destructive behavior such as sexual and substance abuse.
- e. Continuing to support vocation ministry.
- f. Promoting ongoing formation among our members.
- g. Continuing to support and encourage the vocation of brother in the CPPS.
- h. Strengthening relationships with our lay associates.
- i. Encouraging reflection on dealing with an aging membership in some areas.
- j. Building the economic and leadership resources in the South that will enable all units of the South to achieve autonomy as Provinces.

We call on our general government to strengthen the pillar of **SPIRITUALITY** by:

- a. Working toward the spiritual renewal of the Congregation as a means of re-entering the work of “refounding.”
- b. Continuing the development of Precious Blood spirituality, especially around the theme of *caritas*.
- c. Helping the laity to develop a Precious Blood spirituality adequate to their lay vocation.
- d. Reinforcing the awareness of the mystical ground of our apostolic life and helping members to live a deeper life of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

In the chapel in which we have celebrated Eucharist together each day of the Assembly, we have had before us the image of Gaspar holding a chalice of the Blood of Christ, Blood which flowed from the pierced side of Jesus. In his encyclical letter *Deus caritas est*, the Holy Father calls us to meditate on this very scene:

By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. John 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move (no. 12).

As Missionaries of that Blood, we must keep before us that image of love as self-giving. This is love, as our Holy Father says in the same passage, “in its most radical form.” We commit ourselves and invite our confreres to making this love in the heart of God concrete in our local communities, in our ministry, among our lay associates, and in our world. This is the path along which our life and our love must move.

We call upon our newly elected Moderator General and General Councilors to call us to fidelity to this vision of love and to the charism of St. Gaspar, which was a particular way of incarnating and understanding the mystery of God’s love. It is a charism that remains valid and life-giving today.

We commend our new leaders and our Congregation to Mary, Woman of the New Covenant; to St. Gaspar, our Founder; and to St. Francis Xavier, our patron.

Rome, 27 July 2007