

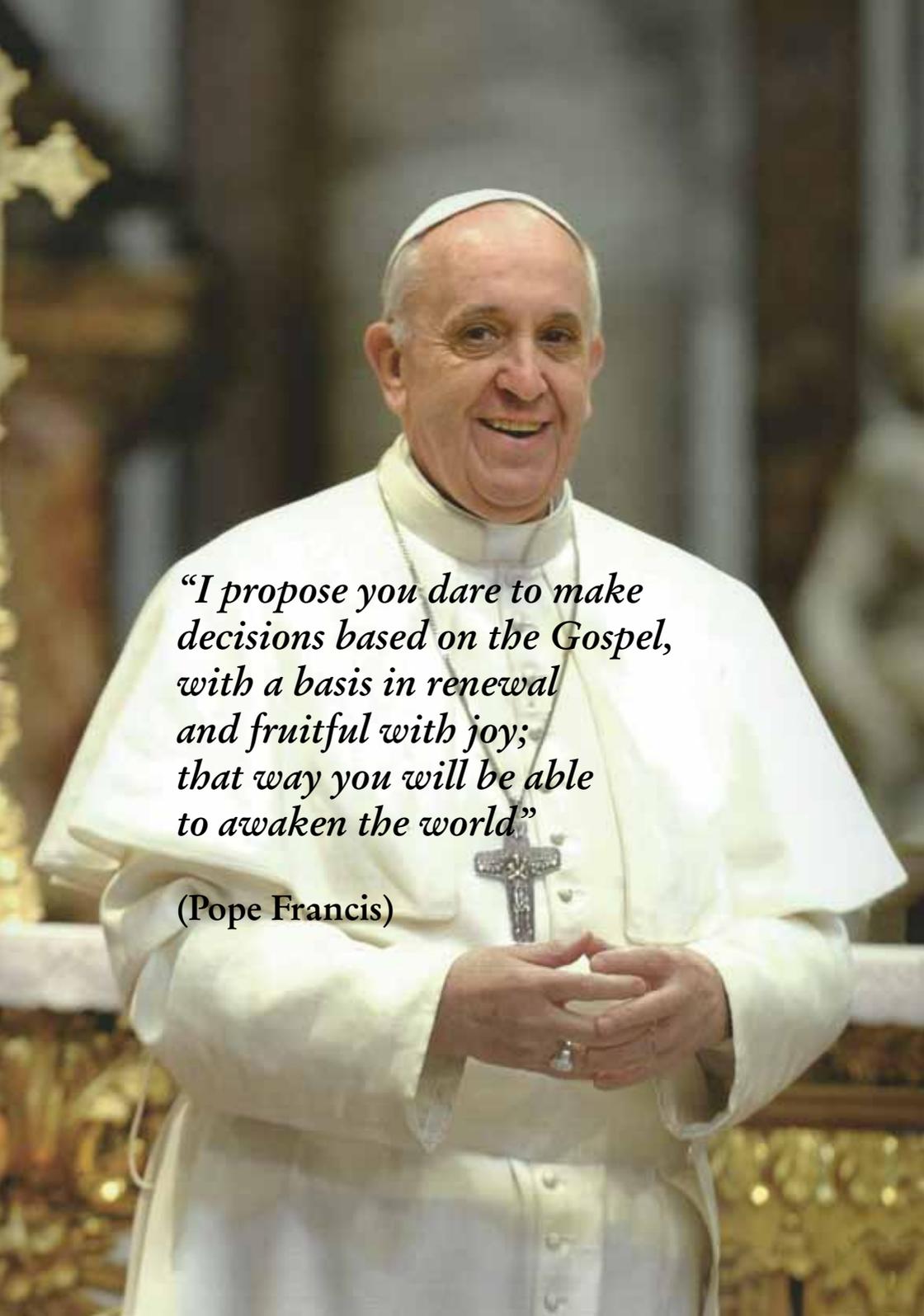
# Giving Witness to the Goodness and Love of God Our Savior

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**SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE SAVIOR – SDS**  
**Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians**

**25 December 2014**

A photograph of Pope Francis, smiling and wearing his white papal vestments. He is wearing a white zucchetto and a large silver cross necklace. His hands are clasped in front of him. The background is a blurred, ornate interior, likely a cathedral or papal residence.

*“I propose you dare to make  
decisions based on the Gospel,  
with a basis in renewal  
and fruitful with joy;  
that way you will be able  
to awaken the world”*

**(Pope Francis)**

1. Dear confreres, as the end of the year approaches I write you this pastoral letter for two basic reasons. In the first place, because the Superior General customarily writes a letter to the Society on the occasion of our titular feast in which we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior. As a result, this year I have decided to write a longer text, inviting everyone to meditate on the concerns we have in the Society and glancing toward the future of our evangelizing mission, both personally and communally. The second reason is based on my desire to point out the direction already shown by Pope Francis in which he asks religious to go a bit more beyond the ordinary horizon and to live one's vocation with authenticity. In his dialogue with the Superiors General in November 2013, Pope Francis made a very direct proposal to us: "*Awaken the world.*" He asked us to be capable of "*making decisions based on the Gospel, with a basis in renewal and fruitful with joy*". In reality, Pope Francis is asking us "*to raise the level*" of our apostolic consecration as he said clearly to us religious: "*Don't play at being a prophet; be it.*"
2. I wish in this letter not only to react to some of the challenges currently facing the Society but also to recognize the signs "*of the goodness and love of God our Savior*" (Ti 3: 4-7) that are always with us. According to our Founder, Fr. Francis Jordan, our security is not in our plans, nor is it in the programs we propose, neither is it in our personal efforts. Our security is rooted in God's love working in us. God's love is what prompts us forward to proclaim the salvation given to us in Jesus Christ. From his own experience, Fr. Francis Jordan repeatedly spoke of this absolute and unconditional love that never fails, as can be seen in one of his letters to Fr. Bonaventure Lüthen: "*The special loving disposition of God towards our Society is so great, that I am almost moved to tears...I desire to fall on the ground and*

*embrace the Savior because of the great love He gave and gives me who is unworthy.”<sup>1</sup>*

3. In these lines, I want to reflect on some topics related to our Salvatorian life from the starting point of some questions, which in reality were the same questions Fr. Francis Jordan had in his time: Where is God calling us to serve? How can we help more and better people who suffer, particularly the impoverished? What services should Salvatorians offer in the Church? Although all discernment should lead us to action, the answers to these questions do not imply that we make immediate changes or reforms. The invitation is to continue the path of discernment, which requires time, space and silence. Changes need to be thought through together, for as Pope Francis said: “*The wisdom of discernment redeems the necessary ambiguity of life and helps us find the most appropriate means, which do not always coincide with what looks great and strong.*”<sup>2</sup> This is what I want to call attention to in this letter, to listen to the Spirit of God, since nothing can be more absolute than God’s will. Above the long history of our Society is the history of a God who is acting in all that we are and in the effective use of the means available to us. We can be sure of one thing: the mission of our Society is as alive now as in any earlier time. That is because God has been working before we came along. It is because humanity continues to need humble and generous persons. And, it is because the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan moves us to dedicate our lives to the service of evangelization and to offer to all the salvation brought by Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fr. Jordan – Letter to Fr. Lüthen, Aug. 15, 1884*  
(see *DSS vol. X.I, n. 0180 [Eng. trans. from SD 2011 ed., p. 159]*).

<sup>2</sup> *Interview of Pope Francis by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, director of the magazine “La Civiltà Cattolica,” August 2013.*  
(English: [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20130919\\_1.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20130919_1.htm)).

## FROM THE DEPTH OF THE HEART

*“You must be members of the Society from interior conviction (...) from the depth of the heart.”<sup>3</sup>*

4. Once not long ago, I visited a community where the vast majority of the confreres are retired. Many of them have worked very hard as missionaries in a great variety of places and have given the best of themselves in diverse services in the Church and for the people. When I arrived at that community for the first time, I limited myself to observing my confreres since I did not speak their language. Once when they gathered in their beautiful chapel for prayer, I began to reflect on the great differences among them there in terms of age, cultural outlook, faith experiences and contributions to the mission of the Society during that moment of silence. I also felt the deep connection that points to our common identity as Salvatorians. If we wish to be faithful to our Founder there is no other way than to pay special attention to the global context, which is required of us as a Society. At the same time, we have to take into account the diverse realities in which our Salvatorian communities are developing. This is one of the main reasons we have held the Salvatorian Leadership Meetings in the different continents this year.
5. For the first time in the history of the Society we have been able to gather Salvatorian leaders in the Philippines, Spain, Colombia and Tanzania, in order to dialogue in concrete ways about our identity based on our charism, the service of our mission, and our formation processes in different contexts. In these continental meetings, I have seen many gestures of unity in the midst of a diversity of cultures, tongues and mindsets. I have heard the names of many Salvatorian confreres, who never receive any publicity whatsoever, who are true apostles of Jesus Christ in distinct services and some even in difficult situations. Without emphasizing one over the other, I want to reaffirm that

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<sup>3</sup> *Chapter Talks of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan, Oct. 15, 1897, p. 132.*



this diversity of Salvatorian gifts and charisms is a sign of the infinite love of the God who accompanies us. At the same time, it is the greatest treasure of the Society of the Divine Savior.

6. As we know, what binds us together in life and in mission is the spirituality of Fr. Francis Jordan. It invites us to be apostles of the Divine Savior. However, we cannot be apostles if first we have not been disciples. That is to say, without having had a vibrant and personal encounter with Christ living united to Him every day through prayer and primarily in the Eucharist. He is our only love and without Him, we cannot live. This distinctive element is so important that it is seen in the Society's emblem, which shows an image of the Savior surrounded by the inscription: "*Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.*" Naturally, our identity cannot be limited to a group of ideas, signs and rules, rather it is fundamentally and above all a way of life that emerges for a deep and personal relationship with Christ, Master and Savior. Fr. Francis Jordan has continuously pointed to this spirit

and way of living giving us the “mission not to rest content until all people know, love, and serve Jesus as their Savior” (Co 103). This is what really convokes us, unites us, gives us energy, and nourishes us. It is also a pathway that lasts all of life, because as you know, we were not born Salvatorians. Salvatorian identity is shown in each one of us like the promise of a seed. Our Salvatorian vocation is not an obligation. Our Salvatorian vocation is a task geared toward the future. It is a grace from God, a call of love to follow in the footsteps of Christ the Savior, without turning backwards.

7. On the other hand, we proclaim at our profession, “*Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World, in order to follow you faithfully and to serve You and Your work of Salvation, I...dedicate myself to You in Your Church without reserve to a life of apostolic service in the Society of the Divine Savior*” (Co 305). These words speak of a life that is surrendered, without conditions or reservations in terms of space, time or place. What happens many times however is that these words get located in the past with little relation to what we live today. This might imply that these words have lost their power and no longer are the basis of action that continuously energizes our choice of life. Although there are confreres in some units that give a clear witness of faithfulness to their vocation and of care to the persons who have been confided to them, I would say that this continues to be an important challenge for the future as we rediscover the meaning and depth of our Salvatorian religious and apostolic consecration. If we want to be significant for the people around us, I continue to insist that we need to sustain the three fundamental and non-negotiable columns of apostolic religious life, that is, a profound experience of God, fraternal life and zeal for apostolic mission. In this sense, I recommend to all that you engage in continuous and firm discernment so that none of these three elements is suppressed nor diminished. Let’s not veil the spirit of Fr. Francis Jordan that has convoked us to be persons who use all our strength to announce Christ with word and example. In all the

schools, parishes, houses of formation, spirituality centers and universities, with the resources and persons at our disposition, let's make visible our Salvatorian identity, our belonging to a fraternal community, and our missionary availability to serve others and for the salvation of all.

### **TRANSCENDING THE PARTICULAR AND THE LOCAL**

*“The spirit of our Society is this: omnibus et ubique (...) The opposite of this spirit of the Society is borders, bias, nationalism, whatever one may call it...”<sup>4</sup>*

8. Once as I was traveling by plane, I entered into a conversation with a passenger and we spoke about the vocation crisis to religious life in Europe. He asked me what the situation was of our “congregation.” I responded with a bit of pride for sure, that we were growing in number and activities. His eyes grew wide because of my response and he expressed his surprise saying he could hardly believe it since practically there are no vocations to religious life in the majority of the European countries. Of course, in terms of that, the passenger was correct and I had to clarify that we are not only in Europe but also on all the continents. Prompted by the charism of our Founder, we are called to live an identity that goes beyond the boundaries of nationalism and we cultivate a global vision of evangelization everywhere. I explained, furthermore, that Salvatorians are persons willing to go all places, without losing sight of our common identity as Salvatorians.
  
9. I think that in all the circles of the Society we should reflect on this topic, that we Salvatorians do not belong to a Province, rather we belong to the entire Society. From the first day a young man shows interest in being a Salvatorian, we should be clear and tell him that the work given to our hands is larger than a province or a culture. In accord with the charism of our Founder,

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<sup>4</sup> *Chapter Talks of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan – Sept. 17, 1899, p. 278.*

Fr. Francis Jordan, we are called to be members of an apostolic society without borders. When this point of view is lacking, the tendency to individualism and regionalism that extinguishes what is distinctively Salvatorian prevails. When the vision of our universal vocation to be open to the needs of the Society and attentive to those most far away is lacking, what predominates is the tendency to base everything on what is particular to the “provinces” surrounded by exaggerated ethnic and cultural tendencies that limit the rich diversity of the Salvatorian charism. In this context, the norm should not be the province, it should not be my culture, it should not be my theology. The norm is the apostolic mission of the Society of the Divine Savior that transcends the limits of one’s own Unit. There is no doubt that we would be much closer to the spirit of the Founder if we are able to surpass a “provincial mentality” and take on a mentality of belonging to a Society that goes beyond the spatial boundaries of geography and its contexts.

10. Another reason to reflect on this question is the clear awareness that we live in an interconnected world. We cannot continue to think of the units as autonomous. Today reality radically contradicts the juridical focus of our Constitution, almost exclusively addressed to an ideal picture of Units as full of vitality, characterized by a great efficiency at all levels. What we need today is a more profound and extensive collaboration throughout the Society. The process of restructuring that we have been going through in the last years reinforces this vision of establishing a more balanced dialogue between the central authority and the Units. I suppose that without renouncing the principle of “subsidiarity”, we should emphasize the unifying function of the Superior General and his Council. From a more up to date and global view of the Society, the Generalate is the one who should undertake integrated planning and animate the entire body of the Society. Consequently, to continue developing this reorganization process, I have convoked a team to study these questions so that they can be better defined and

specified juridically. Once this team has prepared a first draft we will present it at the next General Synod in 2016, which will then study and discuss it for the first time. I want to remind you again that the main reason for these changes is not only the decrease of members in some units or the growth of other new ones, rather because the times today are different and they require the Society to look ahead to the future with creativity, energy and dedication to renewal.

## THE EVANGELICAL SERVICE OF AUTHORITY

*“Oh, it is so beautiful and exalted when one builds others up through his observance, and when one supports his superiors, when one helps others to progress.”<sup>5</sup>*

11. In the year 2004, upon being elected Superior of the Brazilian Province, a religious of another congregation called me by phone to congratulate me. I have never forgotten his words: *“Get ready, my brother, to carry a heavy cross and to live moments of sorrow, to get criticism. Get used to listening much more than talking...”* Now, after completing more than a decade since then, I have learned that in one way or another, all who exercise a service of authority pay this price. Moreover, I’m convinced that all the other things related to authority such as a position of honor and acknowledgment, are distractions that impede a response to the authentic vocation to this service and they become an obstacle to using our energies for the mission. Any Salvatorian superior will have his defects because he is human like all the rest, but what should be always evident in the first place is his office of leading, inspiring, and sustaining the members and the community (see Co 702).
12. Nowadays, superiors cannot only be “organizers” of the life of the community or “managers” of the apostolic works we have. *“The manager does things well, but the leader does good things”*

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<sup>5</sup> *Chapter Talks by Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan – Apr. 14, 1899 A, p. 298.*

(Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, sj). Furthermore, leaders aren't situated above good or evil nor can they be the center. True leaders are the ones who put the apostolates, the school, the formation house, the parish, the spirituality center at the center and that all attention is directed there. Therefore, the leaders needed by the Society have to communicate a vision but without basing it on themselves. What the Society needs are teachers and guides who take initiative and open new horizons for shared work where each one finds his place and contributes to the welfare of all. In this sense I recommend, particularly to the local and major superiors, to be creative, to "make noise" (Pope Francis), especially in continuing formation programs and activities as well as in the areas of Salvatorian spirituality, charism, and mission. The Society needs the contribution of all in order to grow and develop, not only in the number of houses or apostolic works, but also to grow in the service of holiness and surrender without conditions to be light and leaven in the world.

13. From the onset of his pontificate, Pope Francis has surprised everyone with his new style of leadership, anchored in kindness and in humanization. Pope Francis' gestures are loaded with symbol. His direct words and closeness to those who suffer are an invitation to "conversion" to all of us who exercise a service of authority. For that reason, I think that Pope Francis' teachings provide us with interesting pathways for suitable service of authority in the Society. Therefore, I would like to highlight here some teachings on leadership in light of what the Pope said to us at the meeting with the Superiors General in November 2013.
14. First, the importance of the example of the life of the one who exercises a service of church leadership. We cannot serve our confreres in the way they have asked us to do if we are not trustworthy persons. I see clearly that Pope Francis has won credibility because of his life, his signs, and his wager on authenticity. Second, exercising the service of authority without

fear of changing what needs to be changed. If we need to change structures, let's do it. If we need to ask difficult questions of certain aspects, we have to be willing to do so. Third, exercising this ministry having in mind what is primary: the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his message and not the structures with which we organize ourselves or the traditions that we accumulate. Fourth, the wisdom to be attentive to the core essentials proper to Christian and religious life: the poor, community, being prophetic, proclamation of the Gospel, living one's charism, etc. Fifth, leaders leave a mark on institutions because of good teams, consultation, listening, and generating shared responsibility. The leader involves collaborators so that they can help him in his ministry. Sixth, the necessity of giving impetus to a new style of authority that above all makes reference to God and is based on humility, availability, mercy and kindness: "*I am among you as the one who serves*" (Lk 22:27).

### **COLLABORATION WITH LAITY IN THE MISSION**

*"The work of the apostolate could certainly be accomplished through individual initiative but it would be more effective if many joined together, cooperating to reach the same goal..."*<sup>6</sup>

15. At the beginning of the year 2000, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, we Salvatorians had to sell the most valuable property we had at that time. We all engaged in a process of discernment, aware that a wrong decision could result in grave consequences for our mission. The challenge and the risk were great and we were hounded by questions such as: Whom can we trust? How do we do this? Who can help us? Finally, we asked a professional layman to help us and "providentially" we found a professional who squared very well with our values and mission. From that time on, I have understood in a distinct way what Fr. Jordan repeated so insistently that we should "*trust in Divine Providence*". Just as our Founder says that God provides

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<sup>6</sup> "*Il Monitore Romano*", n. 4, 1881.



in many ways throughout our life, I have been able to verify that as well in the professionalism of so many lay people who collaborate with us in our apostolic works.

16. Nowadays expense and juridical questions cannot be the excuse for not relying on the collaboration of lay professionals in our mission. It is essential for me that every Salvatorian understand the new role the laity have in the evangelizing mission of the Church. In his Apostolic Exhortation on the vocation and mission of the laity, Pope St. John Paul II says *“The lay faithful are seen not simply as laborers who work in the vineyard, but as themselves being a part of the vineyard. Jesus says, ‘I am the*

*vine, you are the branches.’*”<sup>7</sup> What the Pope affirms is that lay Christians form an active, conscious and responsible part of the mission of the Church. I have seen in various places how some laity recognize this call to the apostolate and how they seek to be formed and sent for this service. Consequently, I believe we should advance more in this direction, offering the laity our spiritual heritage and sharing our apostolic resources. If we look deeply into the history of our charism, we become aware that collaboration with the laity is not a new reality. From the onset of his first contact with the professional layman Ludwig Auer (1880), Fr. Francis Jordan sought the collaboration of laypeople. The first outlines of his foundation already had as a trait being “*a Catholic Society of clerics and workers in the Lord’s vineyard from all nations*” (see SD I/124). In our day, observing Salvatorians acting in distinct countries, I believe we should be very grateful because the great majority of our works only exist thanks to the collaboration of Salvatorians and lay people. In addition, I think we could accomplish so much more if we were able to offer a greater role to professional lay people in our apostolates.

17. Above all, in the reality of today’s world, which leads us to think in terms of globalization, it is urgent we develop an attitude and practice of collaboration in the Society. The mission of evangelization to which we are committed is huge and we will never be able to accomplish it alone as Salvatorian religious. Personally, I believe that this was an early intuition of the Founder to open us to the laity so as to accomplish the apostolates in a new way. Surely, you in the different parts of the world have had some type of experience of collaboration between Salvatorians and laity who have wanted to be part of our mission. These are laypersons who give life to the

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<sup>7</sup> *Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles Laici,”* (n. 8, first paragraph), Pope John Paul II.

Salvatorian mission by different modes of cooperation in the social service realm, vocation promotion, and apostolic evangelization. Without a doubt, our Society is made greater by inviting laypersons to form an active part of our mission and to share in our spirituality and apostolates. I have seen in different countries how the support and contribution of laypersons bring a new dynamism and life to the mission, help our apostolic works, and raise resources to sustain them. I think that the mission of our Society is to establish strong relations with lay collaborators to the extent possible.

18. Certainly, there are differences between Salvatorians and laypersons that we need to acknowledge. Being a member of the Society and being a layperson are different vocations that involve different types of formation and availability of time. It is necessary to take account of these differences in the various contexts, which are at the same time a limit, and a source of potential. I believe that there are two important elements to consider in this area: first is a required attention to this type of collaboration in the various stages of Salvatorian initial formation and the preparation of formandi for a future active apostolate. Second, it is important that the laity have a solid basic personal formation that permits the Society to have a dialogue partner. An example is the people who have grown in our apostolic works. I think too it is important to reflect not only on the identity and role of the laity who work with us but also to examine the criteria we use to select collaborators. I'm fully convinced that preparing laity to know our history, spirituality and mission is for us Salvatorians today an opportune task and a correct response to the signs of the times.



## TRANSCENDING THE MARGINS OF THE MISSION

*“And if you arrive at the Himalayas, or South America, or into the mountains, or into the wilderness – think everywhere: that is my brother [or sister] who I must rescue! Therefore, seek to protect this spirit of universality!”<sup>8</sup>*

19. We know that from the beginning of World War II in 1939, Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, being the Superior General of our Society, sent many scores of young Salvatorians to the American continent. His intention was to avoid having these young men called to the front lines of that horrible war. Even today, there are many impressive stories told of those Salvatorians sent to lands completely unknown to them. They had no time to prepare themselves not even to have a proper leave-taking.

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<sup>8</sup> *Chapter Talks of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan – Febr. 17, 1899, p. 279.*

Some spent years and years away before being able to return, while others never had the opportunity to return, spending their lives in mission territories. It's clear we live in other times today marked by astronomically fast mobility and very advanced means of communication. What continues to call my attention is not so much our modern means but rather the missionary spirit of availability and sacrifice that so characterized our confreres. I believe that we need to continue nurturing this spirit in our Society. It's true, the world has changed but humanity continues to suffer and more than ever still needs persons who dedicate their lives to the service of salvation and the advancement of life.

20. The mandate we received from Fr. Francis Jordan was to go and evangelize all nations, wherever humankind or the Church needs our service. Upon reading his writings we feel called to "displace ourselves," to come out of ourselves, to construct our life and mission at different borders and different contexts so to promote life in its fullness. According to the Founder, the Salvatorian vocation is not identified with a comfortable life but rather with going to difficult places, without marked roads, risking one's own safety. I want to remind you that it was in such circumstances that Salvatorians began the first mission in India, in China, in Ecuador, in Tanzania and so many other places as a verification that "*God's works thrive only in the shadow of the cross*" (Fr. Jordan). Let's not allow this spirit of living the Salvatorian mission to get lost, especially in the times of today when it should be normal for us to go to another country, at least for a certain period of time for service or to be better formed in the international vision of the Society, of the Church, and of ourselves.
21. Thank God that the missionary impulse given at the last several General Chapters has made the Society grow and continue keeping alive the Salvatorian charism on all the continents. In March of this year, during a very simple ceremony in the city of Manila (Philippines), I had the joy of sending the first

Salvatorian to Vietnam, thereby establishing our presence in this beautiful country. This Asian nation opens many horizons for us to collaborate with the evangelization efforts of the local Church and for the future of the Society. I want to remind you that the theme of expansion, from the point of view of going to the margins, is one of the priorities of our Society. This we do with even more reason now that Pope Francis has spoken to us about going beyond ourselves, to “*go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel*”.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, I want to draw your attention to the need to slow expansion beyond the margins. It’s not enough today to count the number of geographical nations where there are Salvatorians, because there are frontiers that are less geographical and much closer to us that we need to discover and identify. Of course there are still geographical frontiers and we are available to go to them. For that reason, we have already planned in the Continental Meetings to initiate the presence of the Society in the countries of Peru and Kenya. However, there are also symbolic margins comprised of situations arising from human difficulties that cry out for our help. Those places are where the poorest and those thrown away by a consumerist society are found. A real contact with the poor is also part of our evangelizing mission (see Co 205). Therefore, it is very important that we accompany and support Salvatorians committed to this work of visiting impoverished areas in order to know first-hand the reality of what people go through who survive in the midst of great human sorrows.

22. A wise man once said, “*It takes man some two years to learn how to talk and some seventy to learn how to listen...*” Whether this is true or not, I believe that one of the signs of the times today is the need to listen seriously to the realities of the smallest ones of the globalized world. Pope Francis upon declaring the year 2015 as the “Year for Consecrated Life”, asked us as religious to live in

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<sup>9</sup> *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”, n. 20, Pope Francis.*

the present times with passion, to listen to the cry of those who weep and to make poverty our way of life. The year dedicated to Consecrated life will be a special opportunity to present to young people the beauty of a vocation to serve others, especially those who suffer the most. In this context, I have decided that the year 2015 will also be for our Society the “Salvatorian Missionary Year”. We want to give thanks to God in this way during the next year for the gift of our vocation to consecrated life as well as to celebrate the jubilee year of the sending of the first missionaries of the Society to India in 1890. These two themes of consecration and mission are like two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the year 2015 presents itself to us as an apt time to reflect on and pray about the topic of our consecration and mission in a world divided by many borders caused by injustice, wars, unequal globalization, the emergence of virtual content on the internet, etc. The motto of the Salvatorian Missionary Year, “*The Savior’s Mission is our Passion*”, is meant to be an invitation to us Salvatorians to make visible our missionary zeal that so filled the heart of our venerable Founder. Fr. Francis Jordan wanted us to be religious and apostles in order to be with Jesus and to be sent to preach throughout the world under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## THE JOY OF BEING BROTHERS

*“For the most part, brotherly love accounts for the well-being and advance of the Society. (...) People feel drawn to enter the Society when they see how love reigns there.”*<sup>10</sup>

23. For almost 60 years now there is a Salvatorian community living in Catia, an enormous slum in the west of Caracas, Venezuela. It seems to me to be one of the most violent slums in which I have ever been. The zone is controlled and continuously threatened by armed groups and delinquents who kidnap and kill innocent people on a whim. It would seem that nothing is capable of

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<sup>10</sup> *Chapter Talks of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan – March 31, 1899, p. 292.*



solving the majority of homicides, which causes even greater sorrow and leads to savage vendettas. Without a doubt, living in such a place totally changes anyone's mindset, awareness, basic questions and even the way one lives religious life. The central question is what sustains the mission of our confreres placed in such places? One of them told me that it is only possible to live in this type of place and give witness to the Gospel without losing courage if there is community. To be able to live in such a context with so much pain, violence and insecurity, in addition to a deep faith in God, one needs close, mutual and fraternal support. And our confreres happily, give witness of this.

24. Community life has always been a non-renounceable element of our Salvatorian apostolic life as affirmed by our Constitution that says, “*We are called by God to a community of faith, fraternity, and apostolate*” (Co 401). Even though it is true to say that many Salvatorians neglect this aspect of forming a fraternal community, it is also true that many Salvatorians, because of their “common faith in Jesus Christ,” join together with a view on the mission, above and beyond all differences of origin, age and formation. I am more and more convinced that we need to recover today the theological dimension of Salvatorian community life. Without this spiritual base, that sustains our efforts toward life in common and of mission, I don’t believe we will be able to convince others to live as a family or to be brothers. Two aspects are essential among the means to cultivate this dimension of persons “gathered in the name of Christ”. One is to take on an apostolate as a group, without so many individual initiatives, and the other is to maintain the practice of community prayer. I don’t believe there can exist an authentic community life without a minimum of shared prayer by which we confess for ourselves the foundational element who continues to be the person of Jesus Christ and his message of salvation.
25. The main recommendation I wish to make about this topic is that in all Salvatorian houses times, schedules, spaces, and forms that allow for reinvigorating or giving new impetus to prayer and community celebration be sought. Taking care of community prayer is what saves us from simply being a “productive community”, in which individual rights take precedence and overwork obscures moments of fraternal life. I think it is a grave mistake to think that we don’t need community prayer and to live unmindful of the mystery of God that has convoked us to be brothers, both in moments of joy and in painful ones. Naturally that doesn’t mean closing one’s eyes and imagining that everything is always going well among us. Rather the conditions that allow for community are internal, it is an attitude of faith, it is a style of life.

26. I imagine that the majority of us have already had some type of failure, difficulties, or problems in community life. Of course, on these occasions it's normal to enter into deep frustration, to feel worthless and even to doubt the choices we have made. What I'm able to say after many years of experience is that no community is perfect and neither is fraternal life uniformity. Wherever one goes, to live in community is something internal; it is a way to follow Christ. For that reason, I try to live the experience of community life from this internal attitude. It's not an easy attitude. It has to be worked at day after day in prayer, in the ability to forgive, in mutual understanding, and in patience. Of course, it's a never-ending job and in which there exists no magic. So let's not allow ourselves to be carried away by the temptations of always complaining about community life, of not trusting in the power of God's grace and of abandoning our ideals.
27. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the local superiors who dedicate themselves to the primary mission of favoring unity and participation in community. I insist that you use Salvatorian feasts and celebrations as privileged occasions to examine the examples of apostolic life as shown by our Founder. Each date on the Salvatorian calendar is an occasion as a community to meditate on and to perceive the joy, enthusiasm, the pleasure of living and sharing as brothers together in mission. If at any time in the past the frequent accusation of a low quality community life has been the excuse for leaving the Society, it is also true that because of the joy of being brothers, lived authentically in many Salvatorian communities, community life constitutes a valuable source of support and perseverance for many of us.

## TO NOT PROGRESS IS TO SLOWLY DIE

*“Always move forward in the name of the Lord toward the goal to be reached. Work, suffer, endure, pray, sigh, trust in God ...”*<sup>11</sup>

28. They say that Eastern culture is based on change. For example, for the Japanese the only thing that is fixed is that there are four seasons. And of course, the essence of the seasons is that they continuously change. Nature itself shows us that life goes beyond our conventional daily routine and that it is part of a greater mystery. Every day new forms, new developments, new needs, and new responses appear. The only permanent thing is God’s love, his Word, that pushes us, empowers us and motivates us to go forward. In this context I’ve become aware that Fr. Francis Jordan, in his spiritual writings, frequently uses verbs that imply action: pray, serve, advance, walk, aspire, trust, grow... For that reason I dare to say that like our Founder who felt a great dynamism in his gut and never wanted to conform to the status quo, we too are called to open our heart so that we can be carried away by the Spirit of wisdom, intelligence, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety and fear of God.

29. Reading his “Spiritual Diary,” what I’ve always admired in Fr. Jordan is his continuous discernment, availability and sacrifices to help all, without exception, so that they can know the Savior of the world. In reality this is the contribution the Society makes to the mission of the Church, to proclaim in all places that in Jesus Christ, God came to save everyone, without excluding anyone. We find this central thought of the Founder in all his writings and in our *Constitution*. Nonetheless, I often ask myself: How can we keep alive this spirit of the Founder in the present time? What should we learn from our confreres who came before us and gave their lives for this cause? Of course many of the apostolic solutions that

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<sup>11</sup> *Fr. Francis Jordan. Spiritual Diary – II/59.*

were useful until now no longer serve in the difficult times of today, in a world that is changing and changes us continually. New situations always ask for new discernment, reflection and new responses. As a result, we Salvatorians of today are obliged, before anything else, to have the capacity to interpret the signs of the times, to be formed and to deepen ourselves in the charism, to promote creativity, and to accomplish the apostolic vision of Fr. Francis Jordan. This includes a deep commitment to the persons with whom we evangelize. We cannot remain content. These are times for looking ahead and for living intensely the Apostle Paul's exhortation to "...not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God..." (Rm 12:2).

30. One of the important topics of the General Chapter was the need to reconfigure leadership at various levels. In terms of this, we cannot allow ourselves to lack the creativity to look for cooperation and new forms of organization. The Generalate has begun a review of the central government's services. Throughout this year I have spoken with some Salvatorians and management experts who can help us organize the services of the Generalate in a new way, from the experience and wisdom of the previous governments. The new structure of the Generalate will be comprised basically of different service departments (communications/publications, administration/finances, data base/archives/SOFIA, etc.) and various apostolic offices (Formation, Mission, Salvatorian Family, Legal Representation, Justice and Peace, Postulation, etc.). Our intention is to create an adequate structure in which Salvatorians and lay collaborators work in an integrated way for the development of the Society. These changes are intended to make the Generalate not only an administrative entity but also one that becomes "*the heart of the Society*" (Fr. Jordan). I imagine that everyone understands how necessary it is for the Generalate to function well in its work of giving adequate

answers to the decisions of the General Chapter, of interacting with the Units, of conducting numerous trips and of organizing meetings of teams that collaborate in the Generalate's service, etc. As these changes are being implemented we can already verify the dynamism of a much more effective government, even though sometimes things don't turn out as we would have wanted. The Founder himself is the one who inspires us to act in this way, without fear of the risks of exploring all the possibilities to maintain the spirit and aim of the Society in all its forms. In this moment of our history, I ask that each Unit make a particular effort to improve our structures and to discern together on where to put your attention, your service and energy as Salvatorians. Let's not be afraid to revise our structures nor to respond with depth to these questions: What does the Society of the Divine Savior need today? What other means do we have to be significant (instruments of salvation) for the men and women of our times?

31. I want to conclude this letter by sincerely thanking each one of you, the members of the Society of the Divine Savior. Looking around the world, many times I have observed with admiration the passion and generosity with which you dedicate yourselves to the apostolic work of our Founder and his service in the mission of the Church. I beg you all to continue forward with our commitment to give time, reflection, heart and means to the Salvatorian cause. Receive from the members of the Generalate and from me our best wishes for Christmas and a blessed New Year. May we live the birth of Jesus the Savior contemplating with fervor the great way of God's immense love that attracts us toward him. May we live Christmas with an open heart and a renewed desire to live our vocation intensely – both personally and communally – *to give witness to the goodness and love of God our Savior*. I end by sending you my blessing with these inspiring words of our venerable Founder, like pearls that need our care and our living out with passion:

*“Always keep your holy vocation  
before your eyes,  
everywhere and in all things.  
That vocation is to form Christ  
in yourselves and your neighbor.*

*Love one another (...)  
Be all-inclusive in your love for peoples  
of whatever race or nation (...)  
Cherish the spirit of prayer...*

*The Society’s growth should be  
of the greatest concern to you.  
Promote its good name by good example...  
Help the missions...  
by prayer and sacrifices  
and by obtaining help for them.*

*Continue to do good,  
working for the glory of God  
and the salvation of souls  
with all your strength.  
Move ahead. Go forward!”<sup>12</sup>*

  
Superior General

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<sup>12</sup> Fr. Francis Jordan. *Circular Letter to the members on the occasion of the XVI Centenary of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, Passion Sunday, March 11, 1913* (see DSS X, n. 1112 [Eng. trans. by S. Miriam Cerletty SDS, “In the Footsteps of the Apostles,” *Contributions on Salvatorian History, Charism, and Spirituality*, vol. 4, pp. 88-89]).





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