

# LETTER OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL FOLLOWING THE INTERCAPITULAR ASSEMBLY 2012-11-15

Rome, 1 November, 2012

*“Think of the fig tree and every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you know that summer is near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the Kingdom of God is near”.* (Lk: 21, 29-31)

Dear Confreres,

Cordial greetings and best wishes in Christ the missionary.

The Intercapitular Assembly ended some weeks ago. During the October Consulta we took time for reflection and discernment on this event of such importance for the life of our Institute. We now wish to share with you the fruits of this reflection by means of this letter which also accompanies the synthesis of the minutes of our meeting with the provincials, the general secretaries and the invited confreres

As foreseen, the Intercapitular permitted us to review and evaluate the progress made during the first triennium of our service as the General Direction. It was a good opportunity to listen to one another and to understand what we are living through as an Institute in the concrete situations of our circumscriptions. At the same time, we tried to look towards the future, seeking to avoid losing sight of that which is important to respond to the tasks that the General Chapter of 2009 entrusted to us as well as the challenges posed to us by the situation of the Institute and the mission today.

Thank God, the Assembly took place in an atmosphere of serenity and commitment on everyone's part. This facilitated the work of reflection and evaluation and also allowed us to engage in an experience of fraternity and communion.

## **1. Some impressions and decisions we wish to share with you**

As you can see when you read the minutes that follow this letter, there was nothing very new in the themes discussed or in the dynamics of the meeting. Even if we were not all of the same opinion in everything, there was sufficient agreement to allow us to see clearly those aspects of our life and our mission where we must be more committed during the period leading up to the Chapter of 2015.

After the Intercapitular and having had some days of reflection and exchange with the General Secretaries, we wish to share with all of you some of our reflections and the decisions we must take to render operative what was discussed during our Assembly.

We do not intend to take up again the themes discussed but simply to emphasise some points upon which we reflected in the hope that they may help us to continue our journey and commitment to the mission.

## **2. A glance of realism and hope**

Starting from the report of the General Council which allowed us to keep the memory of the progress made during the first three years, and, hearing the reports from the continents through which every circumscription shared the joys and concerns of the mission today, the first image we have is that of an Institute fully engaged in the four continents where we are present. The tasks entrusted to us are still many and the fields of service very diverse.

The joy of the mission continues to be a value to our family. We trust that the Lord may continue to bless us with the power of his Spirit so that we may live our commitment with serenity and great passion.

This fills us with hope, even while we are faced with difficulties that, realistically, we cannot avoid underlining.

Sometimes we have the impression of having before us a great machine that continues to function even if there are some noises warning of the danger of a breakdown. Some of us seem to take no notice of these “noises” since they have been there for years while, for others, the situation is worrying: they feel it is time to stop and fit some spares parts before the machine is broken beyond repair.

This shows you, from the reports presented, that yet again there appears the situation of the imbalance between commitments and personnel: a situation that brings with it the risk of an involution and that is often a cause of tensions at the general level and of suffering at the circumscription level.

Among us members of the GC, there is a firm impression that the circumscription superiors are not as aware as we are of the urgency and dramatic nature of the situation, believing that things can go on as they have always done, at least for now.

Without dramatising, it seems to us that the time is approaching when the normal management of our circumscriptions runs the danger of paralysis. Nevertheless, we are encouraged by the still intense missionary zeal, the certainty that what we bear in our hands is the work of God and that He still walks with us. At the same time, we sincerely believe that it is necessary to downsize and rethink our possibilities, in order to understand that, if there is not a certain degree of conversion, our very future will be seriously at risk.

### **3. The unification of some circumscriptions**

During the Intercapitular Assembly we shared our views on whether to proceed with the unification (or clustering) of some circumscriptions. It seems to us that this is the way being indicated to us by the present situation. Besides, we think that this would be one concrete way of responding to the challenges of personnel and the requirements of the mission today. In fact what's required is that we may contribute significantly to generating new life in the contexts where we are present and where we cannot be content with maintaining the *status quo*.

The sharing, reflection and debate on this theme showed us that there is a certain interest and motivation to reach concrete proposals. Almost all the provinces and delegations feel involved in some way. However, it does not seem that they are clearly aware of the urgent need to take certain steps. This may lead to postponing the decisions to a time no longer favourable.

As General Council, we decided that it was right to continue the work of animation entrusted to us by the Chapter on this matter and we therefore felt free to encourage some provinces to consider the experience of unification as a possible journey to be undertaken, starting with the next elections of provincials and their councillors. However, we wish to respect the processes already being carried on. This has moved us to offer them some alternatives which, however, involve unification not later than the next Chapter.

### **4. The Ratio Missionis**

After the journey and the experience of the entire Institute on the process of the Ratio Missionis and as foreseen by the instructions of the 2009 General Chapter, the Intercapitular received the outcome of the work done by the commission that has worked and reflected upon the material that was produced. The path followed has allowed us to see that the Institute possesses something very valuable that is revealed through the missionary passion and commitment to be found in the life and dedication of its missionaries.

The Ratio Missionis has enabled us to assess our missionary health. There are many reasons for being thankful but, at the same time, there is a great challenge that compels us to respond to the needs of our vocation and mission in the world where we live.

The work done by the commission gave us back what we discovered during the process we experienced during these years. It presented us with a reflection that will certainly be of help to live better our missionary service, becoming aware of the new situations of mission and of the need to work for the contextualisation of our being Comboni Missionaries today.

In order to respect the desire to avoid making of the Ratio Missionis a normative document, the work presented to this Assembly seemed a suitable conclusion to the process undertaken. However, this does not mean that the "*Ratio Missionis chapter*" is finished. We invite you to read it as a document that reminds us of the journey travelled and that offers us secure points of reference. We are left with the great challenge of again taking up the fruits of our reflection and the elaboration carried out by the commission to translate all this into the work of our daily missionary and Comboni lives.

The final text of the Ratio will be sent to all circumscriptions introduced by a letter of the GC. We trust it may be a means of help and light to guide our options and our commitment to the mission.

## **5. Some decisions concerning Basic Formation**

The 2009 General Chapter had asked us to continue some experiences in the field of basic formation and to evaluate them during the 2012 Intercapitular. It was a matter of verifying the value of the missionary service of our scholastics, of the inter-continentiality of the scholasticates and the experience of formation of some scholastics in the context of an inserted community.

Having heard the evaluation of the General Secretary of Formation in preparation for the Intercapitular, and having heard the views of the provincials and delegates, we decided during the October Consulta that missionary service is an experience that must continue to form part of the formative plan offered by the Institute to its candidates. We also welcomed the favourable opinion of the Assembly regarding the inter-continentiality of the scholasticates and we shall do everything possible to ensure their internationality which has always been one of the values of our formation. As far as formation in small communities in an inserted context is concerned, we have decided that it is right to keep open the possibility of offering this experience even if we are aware of the real difficulty of finding formators.

These three themes will again be dealt with in a letter of the GC in which the decisions will be presented in greater detail.

The great challenge remaining for our Institute is that of finding new ways of presenting our vocation to the young people of our time. In Europe and America great efforts are being made in vocations promotion but with very little results. At the same time, we find it difficult to guarantee the necessary personnel for the formation of candidates in Africa.

Besides, we must continue to be committed to the preparation of formators and to provide the care and accompaniment of all the young men already in formation.

## **6. The sector of the economy**

From the report of the Treasurer General, we have seen the progress made at the level of the Institute during the past three years and, with satisfaction, we see that there is a growth in the spirit of communion. The commitment to adopt the Total Common Fund is a reality assumed by a good number of provinces and delegations. It is expected that, by the next Chapter, almost all the circumscriptions will attain a more meaningful experience of missionary communion, involving the common use of all the resources collected for the mission.

During the Assembly, the document containing the general norms of the Total Common Fund was presented. Having heard the favourable views of the provincials and delegates, in the General

Consulta of October, 2012, we approved these norms and instructed that they be published in a formal and binding manner. We trust they may become a more qualified help to organising better the running of the economy of the Institute to the benefit of the mission.

## **7. Ongoing Formation**

By means of the report presented by those responsible for Ongoing Formation, we see that, in the Institute today, there is an effort towards consolidating this dimension of our life. There is no lack of effort to provide resources for Ongoing Formation. We have tried to accompany especially the work done in this sector on the continental and provincial levels.

A meaningful step taken in this triennium has been the opening of the Centre for Ongoing Formation in Rome where the Renewal and the Comboni Year courses have taken place and where the possibility of up-dating has been offered to confreres seeking such an opportunity.

The team leading this Centre also accompanies the community of confreres who have come to Rome for specialised studies or to prepare for specific services, especially that of formation.

The evaluation made indicates that this Centre may become a useful instrument in accompanying individuals towards a more qualified service to the mission, also offering our missionaries the possibility of taking time out to reclaim the value of their missionary experience.

Similar structures for the continents, particularly Francophone Africa, were considered but we have not succeeded in responding concretely to the request of the Chapter. Regarding America, the provincials have informed us that there are other institutes that may help us without creating new structures.

## **8. The Rule of Life**

The commission in charge of reflecting on the Rule of Life presented to the Intercapitular the works and aids they produced on the Rule of Life. This was to help us to rediscover it as an important instrument for our lives as persons consecrated to the mission. It was stressed that our Rule of Life was ahead of its time and has served as a means of renewal for many Institutes. It seems important today to make an effort to place it again at the centre of our lives so that it becomes an instrument of inspiration that allows us to live that which the Comboni Missionary and the Institute ought to be.

The commission proposed to organise seminars at the general level to prepare animators who may help us to reclaim the riches contained in the Rule of Life. The Intercapitular Assembly, however, was of the opinion that, in order to succeed in this, it would be better to organise them at continental level.

During the next three years, in agreement with the provincials and delegates, we therefore wish to follow up this proposal. We ask that this theme be discussed during the next continental assemblies for provincials in order to establish the modalities for carrying out this proposal.

## **9. Vademecum on Continentality and Subsidiarity**

The theme of Continentality and Subsidiarity was discussed during the Intercapitular and helped us to make a synthesis of the journey travelled during these years at Institute level, acknowledging the developments that permitted us to have some experience of collaboration and subsidiarity.

This reflection gave rise to the idea of preparing a Vademecum which may help us to mark out the responsibilities concerning the organisation and the activities that are carried out in the continents so that these may be better reflected in the provinces and delegations.

This Vademecum is an effort to better define what is meant by continentality, the objectives and means to true continentality, the degree of responsibility of the Assistant General in charge of the continent, the responsibility of the continental coordinator and that of each sector coordinator in the continent.

The General Council saw fit to commence this work so as to be able to present it at the next meetings of provincials. There they will gather eventual suggestions and contextualisation at the continental level.

#### **10. The theme of justice and peace, environmental protection and the Forums**

During the Assembly there was a time of sharing on the themes of justice, peace, commitment to the protection of creation and the presence of confreres at World and Comboni Forums.

We are aware of the importance of our participation in these new areopagi and we believe that our commitment in this field is vital, without forgetting that, as consecrated people and missionaries, our motivations will always be inspired by the Gospel and the experience of meeting personally with the Lord.

As General Council, we reflected on these topics. It seems important to us to remember that it has always been clear that, in being missionaries, commitment to the defence of human rights is an aspect we may never abandon, while, at the same time, being careful not to be taken for social promoters. We think it is important to reread the documents that the Institute has published on these themes in the past.

We have seen that it is necessary to reflect upon the participation of confreres in various world “forums” so as to establish criteria that may help them to gain by it, leading them to share their experiences with their circumscriptions.

The General Council will clarify its position on the theme of justice and peace in another letter. It will also invite the superiors of circumscriptions to prepare, in dialogue with the General Secretary for Evangelisation, the criteria that may serve to better organise our participation in the various “forums”.

#### **11. Towards the next Chapter**

As was the case at other Intercapitular Assemblies in the past, this time, too, we spent considerable time to reflect upon the road we must travel towards the next General Chapter. It was remarked that we must prepare ourselves so that we do not waste time by dealing with too many themes and topics. It was also said that we should review the Chapter Statutes and it was suggested that we have a facilitator to accompany the preparation, the work and the dynamics of the Chapter.

With the experience gained before the last Chapter, we shall endeavour to facilitate the work of preparation at the continental level and do more to involve all the members of the Institute.

At the end of the Assembly this theme was proposed for the next General Chapter: *“Being Comboni Missionaries in the era of the new evangelisation”*. The General Council invites all confreres to freely present their own proposed themes as well.

#### **12. A confident outlook**

At the conclusion of this Intercapitular Assembly, we wish to invite all the members of the Institute to receive with gratitude all Our Lord has given us during these days. We are living in times that challenge us to go ahead with great confidence, certain of the goodness and closeness of the Lord. In this time when the Church invites us to live the challenge of the new evangelisation and calls us to give the reason for our faith, as missionaries and as Combonis, we must assume with seriousness and responsibility the gift of our missionary vocation within a process of conversion.

There is no doubt that, as an Institute, we wish to give the best of ourselves for the good of the mission and we feel called to grow as people and men of God so as to make more efficacious our service to the poorest.

The site on which we are working provides us with many opportunities to do a beautiful job. We shall certainly not lack the courage to live this time of our history so as to show that we bear in our hearts that passion and that faith that accompanied our Founder, St. Daniel Comboni and enabled him to give himself with great confidence to the missionary work.

The Intercapitular Assembly has made us understand that we are not living in a time when we can settle down and take a rest. Quite the opposite. This is a time that challenges us to go ever further. We are being asked to become missionaries whose witness is credible and who are able to show the beauty of their missionary vocation.

May the Lord grant us this.

*Fr. Enrique Sánchez González, Superior General*  
*Fr. Alberto Pelucchi, Vicar General*  
*Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, Assistant General*  
*Fr. Villarino Rodríguez Antonio, Assistant General*  
*Bro. Daniele Giusti, Assistant General*