

I Will Make You a Light to the Nations

**Illuminate the Present and
Envision the Future**

**Fr. Milton Zonta, SDS
Superior General**



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

08 December 2015

Meaning of the Emblem

The globe, a Salvatorian symbol, appears surrounded by a bright color that recalls the glory and love of God present in the world. We, Salvatorians with our rich cultural differences, values, vocations, beliefs and ways of living the Charism are represented on the lower part of the globe. The squares in five colors remind us of the five continents where we are present. The mixed colors also point out that the phenomena of migration and the global network of communication in all its forms impact our world. These images tell us that the map is changing as well as the reality of the world. All of this brings great challenges to our Salvatorian mission.

The violet and red strips that go across the globe remind us of the liturgical colors for the Lenten Season and the celebrations of Martyrs. In the same way that they cross and go beyond the globe, the Paschal Mystery traverses all of humanity and touches cosmic space because the salvation, offered by Jesus Christ, transcends the universe. The red color of the sufferings and passion of humanity crosses our world and calls us to give a response and to walk in solidarity with this reality.

United by our Salvatorian vocation-mission that is to *“know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”* (Jn 17:3), we are called to keep alive the flame of our Charism in the midst of the darkness of injustices, violence and sorrows that afflict the life of the people. On the globe the flame emerges from the strip of colors. It does so in the same way as our light should while nurtured on the Mystery of Jesus, the Savior who called us to be His disciples and to be a light to the nations, that His salvation may reach the ends of the earth (Cf. Is 49:6).

Letter to the Salvatorians

“I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).

1. Dear Salvatorian confreres, please receive my cordial greetings from the Motherhouse in Rome. I wish to convoke all of you by means of this letter in order for us to enter into a process of revitalization guided by the dual principle of *vocation-mission*. Primarily it is because this is the fundamental principle of our apostolic life as Salvatorians. On the one hand we seek to live in intimacy with the Savior in order to continue his Mission in the world. On the other hand, our mission will only be effective if each one of us has the experience of what it is we are to proclaim through intimate connection to the Savior as individuals and communally. Consequently the Salvatorian Mission is fruitful only to the extent there is a loving union with the Divine Savior, which, in turn, makes our mission effective and gives it ultimate meaning (Jn 15:1-27).
2. I sense the time has come for us to put all of our forces to work in favor of the development of a process that will involve rethinking, discerning and revitalizing the deep meaning of this principle at the personal level and at the same time, in relation to the apostolic work begun by Fr. Francis Jordan. Our vocation and mission is a call to be *“light to the world”* and for this reason the XVIII General Chapter of 2012 recommended that the Generalate (until 2018) develop a systematic program for the Society with the goal of deepening our Salvatorian Charism, Spirituality, and Mission (see Ord. 01). In order to fulfill this important task the Generalate proposes a path that will lead to an encounter between these three central Salvatorian elements (Charism,



Spirituality and Mission) and their concomitant relationship to our vocation since “*Our life must be a continual conversion to Christ (...) so that we may better direct our energies for service in the Kingdom of God*” (Const. 508).

3. I invite every Salvatorian, wherever and whatever situation in which you find yourself, to actively participate in this process comprised of four key themes from our Salvatorian life as the criteria for discernment as well as a lens for reflection, that is: *vocation, mission, formation and reorganization*.¹ These four key themes can be understood by synthesizing them in the following way: We Salvatorians have inherited the spiritual experience of Fr. Francis Jordan, that calls us to be “men of God” (Vocation), who proclaim the Good News of salvation (Mission), from constant deepening and growth in our vocational programming (Formation), collaborating so that the Society is able to continuously revise and adapt its forms of organization (Reorganization), since these are an important means for the realization of our vocation-mission.

4. Taking into account the importance of each one of you and of each Administrative Unit, I underscore this call to every one of us in order to be successful on the road of conversion and of deepening our Salvatorian vocation-mission. It is evident that no change is produced “by magic” and without fear of failure. For that reason the observation by the Jesuit Pedro Arrupe is worth noting: “*We are afraid of risk and for that reason we do not change; but the worst risk is not to risk.*” We will not take refuge in that which makes us feel secure, rather let us get underway, taking into account each one’s history, the stages of growth of the Society, and above all, the persistence of the Founder who despite the great obstacles he faced, never turned back. The Salvatorian Mission, though difficult, captured his imagination

¹ Please recall that these were the basic themes that guided the Continental Meetings that took place in 2014. See: *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*, no. 5.

and gave enthusiasm to his life, because as he himself often recalled “*Nothing grows except in the shadow of the cross*” (SD II/73).

5. This convocation is for every one of us. It is directed as much to the elder members of the Society as to the members in formation, so that we can journey together. All of us need one another and complement one another, being assured that the richness of each one is a valuable gift to be taken into account, for as an old African proverb says: “*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*” Therefore, it is a call to active participation, while respecting the rhythm of life of each place and the reality of each Administrative Unit, yet aware that we are important in giving shape to the totality of our Society. This process will only be fruitful to the extent that together we become aware that we need conversion and need to give greater quality to our presence and our witness as models of Salvatorian Consecrated Life, based on our Charism.

6. The Salvatorian Charism is a gift of the Spirit to the Church. This gift of the Spirit was not only given to our Founder but also as an inheritance to all who dedicate themselves to the apostolic work he initiated. However a Charism is only fruitful when a mysterious combination occurs between the gift of the Spirit and the natural talent of the persons who accept it. As persons consecrated for mission, we ought to improve our capacity to discern the signs of the times and seek new ways to renew and always keep the Charism itself significant. As a result, the Salvatorian Charism needs to be made more “dynamic,” that is, continuously reignited so that it will be a fire that increases in heat and strengthens as the Founder noted: “*Whoever is not burning, sets nothing aflame*” (SD I/186).

7. In order to undertake this current process of renewal, with the aim of planning for the future, personal discernment is fundamental² as are communal decisions made in light of the proposed key elements. We must permit ourselves to be guided by the strength of the Salvatorian Charism, like a boat sent sailing by the wind of God's Spirit. Having this in mind, I will now explain the central themes of the process and, at the end of this letter I will present the concrete steps to be taken. These will lead to an end with the XIX General Chapter of 2018.

ANTECEDENTS TO THIS PROCESS

8. Particular events give impulse to this process. In addition to the recent XVIII General Chapter, we were called to mark the "*Year for Consecrated Life*," which will conclude on 02 February 2016. Along with all consecrated men and women we are called to examine the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope. At the same time, as I write this letter, we are marking the "*Salvatorian Missionary Year*," which invites us to reignite the fire of our Salvatorian Mission. In addition, we are aware of the preparations underway for the "*World Youth Day*" which will take place in Krakow, Poland (2016). Two recent documents by Pope Francis are equally important: in the first place is his Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelii Gaudium*" (2013) in which the Pope offers a motivational and challenging vision of the missionary and evangelizing spirit of the Church, along with a proposal for the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world. And secondly, his Encyclical "*Laudato Si'*" (2015), inspired by meditation on St. Francis of Assisi, in which the Pope invites us to hear the cries of creation, exhorting everyone to an "ecological conversion," to

² I recall here the declaration I made in my first *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians* 2014: "*The invitation is to continue the path of discernment, which requires time, space and silence*" (n. 03).

a “change of direction,” and to assume responsibility for issues such as hunger in the world, poverty, globalization, and scarcity, while proposing another way of managing resources and another idea about our duty to take care of creation.

9. There are global changes in contemporary culture that challenge our Salvatorian presence in the Church and in the world. Advances in knowledge, scientific discoveries, technological innovations represent without a doubt a gain for humanity, but without the same results and benefits for everyone. Instead of improving life in all spheres they bring in their emergence new disparities and greater distance from the situation in which the poor live. Moreover, for the first time in history, we have more information than the ability to decode and process it. “The realm of information superficiality” at the expense of wisdom is dominating us. That is, immediate solutions and utilitarian explanations hold sway, which Pope Francis calls “*throw away culture*.” Nonetheless, we ought not forget the constant challenges that emerge from reality that, like those faced by the Founder, should be for us moments of opportunity and of discovery of new ways and means to evangelize. As men called to evangelize we should ask ourselves: How can we reduce the suffering of humanity in these times?

10. There are also future events in our Society that motivate and call for this process of revitalization. The first is the General Synod of the Society (2016) which has as a function among other things “*to evaluate and revise the long range plan of the Society*,” as well as “*to determine the method of preparation*” of the XIX General Chapter of the Society (2018). The Chapter, itself, should analyze the results of this process that has already started and approve the priorities of the Society for the following years. On the other hand, the International Formation Team is working arduously on the revision of the General Plan for Formation of the Society (*Ratio Institutionis Generalis*). The team will develop a working text that will be sent to the Administrative Units so that we

participate in and collaborate with the revision of this important text for our Society. That is, we are taking note of the times that will implicate all of us and will call for our discernment.

11. The year of the chapter coincides with the *first centenary of the death of the Founder* (1918-2018). There surely is no better way to celebrate this event than to revive in the heart of every Salvatorian our first vocational love, that which makes us messengers of the evangelizing spirit of Fr. Francis Jordan now present in over 40 countries. Our task and commitment is always to keep alive and current the work initiated by our Founder for which he gave his life and greatest energy until the end. In order to celebrate such an important moment in our Salvatorian Life, we are designing some initiatives that will be presented at the General Synod next year.

12. As is known, since the death of the Founder the face of the Society has changed and continues to change radically. Until a few decades ago, the majority of the members that entered the Society came from the northern hemisphere. Today this is completely changing. This transformation is producing demographic and intercultural changes, not only in the interior of the Society, but also inside the Church itself. The prediction is that in the year 2025 only 30% of Christianity will be in the north.³ Other cultures, values, and visions are increasingly being expressed in the Society and ought to be taken into account. For that reason, more than ever, the Spirit is asking of us the ability to dialogue, to listen and to discern.

³ See the talk “*Desafíos de la Vida Religiosa Hoy*” by Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, to the General Chapter of the Order of St. Augustine, on 30 August 2013.

CRITERIA FOR DISCERNMENT AND LENSES FOR REFLECTION

A – Salvatorian Vocation

“A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him”(EG 266).

13. In the year 2011 the Salvatorians of Italy, for a series of reasons, had to abandon the Parish of the Divine Savior at Tor de' Cenci, on the outskirts of Rome. The surrender of this structured parish apostolate was a very painful process. I remember that some even said that the Salvatorians no longer existed in the diocesan Church of Rome since they had lost their visibility. Of course it is true we no longer have a structured pastoral field in Rome, but this does not mean we are not present in another way in this diocese. Nonetheless, this clearly demonstrates the constant confusion that occurs when a structure or specific form of the apostolate is identified with Salvatorian Consecrated Life itself. That is, without structures or specific external forms there is no more religious life! What ought to be an instrument that will facilitate living out our vocation, ends up usurping the very essence of it. The means is converted into an absolute. What is secondary takes the place of what is primary. For these reasons, it is always necessary to recover the deep meaning of our vocation.

14. It is important to point out that in the Bible, Jesus is the one who takes the initiative in terms of the calling. He calls and invites one to follow him. The call is a free and loving decision by Jesus and not the result of the gifts, talents or personal sanctity of the one invited (see Mk 3:13; Jn 15:16). Each vocation story starts from this basic call, which is personal and always based on God's love and not on one's merit. Jesus invited persons to come closer to Him, to spend time with Him, and to participate with Him in the work of salvation. Our vocation is a definitive and irrevocable gift of God (2 Tim 2:13) that introduces us into a process by which we

are “*taken possession of by Christ*” (Phil 3:4-14). This conquest in turn leads us on a continuous and gradual road of conversion, where the disciple in confrontation with the Teacher, questions his real motives for following Him. For this reason, vocational discernment and evaluation of real motives is fundamental for those who enter the Society. Fr. Francis Jordan wrote “*Admit no one unless his vocation is sure*” (SD I/161).

15. It is also worth noting that our vocational response implies a vocational co-responsibility. A vocation is always a road of following and necessarily includes a deep “knowledge” of the person who calls and walks with us. Jesus is the Teacher and Savior, and we are His disciples engaged in an ongoing apprenticeship. In the course of this process that is born in an encounter with Him, all that we are, do, and have will begin and end in Him. Naturally, this affective and enacted union with Christ requires means for its realization so that it does not remain only at the theoretical level. We need to have moments of silence, of prayer and of contemplation, alone and in community, in order to be intimate with Christ. There is no doubt that many religious have forgotten or never learned how to pray intimately with the person of Jesus, and so they fall into sterile activism, empty rituals, motivated in action by personal projects or simply falling into discouragement. How is it possible to live as one called without belonging to Him, without a true personal relationship with the Savior?⁴
16. Lastly, our vocational calling has the seal of the Salvatorian Charism. We are followers of Jesus Christ in the spirit lived and proposed by the Founder. And we can only understand the life of Fr. Francis Jordan, his charism, his choices and his apostolic works based on his vocation-relationship with Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Christ was the one who called him and directed his steps so that he would be an instrument of salvation in the

⁴ In terms of this see what I wrote in the *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*, n. 06.

world. The Founder did not attain this vocational awareness instantaneously, rather it was an experience of faith that deepened and was consolidated over the course of the years, transforming him interiorly. In the same way, every Salvatorian needs to return continuously to the origins and core of his vocation. That is to say, to grow in consciousness-consistency in one's own call to follow Jesus, allowing oneself to be guided by a similar movement of the Spirit. As Pope Francis reminds us well, *“At the root of every Christian vocation we find this basic movement, which is part of the experience of faith. Belief means transcending ourselves, leaving behind our comfort and the inflexibility of our ego in order to center our life in Jesus Christ. It means leaving, like Abraham, our native place and going forward with trust, knowing that God will show us the way to a new land.”*⁵

B – Salvatorian Mission

“We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (EG 273).

17. We know Salvatorians in all of the Administrative Units of the Society who, for reasons of age or health, are no longer engaged in an active apostolate. Sometimes in our communications they simply appear as “retired.” Nonetheless, we ought to ask ourselves: Has their time for mission ended? Do they still have a mission to accomplish? Are we able to claim a “mission pension?” As we answer these questions we soon discover what is the concept of mission that truly motivates our life and action. The first observation that should be made is in terms of the relationship we establish between two possible interpretive principles of any type of human action: the vocation principle and the career principle. We believe that a vocation is a divine

⁵ *Message of Pope Francis for the 52nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (26 April 2015 – Fourth Week of Easter).



call, and therefore linked to surrender, service, gift and passion for the cause of the Kingdom. Thus, the vocation principle is associated with a mission. A career, on the other hand, is the exercise of an activity related to a certain ability that requires technological-scientific competency, productivity, efficiency, visible results, and employment. In other words, the career principle is connected to a function. The Salvatorian Mission, in sum, is guided by the vocation principle, which is the total and continuous surrender to the Savior's Mission and not by the career principle, which implies remuneration, power and a time of retirement.

18. The concept of mission, moreover, needs to be disconnected from its manifestation in a particular pastoral activity. The Salvatorian Mission cannot be understood based only on the apostolates we direct. It in itself is much more than an activity or an apostolate. To the contrary, a certain activity or apostolate is a chosen possible and conscious (or not) expression that fulfills the mission in a particular historical and human context. That

is, there are many ways to live the Salvatorian Mission and we cannot simply reduce them to working in a parish or a school. I believe the quality of fulfilling our mission will grow when we have an integrated vision of it, understanding and assuming that our mission can be expressed by various ways and means. Having clear the range of possibilities that emerge from this conviction, with greater reason we can affirm that a Salvatorian will always be a missionary, all of his life, each one in the place that has been given to him by the Lord, starting from the Charism we carry and that identifies us. In the same way that Jesus Christ, consecrated and sent into the world, made his whole existence a saving mission, in an analogous way Salvatorians are persons called to make their entire life a mission, with the same attitudes as the model that inspires them: the Savior.

19. The Theology of Mission reminds us that rather than a simple activity of the Church, mission is understood as something that is born in the very nature of God revealed in Jesus. That is, mission is an activity that God himself performs in relation to the world. Mission is born in the heart of God. In that way, the Church is a sacrament of the universal love of God for all of his creatures. The term “*Missio Dei*” (the Mission of God) helps us name this deeper sense of mission as a movement of God toward peoples, sending his Church to participate in his Plan of Salvation. Consequently all that we do in service to the Church is part of God’s mission in the world, but this does not represent all of God’s work in the world. In God’s mission we are chosen to serve and based on our Charism to proclaim by word and action God’s salvation of all people, without excluding anyone. How is it possible that we have persons who continue to believe they are the only ones who can take forward a particular work or means of evangelization?
20. The essential part of our mission for us Salvatorians is to be the perpetuation of the Savior’s Mission. For this, neither our age nor the place in which we work matters. As I look at the

Founder's experience of founding, in my judgment he models our Salvatorian Mission in two basic dimensions: to know the Savior intimately and to make him known by everyone and everywhere by all ways and means. This is what our documents express, "...we proclaim to all people the salvation which has appeared in Jesus Christ, so that by the lives we live and in our apostolic activities, all may come 'to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent' (John 17:3), and have life in all its fullness."⁶ Nonetheless, I remind you that this way of understanding the Salvatorian Mission will not be born by simply studying our sources. Rather it is born by a profound experience that each one of us ought to make of an encounter with the Savior that puts us on the road to knowing who He is and that sends us to make his person known to everyone else, making disciples of all peoples.

21. In the letter I wrote in 2014, I have already affirmed that we are called to transcend the margins of the mission.⁷ Today, more than ever, I perceive that the new times are asking of us the capacity to visualize new scenarios and to seek new responses, such as Fr. Francis Jordan did in his day. We have to open our ears and our hearts to the demands the Church is making today of Consecrated Life and not lose so much time and our best energy looking only at our internal problems. We are surrounded by so many cries of pain and desperation and we cannot be deaf to these demands. Are our apostolic activities effective responses to these realities or are we content with "the apostolate of merely maintaining things as they are," simply managing what we already have and what we have always done? We cannot renounce our Mission and much less be content with doing the same thing as always!

⁶ Declaration on the Mission Statement of the Society – SDS General Synod 1995 (see *Annales*, vol. XIV, no. 7, 1996, p. 460).

⁷ See: *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*, nn. 19-22.

C – Salvatorian Formation

“We want to have better training, a deepening love and a clearer witness to the Gospel” (EG 121).

22. During a recent visit to our formation house in Amadeo, a city of the Philippines, the formandi enthusiastically showed me photos of their “missionary experience” among indigenous families in the mountains of Occidental Mindoro. Prior to leaving for that island, they had prepared well so that they could undertake various activities: healthcare orientation for self-care, food distribution, and catechesis sessions for youth and children. But what also caught my attention was the account of this same experience by Fr. Hermann Preußner, one of the organizers of the mission. He spoke with such joy and gratitude about how the experience of the precarious situation of the families and the vitality of the young formandi helped him grow and learn, at his more than 70 years of age! For me, here we see the outline of a style of formation in a missionary key that builds on the capacity to give and receive, to speak and listen, to teach and learn. And all of this made me think about the value of these



experiences in the formation of all of us. It is lamentable to verify that there are Salvatorians who, once they have completed initial formation (novitiate, scholasticate and juniorate), do not believe it is necessary to deepen how to live their religious consecration, deceiving themselves with the idea that they have already lived all the missionary experiences possible. And neither do they worry about making the effort to reinterpret the Charism for our times. Many young religious who have quit studying after their time in initial formation are already becoming out-of-date. Today a method of formation that is evolving and ongoing is needed to help us deepen our vocation-mission in the face of contemporary reality with its challenges and opportunities. If we do not enter into this ongoing formative dynamic, we will lose what is basic to what makes us true Salvatorians.

23. In our documents we have written many times that formation is “one of the primary priorities of the Society.” Nonetheless, what we feel most is the lack of qualified and dedicated formators, continuity in the formation process, and better preparation of candidates so that they can assume the totality of what it means to embrace Salvatorian Consecrated Life. If there is something primary and indispensable for formation in the Society, it is to form in order to reach the deep awareness that we are disciples of Jesus the Savior, the foundation and ultimate sense of our choice of life. I continue to insist on the non-negotiable principles of Consecrated Life that I have already emphasized in my previous letter and that are fundamental to this way of discipleship:⁸ a) the profound experience of an encounter with Jesus Christ by means of the continual habit of prolonged and continuous prayer, primarily through reading and meditation on the Word of God, using for example the method of *Lectio Divina*. There is no doubt that deep spirituality is what nurtures our ability to move forward. b) The experience (not only study) of living in community, building on the establishment of

⁸ See: *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*, n.07.

solid and true human relationships with the companions with whom we spend our life. No Salvatorian ought to be formed in isolation; it's just inconceivable to not offer ourselves the experience of the joy and the difficulty of living in community during initial formation. c) And, lastly, that everything be directed to evangelizing mission, to the generosity of service to others.

24. I understand that one of the important tasks we have today in the Society is certainly the creation of a tradition of Ongoing Formation. On this point it is necessary to insist that "continuous formation" is much more than participating in out-of-the-ordinary activities, taking courses for updating, or attending events in order to acquire new knowledge. The basic proposition of Ongoing Formation is to continuously awaken the conscience about the necessity to stay on a permanent journey of growth as consecrated men. Consequently, more than completing a specific program, ongoing formation is a requirement of our following Jesus, the Savior, and of our fidelity to the Salvatorian Charism. Instead, it punctuates our daily reality. That is, it molds the interior disposition that impels us to personal and vocational growth in our following of Christ. Ongoing formation does not refer in the first place to higher studies or in attaining academic degrees. Clearly, studies for updating oneself are important and necessary, but it is in ordinary life, deeply lived, where we realize our life plan and mission. Understood in this way, daily life, which includes interpersonal relationships, programmed communal life and apostolate, a life of prayer and Salvatorian Spirituality, needed rest..., is what offers us the real framework and the effective space of our ongoing formation. I am sure that in many of our Administrative Units the attention to this topic of Ongoing Formation will give greater meaning to mission and above all to the growth in human and spiritual maturity.
25. Lastly, Salvatorian Formation (initial and ongoing) needs to be one of the pillars of the revitalization we dream about and for which we are working. The Generalate wants to foster the interchange

of experience and formation programs to the greatest extent possible in order to seek together the newness that is necessary and possible. All the work of the International Formation Team points to this in the updating of the *Ratio Institutionis Generalis*. Because if we offer quality formation the Administrative Units and the Mission of the Society will be revitalized automatically. However, if formation is mediocre the Society will be mediocre. That is to say, we have to make the effort to create new things while building on the treasure of the Charism we have received. As we know, the Salvatorian Charism is not the product of a rational idea about a possible apostolic charism, rather it is the fruit of the mystical experience transmitted to us by the Founder. The key purpose of this gift of the Spirit finds its greatest meaning in the Gospel of John 17:3. For this reason I consider it possible to synthesize the Salvatorian Charism in the following way: announcing by our life and words, that in Jesus Christ we know the only and true God. The God who out of love came to save everyone without excluding anyone. I believe this is the point of departure, where we must invest by forming ourselves so as to attain the maturity of our vocation–mission through the deepening of our knowledge of God and of Jesus, in the availability to serve without reserve, being carriers of a broad vision of salvation. I have no doubt this will guarantee the quality of what it is to be a Salvatorian and it will also be a key criterion for the admission of new members to the Society. We will gain a formation that does not simply prepare persons to take the place of others but instead will advance the Charism and Mission of the Society, as it responds with creative fidelity to the signs of the times.

26. Another aspect that merits our attention today is the specific formation of the “Salvatorian Brother.” The Salvatorian Brother is an incalculable gift from God for the Society in its apostolic service in the Church. Brothers, students, deacons and priests, we were all called gratuitously to follow the Savior within the Society without distinction of our qualities, merits or titles. We

all share the same life plan and the same Salvatorian Mission. Consequently it is necessary to revitalize the vocation of the Salvatorian Brothers, giving them the place they deserve within the Society without having to say that one vocation is superior to the other. There will be greater visibility of our Charism



if not one of our confreres is left without receiving a solid theological formation or in its place the proper professional formation oriented to the Mission of the Society. How much more would we gain for our Mission if we were to recognize the true collaboration that the vocation of the Brother can offer for the greater realization of our Charism! Even so we have to recognize with humility that within the Society this vocation has not yet been well understood and appreciated by some of the cultures in which we work. There are many Salvatorian Brothers from yesterday and today who radiate a hidden witness of silent prayer, of unknown sacrifices made in the mission, of simplicity at the service of catechesis and in the administration of material goods, in help in initial formation, in the care of the ill and elderly of our communities. Thus, the Brother is a follower of Jesus who expresses the Salvatorian Charism in all its fullness and we ought to give him the necessary opportunities to develop his own vocation with all the potential it carries of apostolic vitality. I insist again: how much good is done and will be done to the Society to have a Brother who is well prepared to assume our Mission! All of us can contribute our ideas, initiatives and commitment in order to achieve this new vision.

D – Reorganization

“I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities” (EG 33).

27. Once I heard the story of a group of friends who had the task of rescuing a treasure that was on the other side of the desert. They traveled well for a while until they came upon a great lake. But to cross it, they had to construct a boat. Making the boat was such a positive experience that after crossing the lake, they decided to continue their journey carrying the boat they had constructed. What had been at the moment important as a necessary tool for their trajectory now became a heavy burden to carry, without any usefulness for the trip they had to make through the desert. This story makes me think about the great apostolic organizational system of Consecrated Life that weighs us down especially in these times of rapid cultural changes and greater facility of sharing resources.

28. Both the Founder like the first generation of Salvatorians that succeeded him were persons of great missionary vision, apostolic zeal, and unselfish sacrifice done to serve the Church and Salvatorian Mission in different places. This is the living tradition we have inherited from them and that we have to maintain. On the other hand, these Salvatorians of the first hour, used means, ways of organizing, of living, of cultivating spirituality, of governing, of forming and working according to their time. Nonetheless, time and need did not permit them to sacralize any of these forms. Structures are means and are always subject to change according to the circumstances of time and place. As is known, new wine requires new wineskins (Mk 2:22). When we insist on maintaining certain structures that are no longer useful, our mission enters into an identity crisis and worse, we begin to die. If the Society grew it was because it was able to be flexible and make changes, seeking greater gospel authenticity, with creative fidelity to the Charism and so to be able to go

out to places where the Church and people needed us the most. This spirit of mission is what stirs the continuous revision of means. The spirit of mission is more important than any form of organization because as the Founder said: “*You can organize all you want but if people do not have the spirit all will be in vain.*”

29. What can be most harmful in the management of our works and can impede the appearance of new scenarios is “improvisation.” To improvise means to lead an organization without clear goals and objectives to meet, simply repeating year after year what was done in the past. I believe it’s fundamental that we create among us a new vision of administration with the aim of initiating a constant search for improvement in the quality of our services, overcoming routine and stimulating creativity, based on our values, our way of envisioning work and Mission. Certainly it’s about a discernment that is difficult to apply. I experience this difficulty as I deal with the tasks related to implementing a better administrative structure. For that reason we have not hesitated on the Generalate to seek help to deepen our knowledge in this area, because we wish to make the right decisions enlightened by faith and by the Charism. Without this support simple good intentions can lead to wrong decisions.

30. There are a series of factors that demand an attitude of discernment and better organization in the way we manage human and financial resources. In the first



⁹ See Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer, *Gedankenaustausch*. Part 2: *Spiritus est qui vivificat* (Jo. 6). Generalat der Salvatorianer (Ed.): *Salvatorianer-Chronik* (later: *Annales*), III/03, 1919, p. 215. I also recommend reviewing what I wrote in the *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*: “*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*” (n. 02).

place, the majority of our “older” Provinces are suffering from a progressive diminishment in the number of members. Moreover, what we see in the Society is greater complexity in the administration of works, little investment in the formation of new leaders, and inadequate review of “the apostolate of merely maintaining things as they are”. Until recently the system of “autonomous provinces” in our Society functioned well. However, the new reality of the creation of new Vicariates and Mission Foundations calls for a better management of works and of personnel from the central authority.¹⁰ The same can be said about the apostolates that take place in some schools and parishes that today are calling for greater visibility of our Charism. The reason for this reorganization is to seek a better balance in the Society among the Administrative Units, the apostolic works, and the distribution of members. Often the change in the way we organize ourselves meets its greatest obstacle not in the organizational scheme itself but in our mental structures that do not permit us to visualize new organizational models. Clearly, the passion for the Salvatorian Mission is the great source of energy that ought to motivate us to seek better organization at all levels of the Society.

31. Today more than ever we are called to grow in the quality of our vocation-mission. We need to find the responses and organize ourselves in such a way that allows us to be able to respond to the challenges of the present. How would Francis Jordan, Pancratius Pfeiffer, Otto Hopfenmüller, ... act today? I am sure that in some areas they would not hesitate to act, only when the economic or human situation reached unsustainable limits. I invite you all to revise those organizational structures of ours that are generating fatigue, lack of motivation and little creativity. We all have to learn how to work with objectivity, set goals, evaluating and increasing collaboration. We can carry out initiatives in formation and collaboration with other Administrative Units,

¹⁰ Regarding this topic see the *Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians 2014*, n. 10.

with the advice of professionals and the experience of other Institutes (inter-congregationalism). Perhaps the most decisive approach for the future of the Society will be the investment in the formation of new leaders, giving them responsibility and guidance. In this sense, I believe it is valid that we continue with our program of the internationalization of our organizational structures: initial formation, initiatives in ongoing formation, and even in the opening of new missionary fronts with the poor and against situations of poverty, such as those we have already planned in the new foundations of Kenya and Peru. And, lastly, we ought to do all of this, investing the best of our abilities, but humbly aware that “*Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build*” (Ps 127:1 NAB).

METHODOLOGY

- The way we propose is simple and is aimed at including what is essential. The Generalate will guide the process with the help of a team and of experts when needed.
- The process is divided into different stages. At each stage there will be different levels of participation: individual, communal and Administrative Unit levels. The material that will be sent will include guidelines with objectives and goals for each stage.
- This methodology will permit that in our local, regional and international gatherings we make room for dialogue, discernment, prayer, conversation and the celebration of our life and mission.
- The leaders of the communities and Administrative Units have an important role in the entire process with the aim of encouraging and involving every Salvatorian (including those in formation) in this effort to deepen our following of Jesus and our evangelizing mission.
- In terms of those Administrative Units that are developing a study program of our Charism, Spirituality and Mission, I ask that you do everything possible to integrate this process so that the participation by the respective Unit is effective in terms of the decisions that involve the entire Society.

STAGES OF THE PROCESS

First step: (*December 2015*).

The process begins with the publication of this Convocation Letter and the presentation of the schedule that follows.

Second step: (*January 2016 until February 2016*).

Guidelines sent to the administrations of the Provinces, Pro-Provinces, Vicariates and Mission Foundations with a view to preparation for the next General Synod.

Third step: (*July 2016*).

General Synod in Rome. Presentation and evaluation of the previous steps and approval of the proposal to continue the process toward the XIX General Chapter.

Fourth step: (*October 2016 until December 2017*).

Guidelines sent to all the members of the local communities (including those in formation), to the regional gatherings, and to the chapters of the Administrative Units in preparation for the XIX General Chapter.

Fifth step: (*February 2018 until the end of the year*).

The International Formation Team sends its “Working Draft” of the *Ratio Institutionis Generalis* for study, suggestions, and recommendations regarding our General Plan for Formation.

Sixth step: (*August/September 2018*).

XIX General Chapter of the Society. Presentation of the suggestions developed during the process and evaluation of these.

Seventh step: (*September 2019*).

Approval by the Generalate of the Final Draft of the revision of the *Ratio Institutionis Generalis*, elaborated by the International Formation Team based on the contributions received.

CONCLUSION

32. Throughout this process we will be guided by the biblical symbol of being “*light to the nations*” (Is 49:1-6), as disciples who follow in the footsteps of the Savior who came to save and enlighten all peoples. Jesus Christ is the Light to the nations, and along with Him, we Salvatorians want to be lights in the world. By means of this process we will strengthen our ability to be signs of the vitality and strength of the Charism of Fr. Francis Jordan, as the lamp lighting the way in the darkness of the world today. The Founder often imagined his spiritual sons to be like messengers of the Savior, shining light on the continents. Nonetheless, we need to recognize that enclosed in our small world we are incapable of shining the light of salvation. As a result, it is the opportune time for us to participate in this process and revitalize our vocation-mission, offering an effective apostolic service, capable of always pointing to what is essential in the Gospel of Salvation. The last thing we should do is to adopt an attitude of defensiveness or of grouching, looking for facile justifications or illusory reasons as to why the things are the way they are. As Blessed John H. Newman affirmed, “*Fear not that your life will come to an end but that it will never have a beginning.*” For that reason I am convoking you so that positive contributions are made at all the levels. Thank you for all the good you do for the Society of the Divine Savior. Do not lose the joy of your Salvatorian vocation, of being authentic spiritual sons of Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan, convinced that we are always capable of advancing and improving. Let’s not allow the light of the Salvatorian Charism to be extinguished! Let’s enkindle, with renewed vigor, the flame of our vocation-mission!
33. Lastly, as we near the festivities of the Nativity of the Savior, we are once again invited to renew our commitment by means of this Salvatorian vocation-mission duality. In the same way the shining light of a star guided the shepherds to an encounter with the Savior, I desire that we maintain lit the brilliance of our

Charism in order to lead men and women in the uncertainties of our times, to an encounter and knowledge of the true Savior. In this spirit, I send you all a fraternal embrace with best wishes for a Merry Christmas and blessed New Year 2016.

In Christ the Savior,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wilton D. Gregory, SDB". The signature is written in a cursive style with some stylized flourishes.

Superior General





Society of the Divine Savior

Via della Conciliazione 51
00193 ROME
Italy

For correspondence:
Ufficio Roma 47
Casella postale 102
00193 ROME
Italy

Tel. +39 06 686 291
Fax. +39 06 686 29 400

www.sds.org

Photos:
SDS archives

Printed 2015