

Fruits and Questions of the XIV General Synod

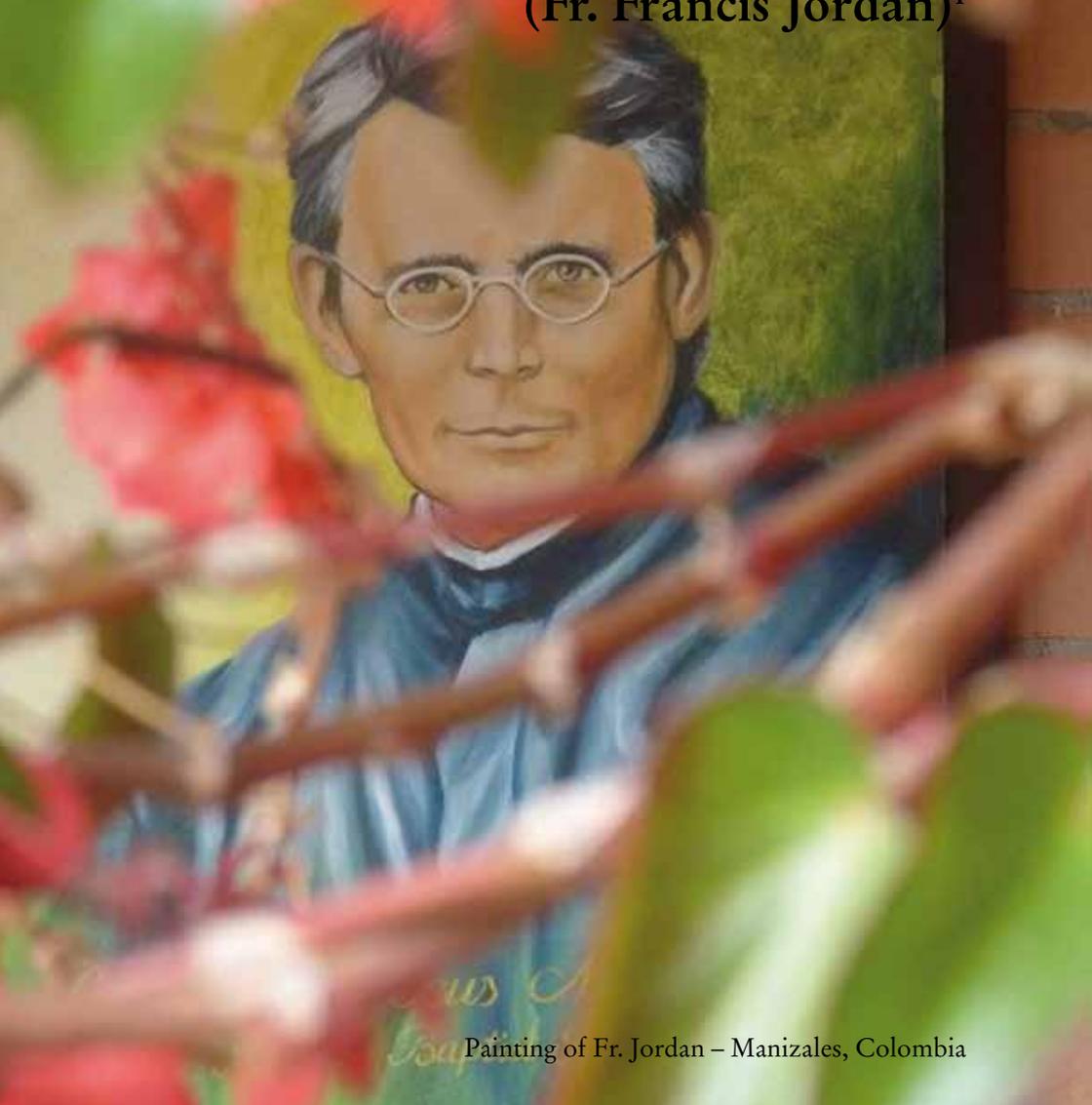
Fr. Milton Zonta, SDS
Superior General



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

08 December 2016

*“Go and enflame everyone!
May everyone become
a fervent apostle!”
(Fr. Francis Jordan)¹*



Painting of Fr. Jordan – Manizales, Colombia

¹ See Letter to Fr. Chrisologus Raich, 18 September 1899; DSS X, no. 480:
Ite et accendite omnes! O daß doch alle feurige Apostel werden!

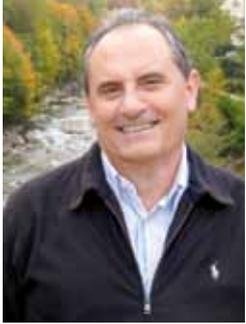
Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The Process like Climbing a Mountain | 6 |
| The Second Stage of the Process | 7 |
| An Event of the Spirit of God | 8 |
| Unity with the Church | 10 |
| Quantitative and Qualitative Growth of the Society | 11 |
| A Network of Cooperation among the Administrative Units | 12 |
| The Importance of Holistic Formation | 14 |
| Responding to the Needs of the People Today | 15 |
| A Substantial Change in Europe | 17 |
| Renovation of the Motherhouse | 19 |
| Centenary of the Death of the Founder | 20 |
| Shared Salvatorian Mission | 22 |
| Our Journey during 2017 | 23 |
| Our Journey through 2018 | 24 |
| Salvatorians with Hearts of Mercy | 27 |
| Move Forward, Advance | 28 |



Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians

Fruits and Questions of the XIV General Synod

1. Dear Salvatorian brothers, a discernment process is comprised of many elements. Among these are prayer, personal reflection, group dialogue and communication of the results. By means of this letter I wish to share with you a reflection on the most important results of the work done at the XIV General Synod for as Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ said: *“an experience that is not reflected upon is an experience that is not lived.”*² As you know this Synod was not an isolated event but rather it was part of a process that began in December of last year. On that occasion I wrote a letter in which I convoked all of you to participate in the process we have named: *“Called to Mission.”*³ Now I take the opportunity to thank you for the very positive responses on the part of many demonstrating support, enthusiasm for the proposed pathway, and a strong sense of belonging.
2. Feeling happy that this important step has been realized, I now have in my heart the desire that all Salvatorians – independent of age or situation in which they live – participate in this process that attempts to engage in a rethinking the reasons that lead one to radically live the values of the Gospel and to spend life at the service of others. Our vocation-mission is nothing less than to be men who bear God in the style of our spiritual father,

² Quoted in Spanish in the magazine of Theology “Vida Religiosa” III, 2016, no. 120, p. 32.

³ See Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians: *“I Will Make You a Light to the Nations – Illuminate the Present and Envision the Future”* 2015.

Fr. Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan. Like him we are called to be in the world like oil lamps that radiate light and illuminate the salvation that Jesus has shown in a unique and definitive way to everyone. Therefore, I invite you to move ahead with the firm intention of planning new horizons and of making needed decisions for the future of the Society.

The Process like Climbing a Mountain

3. The Lebanese mystic Khalil Gibran, a contemporary of our Founder wrote: *“If you wish to see the valleys, climb to the mountain top.”*⁴ The process we are undertaking as a Society is also like climbing a mountain. Along this way we are all being called to scale certain heights that perhaps we never would have thought possible to reach. We are called to contemplate with other eyes our Salvatorian life and mission. On this “climb up the mountain,” or the process we are undertaking, there are well defined and demarcated stages, with different levels of participation (personal, communal, or unit level), that are intertwined with one another. I remind you that at the initial stages of the process we have used four focuses of Salvatorian life as criteria for discernment: our *Vocation-Identity, Mission, Formation* and *Reorganization*. In the letter I sent last year, these four focuses were explained 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.”*⁵

⁴ From *Spiritual Sayings of Kahlil [sic] Gibran*, <http://www.harnage.org/ivan/fun/gibran.htm>.

⁵ See Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians, 2015, no. 3.

The Second Stage of the Process

4. The second step of our climb has been basically the preparation and celebration of the XIV General Synod. In this stage a questionnaire was sent to 41 Units of the Society with the goal of listening to what Salvatorians think about their reality from the perspective of these four focuses mentioned above: identity based on the charism, mission, formation, and reorganization. Three types of questionnaires were sent according to the reality of each Unit, taking into account that the Society is present in diverse contexts and locations, and is comprised of different ages and cultures. On my part I have thought many times that this exercise of paying attention to our differences should be done continuously, since “Salvatorian universality” is not given automatically and neither does it consist of uniformity. Consequently it is important to know how to listen, know how to respect, know how to accept and have the ability to learn. I wish to thank here all the superiors of the Units and communities who responded with dedication to the questionnaire that was sent. Thank you for your collaboration, your participation and sense of belonging. The coordinating team, after putting the responses in order, prepared a summary that was presented and studied on the first day of the General Synod.

5. The XIV General Synod took place from 04 to 15 July 2016 at Villa Maria, a house of the Salvatorian Sisters, in Rome. A total of 33 persons participated in this event, among them the members of the Generalate, the superiors of the Administrative Units, the facilitator (Sr. Dulcelene Ceccato, SDS), the secretary of the Synod (Fr. Michael Hoffman, SDS), some periti

“At this Synod I have been happy to see that we are thinking about the mission of the Society in a passionate way. I feel that the Salvatorian flame is alive and continues to inflame the world. And for me, this is essential.”

(Fr. Piet Cuijpers, Superior of the Province of Belgium)

(Fr. Vinoy J. Thottakkara, SDS, Fr. Charles M. Mushitu, SDS and Fr. Rafał Ziajka, SDS) and other guests. Of course the participants of the Synod themselves were the first “ambassadors” who communicated what we experienced and discerned during this meeting of the extended General Council of the Society. Even so, by means of this letter I wish to share with you my impressions and reflections on what we have experienced during this important step, so that everyone can feel being a part of the journey and at the same time aware of the process that we are developing in the Society. Moreover, I have added to this document the words of some of the superiors that help us understand the ambience and the source of revitalization that this event has been in the history of the Society.

An Event of the Spirit of God

6. I assert that the XIV General Synod was first of all an event of the Spirit. As we know without Him we can do nothing. When the Spirit is lacking only our human accomplishments remain and openness to the novelty of God is diluted. *“What shall we accomplish if we are not enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit?”* the Founder asked himself.⁶ However, at the same time we have to recognize that no fruit of the Spirit develops in us without our sincere cooperation. For that reason, the fruits of the Spirit were encompassed within a broader process. That is, ever since the phase of preparation we have lived this event in a spirit of prayer and with total availability

“Inside the Synod hall, a lit candle in our midst communicates to us that God is always present with us and that all we do is done in his presence. (...) Fr. Jordan would certainly be very proud of us, his spiritual sons.”

(Fr. Piotr Filas, Superior of the Province of Poland)

⁶ *Exhortations and Admonitions of Father Jordan*, translated by Fr. Winfrid Herbst SDS, Third English Edition, 1998, p. 51.



Participants of the General Synod 2016

in order to permit God, and only Him, guide our decisions, quest and commitments. Furthermore, during the days of the Synod a flame was lit in the center of the plenary hall in which the principal leaders of the Society were gathered, all from the most diverse nations and cultures. It was not simply a decoration, rather it was a sign of our trust in God that He says what has to be said when we leave space by means of silence, contemplation, listening and fraternal dialogue. The Spirit is the one who helps us not to hold back because of fear and much less close ourselves off with secure boundaries at the moment we put into practice the charism of our Founder in these times. In this sense, the General Synod has been an opportune time to ask of the Holy Spirit, the gift of discernment and the capacity to discover new pathways, with integrity and creativity, with responsibility and a new sense of belonging. As we move forward in this process, we cannot forget to invoke the light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, above all in the next moment,

which is the stage of discernment in preparation for the XIX General Chapter. Consequently, more than a recommendation of the Founder, the light of the Holy Spirit is a grace for which we must ask always, in order to be authentic apostles of Jesus Christ and witnesses of his message of mercy and of salvation.

Unity with the Church

7. Daily, during the Synod, as I passed in front of St. Peter's Basilica on the way to meet the others, I have thought many times about the connection between our works and the mission

of the Church. I thought about how much the words and gestures of Pope Francis could help us overcome a mentality of self-reference, given that a Religious Institute that does not go beyond itself in order to evangelize becomes self-referential and thereby becomes sick. The Salvatorian charism, in order to be kept alive and to continue developing, ought to be put

"I will carry good memories of this Synod. We have seen how important it is to work together to solve our problems. I have seen that there is a disposition to face the challenges together. Inspired by the vision of Fr. Jordan and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will find the way."

(Fr. Adam Janus, Superior of the Missionary Vicariate of East Asia)

at the service of others, going beyond what is known, of what is secure and already conquered. I continue to think that the challenges of the Society today are the challenges of humanity, in accord with the reality of each continent. That is, wherever we are located we have to dare to ask ourselves: what are people suffering here: Poverty? Hunger for God? Violence? Lack of meaning? Lack of Hope? We need to ask ourselves always, how can we help suffering people with the resources and strength we have available to us? The only reason Fr. Francis Jordan founded the Society was to help the Church in its mission that everyone know, love, and serve Jesus Christ, following the Spirit that guided the Apostles. In this sense, I have seen in the General Synod that there was among the leaders of the Society

an authentic search for a new ardor, a new enthusiasm, a new apostolic strength so that we can be what the Church expects of us, that is, to confront the challenges of every context, with creativity and new responses. Today more than ever, the apostolic fire of the Founder to “save all people” pushes us, calls us, and moves us forward.

Quantitative and Qualitative Growth of the Society

8. In the group of reports presented at the Synod, we have seen that the Society is in a dynamic of geographical and numerical growth, extending itself on all the continents.⁷ Examples of this development are the new Salvatorian foundations in 2016 in the city of Mungu, near Lusaka, the capital of Zambia and in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jaén, in Peru, almost on the border with Ecuador. I have no doubt in affirming that the apostolic expansion of the Society is irreversible and that other foundations will come as a visible sign of our fidelity to the missionary-apostolic spirit of the Founder. On the other hand, I have heard at different times in the reports to the Synod that a better quality of formation for Salvatorian religious life is lacking in the Society. In all parts there is a need for better-prepared Salvatorians who are aware and convinced of their charism and apostolic mission. The reality of the world today demands of us a growing vision of life in the Spirit. In no way can we be content with Salvatorian life “light,” feeling satisfied with the formation we received in the novitiate year, without seeking to grow in excellence. In my opinion, this is one of the most important challenges we have to face. That is,

“This Synod has been a very positive experience for me. I see that it is a challenge for all the Units the need to recover the global vision of the Society.”

(Fr. Sunil Thomas Kashamkattil,
Superior of the Missionary
Vicariate of India)

⁷ In 1990 the Society was present in 24 countries. In 2000 it was present in 31 countries. In 2010 it was present in 35 countries. And in 2015 it already reached the number of 42 countries.

we have to know how to balance quantitative expansion with growth in the quality of Salvatorian religious life. Expansion without going deeper is like a tree without roots or a building without a foundation. Formation throughout life is a topic we need to take seriously and is needed everywhere, both at the human and at the spiritual level.

A Network of Cooperation among the Administrative Units

9. Another component found in the reports to the Synod has to do with the enormous changes in the juridical state of the Administrative Units of the Society. Over the course of the last three decades there has been a reduction in the number of Provinces with their own autonomy while the number of Units needing help has increased.⁸ Currently some Administrative Units suffer from an elevated median age of the confreres and the lack of new vocations. Others suffer from a lack of resources, especially at the economic level. In response to this reality, there was unanimity on the part of the participants at the Synod in regard to two lines that can improve things creatively: on the one hand, the necessity of a governmental structure that is more dynamic and effective that can help the Administrative Units in their difficulties, and on the other, the requirement to create

some mechanisms to develop a network of cooperation and work among the Units. Nonetheless, I believe it is important to point out that in the last few years with the establishment of international houses for initial formation, I have found in the leaders of the Society a positive spirit of openness, of collaboration, and

"I have seen here at this Synod the importance of networking. A joint vision to help us understand what is happening in the Units, what are the needs and how we can help one another."

(Fr. Joseph Rodrigues, Superior of the Province of the United States)

⁸ Currently the Society is constituted of 6 Provinces, 4 Pro-Provinces, 6 Vicariates and 26 Regions/Foundations.



Procession of the Synod's Opening Mass

of a desire to support one another. I do not have the slightest doubt that this is the pathway on which we have to insist for these times. Furthermore, I am confident that this spirit of thinking and doing things together will grow in the Society, with one another and others, overcoming the spirit of everyone doing things on their own. We are called everywhere to have a broader and more international horizon, like the universal vision that characterized our Founder. Yet, these changes in our Society impose on us the need to adapt some structures and rules that in the past were very useful to fulfill our mission but that today are not helpful for us to be able to work together and to think about the common good. This has been one of the reasons why the Generalate gave to an “Ad hoc Commission” the task of looking at some possible changes, especially in Chapter 7 of our General Directory, that deal with the system of governance in the Society. The Synod declared itself very much in favor of this review in order to find more balance and a way to think more conjointly so as to guarantee that the best service is available in an international Society in which we are all called to live as brothers together on mission.

The Importance of Holistic Formation

10. As I have said before, the topic of formation at all stages has been indicated as one of most urgent in the Society. In my opinion, this is a key point: improvement of the offerings of our formation programs, both at the initial and at the ongoing levels, that will help us grow in our identity as religious and as members of an international community. In this year, 2016, the Society at the world level has approximately 500 in formation.

“During this Synod we have discovered that we are not alone. Our worries and problems are found in all the Units, especially in the area of formation.”

(Fr. Africanus Lokilo, Superior of the Missionary Pro-Province of Tanzania)

The large majority of them come from poor or developing countries in the South. These data already make us see that the Society is becoming even more international and intercultural. In this context the participants of the Synod emphasized again the importance of learning a second language. Without this indispensable tool our ability to communicate is greatly limited and our sense of

internationality is impoverished. Likewise, a very alarming fact was presented in the reports: the reduced number of formators in the Society. Very few make themselves available for this very essential apostolate of great responsibility. What wealth in and what sense of gratitude we have for the formators in the Society! Yet, at the same time, we ought to ask ourselves if the lack of formators is also related to a crisis we are going through in terms of our identity and sense of belonging. It has to do with the quality of our prayer, of fraternal relationships in community and with apostolic service as a team. We have to humbly acknowledge that the formation programs we offer to the members of the Society are almost nonexistent in terms

⁹ The groups of young persons in initial formation in 2016 are distributed on the continental level in this way: 42% are African; 38% are Asian; 12% are American; and, 8% are European.

of this area. The same is true that, in general, when we offer some formative activity it is of much lower quality than what is needed today. I am more and more convinced that if we want confreres with a deep spiritual life and who are in love with our mission, we will have to form them in this mentality. I have heard many participants in the Synod say that during the next General Chapter the Society should take very seriously the topic of an adequate, integrated, holistic formation in its different aspects, that is, in the spiritual, the Salvatorian, the psycho-emotional, the intellectual and professional areas so that in the stages of our life we are able to be men of integrated maturity with valid and sure bearings at our disposition so that we can fulfill our mission. If the Society really matters to us, we will have to offer the best and most profound formation possible to the present and future members of our Society.

Responding to the Needs of the People Today

11. This has been another outstanding topic in the reflections of the Synod, because definitely, passion for the mission is the thermometer that shows the vigor and spiritual maturity of our Society. The reports of the Administrative Units and communities reveal that a high percentage, 80% of Salvatorians are involved in parish pastoral activities. I can assure you that in regards to this, the great majority of Salvatorians are very dedicated and much valued by the local Church. Nonetheless, in many places we cannot be content with a style of pastoral work that is purely sacramental and that does not transform persons. It would be a grave mistake for our pastoral work if we lose sight of the fact that for

"I have seen at this Synod a great sense of responsibility in the sharing of our ideas and in discovering today responses in our charism and in the vision of the Founder. We want to walk together with a global vision without becoming discouraged."

(Fr. Elvis José Alzola Pinto,
Vice-Superior of the Vicariate
of Venezuela)

our Founder, the adjective “teaching” was a way of expressing the mission of the members of the Society. Moreover, the Church itself is the one asking us not to rest content simply waiting for others to come to us, rather we are to imitate the Good Shepherd and go out to those who are alienated from Christ and His Gospel. In so many places *“The parable of the lost sheep is reversed today: ninety-nine sheep have gone off and one remains in the sheepfold. The danger for us is to spend all our time nourishing this one remaining sheep and not to have time (...) to seek out those who are lost.”*¹⁰ Thank God that according to the reports given to the Synod, many Units are beginning to face the challenge of reviewing their apostolates in order to find the pathways that best respond to the mission of attending to people who do not know Jesus Christ or who have lost a vibrant faith. I confess that I get great pleasure when during canonical visitations, confreres take me to see some apostolate related



Voting during the Synod

¹⁰ See Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa’s 4th Advent Sermon, 2011.
<https://zenit.org/articles/father-cantalamessa-s-4th-advent-sermon-2/>.

to spiritual formation or close service to the ill, of shelter to abandoned children, of formation programs for youth, of aid to immigrants, of nearness to those who suffer the most, and many more. For me these are concrete examples that make visible the power of our witness of service to “the ones preferred by Jesus” and who are at the heart of the Gospel. We can no longer just repeat what we have always done. Without creativity we will neither be capable of teaching nor accompanying anyone. The future depends on our putting ourselves to some creative apostolic action that is coordinated and effective in responding to the challenges of our times. I am confident that at the next General Chapter we will engage in a deep reflection on the geographical and spiritual locations that are in need, in order to make the Savior known and that ask us to make decisions that will respond to the call of Pope Francis to the religious to “*come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries.*”¹¹

A Substantial Change in Europe

12. Another topic on the Synod agenda was the situation of the Society in Western Europe. We know that consecrated life is going through a very grave and complex crisis, primarily in some countries of this continent. The Society has also been shaken by the strong winds that have led to the closure of communities and seen our apostolates become ever more reduced. In regards to this topic it is important to know that we are involved in a phenomenon larger than us and as a result, requires of us an ensuing and deeper reflection.¹² There are many who say that Europe has become mission territory, a new “locus theologicus.” How can we react to this reality? After a lengthy discussion,

¹¹ Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People, II/4.

¹² “... the crisis that Christianity is actually experiencing in Europe is not a crisis in Christianity itself, but a crisis in Christianity as a religion (...) the problem of religious life in Europe is not the fact that it is European but that it is lived and inculturated in a society that is in a state of cultural mutation.” (José Maria Vigil, in *The Crisis of Religious Life in Europe. A Call to Religious Worldwide*, May 2005, Rome. See <http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat/399e.htm>.)

“At this Synod we have tried to look at reality with all the challenges we face, without pessimism or a feeling of failure. There is hope for the future and together we can face the obstacles.”

(Fr. Karl Meier, Superior of the Vicariate of Switzerland)

the Synod gave its total support to the proposal presented by the Generalate to create an “Ad hoc Commission” to begin a process of planning in regard to the principle lines of the Salvatorian apostolate in Western Europe, with eyes to the future. In the first place, this Commission will have to discern possible alternatives, optimizing the most important patrimonies of the Society and projecting new forms of apostolates at the service of others. In addition,

there is the need to promote common apostolic initiatives, such as for example, the Project of the new apostolic community at Gurtweil, the birthplace of our Founder. All the participants had an opportunity to contribute to this topic and make suggestions, aware that they are facing a change of era that invites us to write a new page in the Salvatorian history of Europe. I believe that it is not hidden from anyone that whatever initiative is undertaken, it will only give results if we are able to work with interconnections, with networks among the Units, based on coordinated and shared work throughout the Society. Based on this reflection, the Synod participants gave the green light to the Generalate to go forward with the development of a plan for a house of formation for theology in Rome, with the goal of forming Salvatorians for other places, willing to serve and fortify the Society in Europe. Finally, independent of this or other initiatives that may be undertaken, the future of the Society in Europe will only be effective if we dare to create a totally new paradigm of mission, focused on quality rather than on quantity, while being grateful for our past and for all that has been accomplished in a committed and generous way. But at the same time with an open mind and heart. We cannot remain “behind locked doors in the upper room,” only thinking about

how beautiful the past was, rather than daring to be moved and pushed by the Spirit of Pentecost, opening doors, tearing down walls, full of joy because we have been called to announce the Gospel without limits.

Renovation of the Motherhouse

13. In recent General Chapters, decisions were made to proceed with the remodeling of the Motherhouse of the Society in Rome. This decision has not been implemented yet, even though the urgency is more and more evident. As is known, the task of remodeling is not at all easy because of the amount of financial investment and of course because of the enormous complexity involved at the legal and civil levels. Under the coordination of the Generalate, a team of architects “Studio Nigro Architecture” has presented a detailed plan for the renovation of the Motherhouse, with all the implications of renovating a historical Palace of the XVI Century. The renovation plan has been based on fundamental criteria, established after consulting a commission comprised of the General Treasurer and some confreres with knowledge and experience of construction. The criteria presented are as follows: a) the Motherhouse should continue to be primarily an appropriate space for the general governance of the Society; b) it is a place where our Founder lived, where his mortal remains are located, and therefore a space where we can find his “spirit” among us. In order to bring this dimension into focus, we will create a space for the memory of the life and work of Fr. Francis Jordan; c) the Motherhouse is a place for hospitality and welcoming our Salvatorian confreres in which we should feel at home; d) and, lastly, we want part of the building to continue

“I am pleased to see that we have come to this Synod not only to discuss problems, but that we have made the effort to take concrete steps. We are all involved in a process we are doing together and we have to encourage our Units to participate in the same journey.”

(Fr. Álvaro Macagnan, Superior of the Province of Brazil)

to be a very important source of income from the leases of the Hotel Palazzo Cesi and the shops. Without this income, we will not guarantee the fulfillment of our Salvatorian mission in the important expansion Units. The architects explained to us that they need at least two years to obtain the legal documents required from the governmental authorities of Italy. Consequently, it will be necessary at the minimum, for another two years to accomplish the renovation of the building as such. Furthermore, this work has a total budget of five million euros. After receiving a positive response from the Synod to move forward with this Project, I have asked the General Treasurer, Fr. Scott, together with some experts, to take charge of preparing a financing plan for this work. The Generalate will work with the architects and other professionals during the long-term, follow-up stages of this Project.

Centenary of the Death of the Founder

14. Another topic that we put on the agenda of this Synod was the celebration of the centenary of the death of Fr. Francis Jordan (1918 - 2018). This provides us an opportunity for a true spiritual and pastoral renewal of the Salvatorian charism. Basically we discussed a plan of activities presented by the Postulation Team that we would like to see implemented very quickly. Nonetheless, I recommend that all the Units, to the extent possible, prepare themselves for this event together with the other branches of the

Salvatorian Family, according to their realities. The Generalate will offer, via the webpage, a series of materials that can help celebrate this important event. Among the activities we have thought about for this event, I wish to point to the monthly celebrations beginning on 08 September 2017 until 08 September 2018, as a way to live out a spirit of unity and in

"I am grateful to all for the fraternal experience of the Synod. If Fr. Jordan were living today, what prophetic words would he give us? There is much to do. There is no need to fear."

(Fr. Agostino Maiolini, Superior of the Vicariate of Italy)



Group work during the Synod

spiritual communion with one another. As soon as this material is ready, we will publish it so that we can be united in prayer on a monthly basis, by means of meditation on some aspect of the life of the Founder. At the same time, I hope that because of the celebration of the centenary of the death of the Founder (2018), we will have some “good news” about the process of his beatification. As has been made public, the documents on the investigation of a possible miracle in the city of Jundiá (Brazil) have been delivered in the month of September to the department that studies the Causes of Saints at the Vatican. While we await the response to the study of this material, I invite us to prepare ourselves as best as possible for the unique event of the centenary of the death of our Founder, together with the steps in preparation for the XIX General Chapter of the Society. In regards to this topic, the Synod approved the proposal made by the Generalate of holding the next General Chapter in the Benedictine monastery of St. Ottilien in Munich, Germany, the native land of the Founder, with 08 September 2018 as the ending date. As you know, the General Chapter is

a crucial moment for the life and activities of the Society and as such, requires a long period of preparation. On my part, I am confident that the celebration of the next General Chapter, in the year of the centenary of the death of the Founder, will be a unique opportunity to revitalize the Society, from the perspective of the charism Fr. Francis Jordan confided to us.

Shared Salvatorian Mission

15. Mission that is shared by the laity and those in religious life is an ever-growing reality every day in our Church. The experience of a shared mission is expressed for us in the concept of the “Salvatorian Family,” comprised of persons from different states of life working side by side in a particular mission. I have seen how in so many places the Salvatorian charism is enriched when we share mission with other religious men and women, Christian laypeople and professionals. From this perspective at our synodal gathering we enjoyed the significant presence of some members of the Salvatorian Family: from the Generalate of the Salvatorian Sisters we had the participation of Srs. Martha Gloria Mesa Garcés and Lilly Kurian. Representing the International Community of the Divine Savior, the President of this branch attended, Mrs. Judy Davis of the United States. At other opportune moments others joined the Synod including Sr. Catherine Brabander, RNDM of Australia, who gave us a presentation

on the strategic review made by her Congregation in order to face these new times. Dr. Arnout Mertens, Director of the projects office SOFIA (Salvatorian Office For International Aid), along with the General Mission Secretary, addressed the challenges related to the gathering of funds for apostolic projects and the demands required for their execution. Although we may

“During this Synod we have listened to one another. We are not only a Congregation, but a Family called to express its charism in a world that is continuously changing.”

(Fr. Floribert Mulikita Kalinda,
Superior of the Missionary
Pro-Province of the D.R. of Congo)

have to acknowledge on the one hand that this topic of shared mission has its lights and shadows, on the other we cannot deny that when Salvatorian religious men and women, laymen and laywomen, and professional collaborators share the same mission in equality and complementarity, the mission is enriched, it becomes fuller and it is strengthened. From my experience at the international level I am aware that we in the Society are growing in the awareness that Christian laity, Salvatorians and professionals alike, are not simply collaborators in the Society's mission, rather they are collaborators with Salvatorians in the mission of Christ, which is simply much larger. That is because our mission is not "ours," rather it is Christ's mission. For that reason the Founder's first dream must not be lost by us which was to begin: "*A Catholic Society of clerics and workers in the Lord's vineyard from among all nations*" (see SD I/124). Also, if we interpret correctly the reality of these times, we are aware that there is no future without the principle of collaboration. As a result, no one is excluded from fortifying the Salvatorian evangelizing mission and from working together as a team on its behalf. I welcome anyone who has the spirit, talent, and desire to join forces with us to work together.

Our Journey during 2017

16. For the next year which is about to start, I wish to invite all of you to become involved in furthering the "Called to Mission" process, working together in order to arrive at the responses and decisions that the Society needs for these times. Having concluded the General Synod, which was the second step in the process, we now continue forward with the third step consisting of the study of the "Reflection Guides" on the theme of the next General Chapter. In accord with the customs of each local community and its own calendars, all the Salvatorian communities are invited to reflect, pray and give suggestions on the evaluation and planning of our mission, thereby preparing the pathway for decisions to be made at the next General Chapter. Undoubtedly this highest event of the Society will receive its power and energy

through quality preparation and the participation of everyone. For that reason dialogues in communities will be very important, using the “Reflection Guides” through which the Holy Spirit will guide the Society and each one of us. Following the official convocation of the General Chapter in November 2017, in accord with the reality of each local community and its own calendars, the preparation chapters will take place in the Units. At that time the fruit from the reflections, the suggestions and proposals of the communities, will be collected and then each Unit will send it to the General Chapter of the Society. Once more I would like to recommend that this time of preparation not be reduced simply to a required action, responding to a

questionnaire so as to be done with it, but rather that it be part of an authentic process, a gift to be lived with a spirit of discernment and prayer. In my opinion this always ought to be our way of doing things: gathering, sharing together, listening to one another with respect, discussing openly, praying together as brothers, and making decisions with great responsibility.

“I have appreciated the opportunity during this Synod to stop, examine our reality and work together in order to find solutions. I am very grateful for this spirit of cooperation and of working together.”

(Fr. Hubert Veesser, Superior of the Province of Germany)

Our Journey through 2018

17. At the beginning of 2018, while the results of the Unit Chapters are being sent to the Preparatory Commission, the communities will receive an invitation to assume another very important task. All the Units will be sent the draft of the General Formation Plan, the *Ratio Institutionis Generalis*, in their own languages. It is currently being studied and rewritten by the International Formation Team. It is very important that, in accord with local reality, the greatest number of Salvatorians becomes knowledgeable, studies and improves this document on our formation processes that take place at all levels.



Closing Mass of the General Synod in the Motherhouse

*“We must be very generous in dedicating our time and best energies to formation. (...) (Without them) all formative and apostolic plans remain theory and useless desires.”*¹³ In these times none of us can be absent from the need to grow and deepen the basic elements of our identity and mission. This does not take place simply with good wishes. To give meaningful responses in these times also means improving our plans for holistic formation in a way that makes us more capable of responding to the new challenges of today using material that is well-known, that is always being deepened further, and with the integral living out of our charism. In order for this to be possible and for it to be real, we cannot rob ourselves of qualitative work in formation. As said earlier, we cannot forget that also in 2018, between the month of August and the beginning of September,

¹³ See CICLSAL: “Starting Afresh From Christ – A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium,” 19 May 2002, no. 18.

“During this Synod I have heard what are the great concerns for the future of the Society. The need to work together as members of one international Society and of everyone being involved in this global vision.”

(Fr. Fernando López, Superior of the Vicariate of Spain)

we will celebrate the XIX General Chapter in Munich, Germany in order to make decisions that will help us live in the present times with energy and fidelity to our charism. This event, together with the celebration of the centenary of the death of our Founder will be moments of grace – a true *Kairós* – that will serve to make us aware of how much the spirit of Fr. Francis Jordan is alive in our hearts and in our apostolic projects. The world today needs and is clamoring for the answers that our Salvatorian charism and spirituality offer.



Leaders of the three branches of the Salvatorian Family

Salvatorians with Hearts of Mercy

18. In addition to these internal topics of the Society, I wish to point out that the XIV General Synod took place in the midst of the celebrations of the “Jubilee of Mercy” convoked by Pope Francis in order to be an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. But not only this. I believe all of us have become aware of the very difficult times in which we live in different parts of the world, above all of the dramatic situation of thousands upon thousands of immigrants and refugees fleeing violence, hunger and terrorism as well as of the advance of a model of a global economy that increases poverty among the poor and enriches the wealthy, increasing the chasm of injustices in the world. In fact, as Pope Francis has said, we live in a world that is undergoing a “*world war being fought piecemeal ...*”¹⁴ Even so, I also want to say that in the midst of all this there are persons (religious and lay) who have assumed their commitment of faith with courage and have defended with their own lives and with valor the life of so many families that suffer. Having said this, I also want to say that these external events cannot leave us indifferent, nor locked up in our houses as if they had nothing to do with our life or mission. On the contrary: “*The work of justice and peace in the world is part of our task of evangelization*” (Const. 205). Mercy was the fundamental dimension of the mission of Jesus Christ to the weary and heavily burdened (Mt 9:36), to the ill (Mt 14:14), to the hungry (Mt 15:37). Mercy is nothing less than having one’s heart linked and

“During the Synod I have become aware that the small difficulties we have in our Unit are similar to the concerns of the Salvatorian world. It has filled me with hope to see how much Salvatorians do in different parts of the world.”

(Fr. Alfredo Tinoco, Superior of the Province of Colombia)

¹⁴ Homily of Pope Francis at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Rome, 19 November 2015.

adhered to a humanity that suffers. I have prayed many times that the Holy Spirit will always plant in my heart and in the Society, a heart of mercy in the face of the needs and suffering of humanity. We are religious not because we deserve it but rather because of the mercy of the Savior who called us to be Apostles of the Gospel of Salvation. Fr. Francis Jordan has also been an instrument of God's mercy, as he himself indicates in the purpose he gives to his spiritual experience: "*Be merciful for God is merciful!!*" (SD I/93). He founded the Society with the intention that "*all may know, love and serve*" the merciful face of God and His goodness manifested in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Although the "Extraordinary Year of Mercy" ended officially with the feast of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe on 20 November of this year, it is my desire that we keep the doors of our Salvatorian houses open, with total availability, closeness and mercy, to the situations of suffering and weakness that are calling for our presence and our service. At the same time, may we also be sensitive and compassionate to our confreres who are going through difficult moments of suffering within our houses. It does not matter where we are nor what age we are, let us always be aware that mercy is the "*very foundation of the Church's life*"¹⁵ as well as of our life as Salvatorians.

Move Forward, Advance

19. I want to end this letter, taking up again the image of climbing a mountain. In the same way mountain climbers stop briefly to take in with tranquility the panorama of the path they have taken, our experience of the XIV General Synod has been likewise. It has been a time for reflection on the journey undertaken, a time to reenergize our forces, and to fortify ourselves to continue forward toward another stage of our process. Nonetheless, let us recall once again that the climb

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, no. 10.

up, the process as such, is a task that all of us have to do together, as a way of responding to our universal mission with the best we have to offer. As we know from experience, in only a short period of time we have seen changes in the ecclesial, social and cultural panorama and this affects our life and mission. Each time is always new: *“you could not step twice into the same river,”* as Heraclitus said.¹⁶ We can never be satisfied with what we have. Let us continue to think of a present that motivates us to continue forward. Let us continue to invoke the blessings of the Savior in this process of internal discernment that we are entering, always keeping an eye on what is taking place outside.

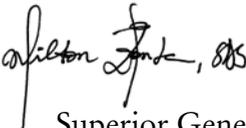
“During this Synod I have seen and heard that we are not ‘losing the fire.’ As we look at the Society in a global way we can see the hope for the future. Despite the shadows, I can see there is light in our midst.”

(Fr. Josef Wonisch, Superior of the Pro-Province of Austria)

20. Lastly, standing at the threshold of the celebration of the Birth of the Divine Savior, it is my desire that our strong decision be renewed to encounter and make known the presence among us of an *“infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”* (Lk 2:12). Like the shepherds, who having seen for themselves the child in the manger *“made known the message that had been told them about this child”* (v.17), may we too make known this beloved Son of God who has come to save us. He is the fount of love, of mercy, and of humility. At the same time, on Christmas night, when we are contemplating the manger scene of some church, may we offer a prayer for one another. Do not forget to offer a prayer for our unity,

¹⁶ See The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP).

with the feeling of being enveloped in mutual love. Also, let us embrace one another in our communities in the same way one embraces the Savior Child who lives in us and never abandons us. In the same way I embrace you with my best wishes for a Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year 2017. May God bless you all!



Milton J. Jones, SSG

Superior General



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HÆC EST VERA VITÆ ET ÆTERNÆ VITÆ CONDICI- O- TE SORUM

DIGNUM SERVUM ET QVEM AGNOS- CISTI JESUM CHRISTUM

Joh. 17. 3



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