



LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE CONFRERES OF THE SOCIETY OF ST PAUL

START OF THE “SYNODAL JOURNEY” *In preparation for the XI General Chapter*

Dear Brothers,

I greet you, praying that *«the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!»* (2Cor 13:13).

Starting from a reflection made within the General Council, we felt that it is already time to take the first steps towards the preparation of the XI General Chapter. With the greeting of St. Paul, which invokes the Most Holy Trinity, which is a community of love and a model of communion, I invite you to begin the journey of this congregational and ecclesial event, which celebration would probably take place at the beginning of 2021.

Indeed, as our Constitutions affirm, *«since religious life is inseparably linked to the life of the Church and to holiness, the general chapter is to be seen as an ecclesial happening, a salvific event, a blade of hope, a particular paschal celebration: the moment in which the Congregation has to tune into and live out more intensely its coresponsibility with the whole Church»*¹.

I. A journey in the synodal style

In harmony with the Church and with the aim of trying to respond to the demands of our life and mission in today's world, we have chosen “synodality” as a method² for the journey of preparation and celebration of the next General Chapter, in the spirit of the exhortation of Pope Francis: *«The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium»*³.

¹ *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St. Paul*, art. 211.

² Our Constitutions enjoin *«to prepare a consonant methodology»* (art. 213.2).

³ Pope Francis. *Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

As members of the Church, we want to experience this “journeying together”, trying to find out what the Spirit of the Lord expects of us, in an itinerary of discernment that, starting from our Pauline identity, helps us to look with objectivity: a) the different realities of our Congregation: the people who constitute it, the community and the spiritual life, the vocation ministry, the formation, the apostolic initiatives, the administration and the economy; b) the reality of the universal Church and of the local churches where we are present; c) the context of the communication culture and its transformations with the advent of digital technologies; d) the reality of the men and women we are called to serve, who live in concrete environments (social, cultural, political, economic, etc.), and especially those who face particular situations of precariousness such as poverty (material and spiritual), migrations, inequalities, the devastation of creation, etc.

2. In “listening” towards the XI General Chapter

As apostles-communicators and as consecrated persons we want to start a synodal journey in view of the celebration of the XI General Chapter, a path that requires above all the continuous exercise of listening. In fact, a General Chapter:

- *«Is a time of listening to the Spirit who spoke to the founders and continues to speak to the heart of the members of the Institute, to question them in their experiences and concrete realities»⁴.*
- *«Is the time for listening to the Lord Who speaks to us through signs of the times; a time for mutual listening and therefore of openness to what the Lord communicates to us through our brothers; time to serenely and without prejudice compare our projects with those of other people»⁵.*
- *«Is also a time to renew obedience to the Spirit that inspires prophecy. This is an indispensable value for consecrated life, inasmuch as it is a special form of participation in the prophetic mission of Christ»⁶.*
- *«Is a time to listen to the voice of those who struggle under the weight of the Institute’s activities, the cries of the dissatisfied and those of the satisfied, to let themselves be guided by the successes in human initiatives and let themselves be instructed by failures. It is a time in which injuries can be inflicted, in the choice of persons, or in discussions about future projects when desires are not accepted. It is above all a favourable time to deepen the charism, one’s identity, to grow in the sense of belonging to the Institute»⁷.*

⁴ Aitor Jiménez Echave, *The Chapter as a juridical reality*, in Aitor Jiménez Echave – Santiago González Silva – Nicola Spezzati, *In the synodal style. Paths of capitular collegiality*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017, p. 88.

⁵ Pope Francis. *Address to the participants of the General Chapter of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master*, 22 May 2017.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Aitor Jiménez Echave, *The Chapter as a juridical reality*, op. cit., p. 88.

In this perspective, it is necessary to realize that everyone has something to say and at the same time has something to learn from each other and, therefore, everyone is invited to get in tune with others and to welcome each other. This attitude must transpire in language and behaviour, in relationships, in choices, in the ordinary way of living⁸.

3. The phases of the synodal journey of preparation for the XI General Chapter

Concretely, the synodal path towards the XI General Chapter will consist of the following phases:

- a) The “pre-preparatory phase”: it is the compelling time for listening especially to our congregational reality.
- b) The “preparatory phase”: six months preceding the realization of the Chapter.

Successively, there will be the “celebratory phase”, which is the very event of the Chapter, which will be followed by its “implementation phase”, that is, the commitment to put into practice the decisions of the chapter fathers in all the instances of the Government and with the collaboration of each individual member.

4. The pre-preparatory phase

Now it is time to refer, in a special way, to the “pre-preparatory phase”, designed to be lived in two stages:

- a) The first stage begins with this communication entitled “*Start of the synodal journey in preparation for the XI General Chapter*”, and goes up to the Meeting of the Major Superiors, to be held in Rome from 11 to 14 November 2019. In this stage, there will be a work of involving all the members, so that each one indicates the great themes that provoke the Congregation. On this occasion, suggestions will also be made for the theme to be chosen for the XI General Chapter.
- b) The second stage of the “pre-preparation phase” goes from the Meeting of the Superiors of Circumscription to the convocation of the General Chapter (and the constitution of the preparatory Commission). We will work on the basis of the results of the first survey and of the reflection made in the meeting of the Major Superiors, trying to identify, with the involvement of all, the specific themes.

⁸ Cfr. Card. Gualtiero Bassetti, *Introduction given to the Permanent Council of the Italian Episcopal Conference on 1st April 2019*, available at <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/sinodalita-metodo-di-vita-ecclesiale>.

5. The Convocation of the XI General Chapter

As our norms foresee, six months before the beginning of the General Chapter, its convocation will be officially made (see Const. Art. 213). «Besides noting the date and place of celebration the letter is to set out the list of participants by right, the norms for the election of delegates and the prayers prescribed for the favourable outcome of the chapter» (Const. Art. 213.1). On this occasion, the “Preparatory Commission” will be appointed (see Const. Art. 213.2) and the time will be opened for the celebration of the provincial Chapters and regional Assemblies in preparation for the General Chapter.

6. The Commission for the pre-preparatory phase

After having listened to the General Council, I appointed the following members to constitute the pre-preparatory Commission: Father **Vito Fracchiolla** (Coordinator), Father **Celso Godilano**, Brother **Darlei Zanon**, Father **Francis Dalmet**, Father **Rafael Espino Guzmán**, Father **Luigi Giovannini** and Brother **Marcello Sannai**. A “Methodologist” will also be added to this Commission.

Dear brothers, let us begin this “synodal journey” aware of the need for an ever greater openness to the Holy Spirit, which is our first guide. In this sense, even if we already have some predefined proposals, we cannot close ourselves to the possible novelties that may appear in an itinerary that demands continuous discernment.

As Pope Francis explains: «Discernment is not an advertising slogan, it is not an organizational technique, or a fad of this pontificate, but an interior attitude rooted in an act of faith. Discernment is the method and at the same time the goal we set ourselves: it is based on the conviction that God is at work in world history, in life’s events, in the people I meet and who speak to me. For this reason, we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us, with methods and in paths that are often unpredictable»⁹.

This journey, of course, is not easy and requires the effort of all. Indeed, «as a process, experienced in the tension between proceeding and being together, synodality is also laborious. It requires evangelical spirituality and ecclesial belonging, continuous formation, availability to accompaniment, creativity»¹⁰. On this journey, the celebration of the Eucharist, the meditation on the Word and the Eucharistic Visit become privileged moments to listen to the voice of the Lord, in order to reinvigorate strength and strengthen communion.

We can make synodality a method of life and also of governance of our circumscriptions and individual communities. If these bodies, in fact, would function, com-

⁹ Address of Pope Francis at the beginning of the Synod dedicated to young people, 3 October 2018.

¹⁰ Card. Gualtiero Bassetti, *Introduction*, op. cit.

munion and co-responsibility will become effective. In any case, the synodal path requires the responsibility of everyone and the emptying of oneself in order to be open to the brothers. The reflection of the *Annual Letter on Poverty* can be an opportune aid to deepen this aspect.

Soon the pre-preparatory Commission will send its first communication and keep everyone informed on every step that will be taken on this synodal journey.

Let us praise Jesus Master who, in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, teaches us to live unity in the diversity of gifts. We ask Him that, in this journey done together, we can live with creative fidelity the charism received from our Founder, being St. Paul living today in the culture of communication. May Mary, Queen of Apostles, accompany us with her motherly protection.

Fraternally,

Rome, 16 June 2019

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity



Valdir José De Castro
Father Valdir José De Castro, ssp
Superior General