

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE 13th GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE MISSIONARIES OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Rome 2013

INTRODUCTION

1. We, the Missionaries of the Holy Family, recognize that during the XIII General Chapter, there was a deep feeling of fraternity and communion, which allowed us to cross the borders of our Provinces and the different languages. After these three weeks of prayer, listening, reflection and discernment, it is with joy that we want to share with all of our confreres some of the fruits that have grown and matured within this Chapter.

2. In the light of the general theme of our Chapter - *being Missionaries of the Holy Family today* - we have tried to welcome and interpret the signs of our times in order to be able, as a congregation, to eloquently proclaim and actively participate in building the Kingdom of God. We therefore studied several aspects of our mission and produced *inspiring principles and operational actions* addressed to the entire Congregation. They concern the knowledge of the world in which we live, our missionary charisma, the prominent ministries within the domain of families and vocations, community life and our structures of animation and government.

3. We recognize that we have now entered into a world that is subject to constant change and that is undergoing a profound process of globalization that tends worryingly towards fundamentalism, promotes secularism, places more importance on civil society and has to come to terms with activism. As missionaries, we should seize the opportunities provided by this moment in history to move with the times and focus on our formation in order to be able to promote the values of the Kingdom of God.

4. We believe that our 'being' missionaries and our 'actions' as missionaries should always stem from a deep experience based on the encounter with God in the light of the Holy Family. By meeting with God we are called to reach out to the boundaries of religion, geography and society to witness, talk of, serve and proclaim the Kingdom of God revealed through the words and actions of Jesus and entrusted to his disciples.

5. We feel that it is high time to consider more attentively the ministries that are at the forefront for us, namely: the family ministry and the pastoral care of vocations. In addition to being recipients of our apostolate, the families can become a very important missionary and vocational resource for the Church and our present world. Encouraged by Fr. Berthier, we feel we are called to renew the pastoral care of vocations and to take special care of those who are neglected or are at risk of going astray.

6. We are aware of the weaknesses of our communities, but we believe that the testimony of fraternity and the sense of family remain at the forefront and are irreplaceable within our

mission. For these reasons we have to turn our communities into places where people are warmly welcomed. We should never forget that the community can thrive only if it carries out a common discernment of God's will and is committed to a common mission. It is always a challenge to balance the respect for the specific interests of individual members and the overall plan established within a community, or the enhancement of our own cultural roots and those of our confreres.

7. We think that the renewal of our structures of government and animation is not only necessary but also vital. To pursue this renewal we need to embark on a restructuring process that involves dialogue and innovation and that is capable of changing our structures based on the concrete situation of the various Provinces and of the Congregation as a whole. This process of renewal calls for the strengthening of congregationality, for more flexible borders among the Provinces and for an enlargement of the forms of participation.

KNOWING AND LIVING IN THE WORLD

A /. Inspiring principles

1. "In the signs of the times we perceive a challenge for our concrete missionary mandate" (C 2; DG 03). To live in the world as it is today, we need a certain attitude. The progress of science and technology has placed us in an era of constant change, that has had an impact on so many aspects of life: economy (GDP, stock market, finance, free market), communications (radio, TV, telephone, satellite connections, the Internet ...) transportation (highway, cars, airplanes), migration. Changes have taken place also in the religious life with the stepping down of Pope Benedict and the election of our new Pope, Francis, who has a special way of serving and comes from Latin America, not from Europe.
2. In this world, we see the signs of the times, signs that entail both positive and negative aspects. Among the positive signs there are: better health conditions in the developed world thanks to which people now live longer and better, the emergence of a civil society that assumes a more important role within the Church; a greater attention being placed on our environment and its protection. The relationship between people is becoming global such that everyone now feels on par with others (relationships are no longer top-down). In the world of inter-connectivity there is no space for hierarchies and there are more opportunities for an equal participation of everybody. In this field, the dimension of equality becomes more important. We should take advantage of this global change.
3. Among the negative signs there is the alarming gap between the rich and the poor and the lack of dialogue. Our world is now a global village where national, cultural and language borders have been canceled. As a reaction to this people may create smaller groups that may degenerate into fundamentalism (thus creating new borders). Other negative signs are: individualism, secularism, indifference, and loss of ethical values (cf. AG 6; 23), etc..

B /. Operational actions

1. An open mind is needed to help avert the risk of assuming a self-referential attitude which might trigger a short circuit. At the same time we should not lose sight of our own identity.
2. We need a different attitude: we should not be afraid of the world. We should be open to accept the good things that it has to offer and use them appropriately: for example the media.
3. Among the many aspects of life that we are called to testify there is our communion as a religious family. This should be expressed through our congregationality, our all-embracing MSF charisma and spirituality, that is not folded in itself and that can help us get closer to those who are distant or excluded, such as the poor. In this way we are able to experience the joy the lies in the Gospel which is the one and only thing that provides for a truly full life. (cf. C 2; DG 01).
4. The poverty of the Holy Family and its simple life is an example to us and a means of getting closer to those who are far from us: the sick, the poor, the excluded, the drug addicts, the unemployed (cf. C 5; DG 011).
5. All of our activities begin with the prayer for the intercession of the Holy Family through which we meet with the needy. We nurture our sense of being together within our Congregation, and with our neighbors under the protection of the Holy Family that wants to create a large family in the world (cf. C 4; DG 010).
6. The world calls on us to come in direct contact with our reality, to see, hear, observe and interpret. We should live close to the poor and to those who are distant and should try to become living signs of the Gospel (religious vows and community life). After getting to know the world, we interpret it anthropologically, socially, economically and politically. With this analysis we reflect on our MSF charisma, on the Sacred Scriptures, on the tradition of the Church, so that we may be able to find our way and take on a responsible attitude in the face of our reality.
7. We should take advantage of globalization to evangelize everyone, especially young people.
8. We should promote an attitude of congregationality and inter-congregationality. We should do this from the very beginning (novitiate).

RENEW EVANGELIZATION AND REVITALIZE MISSIONS

A /. Inspiring principles

1. We believe that, although the Gospel of Jesus Christ always represents the good news that can free *all human beings*, it is *especially so for the 'last'*, 'those who are far away', i.e. all the victims of unjust social structures.
2. We should stress that the purpose of mission is to proclaim, implement and celebrate the Kingdom of God, the *shalom* for all that was created, which comes from the grace of God but depends also on the initiative of Christian communities. Jesus Christ himself held the

Kingdom of God as the absolute principle of his life: his acts and words are the Kingdom of God. Witnessing the Kingdom is therefore our first and irreplaceable form of mission.

3. We feel that we are called and sent to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The *missio ad gentes* involves the active presence of Christians, the yeast and the salt, at geographical and religious frontiers (where there are those in whom faith has not ripened yet, or have lost it), at the social frontiers (where life is being threatened), and at the cultural frontiers (the world of research) (cf. RM 37, RMI 37). As Pope Francis says, it is up to us to move towards the suburbs of society. The *missio ad gentes* thus becomes a *missio cum gentibus*. To carry out this mission in present society, we need deep faith, bright love and a sound theological, social and technical formation.
4. We believe that the mission is a mandate which is entrusted to all the particular Churches and to the Church as a whole. Nowadays, however, the lay faithful are taking on a more active and special role. We are therefore called to raise their awareness and to provide them with the conditions that may help them fulfill this task adequately.
5. We believe that the whole world is a land of mission, including Europe. The Church, which is open to collaboration, however, should seek for methods that are more in line with its context of origin. The mission is not to bring God, but to show that God is already present everywhere (dialogue and inculturation).
6. We want to remind everyone that Fr. Berthier teaches us, through his life, that although one may not be involved physically in a mission abroad, he should still have a missionary heart and mind.

B /. Operational actions

1. Appoint and support a Commission for missions within the Congregation and the Provinces, with the task of preparing, animating, coordinating and monitoring the missionary life and its projects.
2. Develop a sound and detailed program aimed at the “missionary conversion” of the parishes that are entrusted to us. Such a program should begin with refresher courses for parish priests and their vicars.
3. Establish communities, preferably international ones, in the social, cultural and religious frontiers, both within the younger Churches and within the territories of older Christian tradition.
4. Create within the Provinces some centers for the study, formation and promotion of missionary life aimed at forming a new generation of lay missionaries and support their mission in the world and in the Church.

5. Develop an essential program of missionary formation during the early stages of formation, in line with our General Guidelines for Formation.

TO ENCOURAGE THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

A /. Inspiring principles

1. If we are to briefly describing the reality of the families today, we note that the Provinces of the various regions of the world are reporting changes in the social, economic and spiritual circumstances in which the families live today.
2. On the one hand there is a greater openness and availability of many families to actively participate with our confreres in the pastoral care of the family.
3. On the other hand, some negative changes are clearly visible: the crisis of marriage as a social institution and the crisis of family values: broken families and divorce for reasons connected to migration; promotion of an anti-family mentality, negative consequences of globalization, secularism, ethical relativism, moral poverty, social instability, civil laws that undermine natural marriage, and the new social phenomena, i.e. same-sex couples or unmarried couples, which are presented on par with the traditional family that is based on God's plan.
4. This divine plan can be described as follows: the family is a community of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman (cf. GS 48). It is made in the image of God, who in His mystery is not solitude but communion, He is a family. Our families find, in the loving communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, their origin, their perfect model, their motivation and their ultimate destiny.
5. As MSF, we need a clear concept of the family as a point of reference, to be able to clearly define the family ministry in the culture of the country in which we live and work.

B /. Operational actions

1. The family, as such, involves a set of rather complex concepts. For this reason we want to begin by underlining the priorities, the general lines, the fundamental characteristics of our pastoral care of the family, and then present concrete pastoral care proposals.

General guidelines

2. We should consider the families as active entities and not merely as passive recipients of our apostolate. For this reason we should help them discover and fulfill their vocation in the Church and in the world. We should give application to the 'Statute of the Friends of MSF'.
3. The General Government should organize regular meetings of the provincial persons responsible for the pastoral care of families and vocations which should be held in Rome or, better still, in one of the Provinces.
4. We are called to accompany the families at every stage and circumstance of their lives.
5. We want to set the MSF pastoral care of the family within a vocational perspective.
6. The methods of MSF pastoral care of the family should be adapted to the respective local culture.
7. Initial formation and ongoing formation alike should include concrete teachings on the pastoral care of the family.

Pastoral Care Proposals

1. At a sacramental level (celebration)

- ❖ Take advantage of the various religious events to promote the Christian approach (Mother's Day, Father's Day, Children's Day).
- ❖ Celebrate wedding anniversaries.
- ❖ Celebrate the family week.

1. At a formation level (meetings)

- ❖ Organize meetings to help engaged, newly-married and long-term married couples.
- ❖ Set up a team and prepare MSF experts.
- ❖ Courses for people (laity) who are interested in the pastoral care of the family (parish, etc.).
- ❖ Courses of family ministry for young priests.
- ❖ Programs broadcast regularly in the media (radio, web, TV) on the theme of the family.
- ❖ A school for fathers.

1. At the level of accompaniment (follow-up)

- ❖ Take advantage of the movements that already exist in the Church to accompany couples and families: Equipe Notre Dame, Marriage Encounter, etc..
- ❖ Organize family holidays.
- ❖ Organize a center for assistance to the families.
- ❖ Create grassroot family communities.
- ❖ Family Missions.
- ❖ Accompanying the separated and divorced persons.
- ❖ Pay great attention to domestic violence against women, children and the elderly.

REVIVE THE MINISTRY OF VOCATION

A /. Inspiring principles

1. Young people are the future of the Church and of society, but the future is always built on the present. Today the young often seem confused, insecure because of the lack of jobs, "distant" in so many ways. Despite this they have a thirst for life, love, beauty, justice and for that which is lasting and spiritual. And they are always generous, very generous! But they want to be taken seriously and not treated as children or as people who are under age.
2. Our Founding Father invites us to live our lives more like a duty, a service, a responsibility towards the young. The choice of "being Missionaries of the Holy Family" implies that everyone should be fully committed to it, since it is part of our identity. "To fulfill our missionary mandate, the apostolate of vocations has to be taken on with a strong commitment." (Const. 3). The founder had a strong desire to accompany the development of the vocation of every young person. It is therefore up to us to help young people in their growth.

B /. Operational actions

1. Take into account the "general lines of pastoral vocation" approved in Bolivia.
2. Promote late vocations and re-evaluate our position in this regard.
3. Pastoral Care of altar boys and scouts.
4. Organization of pilgrimages with young people.
5. Summer meetings of young people.
6. Meetings with young workers.
7. The missionary experience of young people during holidays.
8. Vocation camps
9. Youth centers.

CULTIVATE COMMUNITY LIFE AND CONGREGATIONALITY

A /. Inspiring principles

1. God has revealed Himself in a form that is very much community-oriented because God is community. God became incarnate by choosing a community that is the family of Nazareth. In Matthew's Gospel (cf. 9:35-38) Jesus does not live alone. He does not fulfill His mission in isolation. Jesus called and gathered around himself a community of brothers and disciples who were searching for the Kingdom of God and proclaiming the Gospel. Jesus formed a family around him.

2. We as Missionaries of the Holy Family want to form a family of the sons of Father Berthier, living our charisma within the community of brothers, according to the orientation provided by our Constitutions: "Called by God to participate in the mission of Christ, we are united by the vows to form a religious community that walks toward God and is devoted to the service of the Gospel. Through our fraternal life we form a Christian community that bears witness to the Gospel of Christ " (Constitution 31).
3. Being Missionary of the Holy Family today means living our vocation as a community of disciples and brothers of Jesus Christ. For this reason, living in a community of brothers is essential for our religious and missionary life because Jesus calls us to be with Him and to participate in His life according to His intimacy that is communitarian. He asks us to experience it day after day, to remain with him on the Mount Tabor and to be aware that we were sent by him in our Mission.
4. Today's community life has become a great challenge since it has to face great subjectivity, selfishness and individualism. How can we build communities that can truly help our confreres to carry out their mission, that can allow them to give their best within the Congregation?
5. To live well our consecration to the Kingdom, there is no other way than to live our vocation with Jesus in our fraternal community, a community where we follow the will of God. By welcoming the others and being hospitable towards them, by respecting the uniqueness of each confrere, by promoting dialogue and a life that focuses on sharing, we will express the sign of the Kingdom that is essential to our mission and bears witness to following our Lord Jesus Christ.
6. Living our community and apostolic life as Missionaries of the Holy Family today means to witness a community life in our modern world.
7. The Church teaches us that the earliest form of religious mission was the testimony of fraternity (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 51, 72).
8. We can thus affirm, in all honesty, that being religious and missionaries of the Holy Family today means to live our vocation in the community (Domus and Unio Stationum, cf. Constitution 92). Father Berthier said that it is good to be with friends. Each and every confrere within the community is a companion in this mission.

B /. Operational actions

1. We should give a clear image of our community and take on a sound approach to live our community experience:

- a. As Missionaries of the Holy Family we should cultivate the spirit of congregationality and be willing to form international and intercultural communities.
 - b. The pastoral care of vocations should be a place of discernment for community life (DG 024, 048, Constitution 27, 35). Community life is a testimony that fosters the pastoral care of vocations.
2. The process of formation (initial and ongoing) should be oriented towards community life. It should not be considered as a mere passage but as a fruitful and essential element of the life of formees and confreres.
3. We can never consider our community life (monthly retreats, permanent formation, prayers and praises, vespers, meetings, etc..) as secondary compared to our pastoral work in parishes or other apostolic commitments.
4. We are called to build a community of love and mutual respect, that can help us in the process of conversion from "I" to "we." We should strive to combat rivalry (conflicts) and encourage support for the mission.
5. We should promote dialogue and sharing within our communities. We can do this by paying attention to our own life, by doing our best to be good Christian faithful and good religious, by fully living our MSF vocation.
6. The local superior should be a community leader, a brother among brothers, who helps his confreres and considers the mission as his MSF family. All members are responsible for shaping the community life (cf. Constitution 31).
7. A local superior should be skilled in community planning, a good listener and a person of dialogue, wise, mature, devoted to service and to the community, with a strong sense of the common good, recognized and accepted by the community that should be ready to cooperate with him and follow his advice.
8. The General Government should promote courses for the local superiors.
9. To be able to live our community life according to the spirit of congregationality we need to improve communication between the Generalate and the Provinces and between the Provinces themselves (through exchanges of information, letters, e-mails, photos, etc.). In using the modern media we should take care not to be lead astray or loose contact with those who are close to us.
10. Given that most members live in Unio Stationum communities, we need projects and programs for their community life. The Provincial Government must oversee their preparation.
11. Our community life should be:

- ❖ simple, transparent (economy of the community), without luxury
- ❖ close to the poor
- ❖ based on dialogue and mutual respect (it should be merciful)
- ❖ based on eucharistic spirituality
- ❖ prophetic

UPDATING THE STRUCTURES OF GOVERNMENT

A /. Inspiring principles

1. We know that the structures are not ends in themselves and are not immutable. The current structures of government and animation have been developed in response to the appeal for the renovation of the religious life coming from Vatican II. We want to serve our common vocation and mission: to be a community of brothers united in Christ, that follows the path of God and is at the service of the Gospel and the mission of the Church (cf. Constitution 1, 31, 89).
2. The XIII General Chapter of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Holy Family, which has chosen the theme "Being a Missionary of the Holy Family today," is aware of the changing times in which we live and of the new situation within the MSF Provinces today. For this reason they propose changes aimed at modernizing the role of the General Government, restructuring the Congregation and reorganizing the Provinces with the ultimate goal of better meeting the needs of our time.

B /. Operational actions

Role of the General Government

3. As we know, the role of the General Government is to animate the life of MSF members and protect their identity. To achieve this, the Government has to take care of the life, spirituality, and apostolate of the Congregation and insist on our specific charisma: mission, vocations and family. To fulfill this the General Government, in addition to the commitments outlined in our Constitutions and General Directory, should:
 - ❖ Clearly define the role of the Assistants and their competences in the government and with regard to the Provinces and the Regions. Other MSF could be appointed as officers of the General Government.
 - ❖ Help overcome "provincialism" and help fulfill the principle of "congregationality."
 - ❖ Foster the MSF identity by promoting studies on our specific charisma and on the spirituality and person of Fr. Berthier.
 - ❖ Make decisions in those situations where the life of the Provinces is more difficult or critical (cf. Constitution 171).
 - ❖ Transfer the missionaries according to the needs of the Congregation, in coordination with the Provincial Governments.
 - ❖ Appoint Commissions (or secretariats) and define their role and their responsibilities.

The committees to be appointed are the following:

- Commission for Formation

- Commission for the Mission
 - Commission for the Family
 - Commission for Vocations
 - Other commissions as needed
- ❖ Make further attempts to improve communication within the Congregation.

Restructuring

- 4) Being aware that the structures of our Congregation need for renovation, the XIII General Chapter has taken the following decisions:
- ❖ The General Government will appoint special commissions (within one year) made up of representatives from the various Provinces involved, a member of the General Government, and an expert in law.
 - ❖ A schedule should be established as soon as possible, which should include the meetings of these commissions, the meetings of the Regions and the meetings with the confreres, so as to allow for the preparation of concrete proposals to be presented to the Council of the Congregation.
 - ❖ The General Government with the Commission will have to study the hypothetical unification of the MSF Provinces in Brazil and of the Spanish-speaking Provinces.

CONCLUSION

1. This document collects and presents the *inspiring principles and operating actions of the XIII General Chapter* concerning the main topics that have been addressed. It proposes a set of actions that refer to the different aspects of our lives. The purpose is to set some possible paths to be followed by the Missionaries of the Holy Family in today's society. In addition to the General Government, the Provinces, our communities and all the members are called to read these inspiring principles and operational actions, to reflect on them and to study and adapt them to their own situation.

2. Moved by divine compassion, "*Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease*". (Mathew 9:35-38). Totally immersed in this mission, Jesus becomes aware that the mission is greater than the resources available. In this situation, he calls on his disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to provide the missing workers. As Missionaries of the Holy Family of this time, consumed by the passion for the Gospel and for its people, we ask for and hope to receive the Lord's workers of which the Church and the world are in need. We are convinced that, if the Lord has called us to be MSF today, He will give us the strength to respond to today's problems. "It was not you who have chosen me, but I chose you and sent you to go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16).

Rome, October 20, 2013

World Day for Missions