

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL'S MEETING WITH THE PROVINCIAL AND DELEGATION'S SUPERIORS.

First, I feel it is my duty to thank the Lord and all the participants to the Meeting for the beautiful experience of fraternity and discernment. We spent time together from January 9 to 13, followed by the personal meeting with individual provincial superiors and with the provincial superiors of the same geographical area.

The Congregation and every individual confrere need to open their eyes to realities and cultures in which today our charism and mission are expressed. In our last General Chapter, we had insisted that Provinces should prepare their own Project reflecting the cultural and social differences in which the common charism is carried out. This has certainly enriched the entire Congregation. Now, ahead of the next General Chapter, the meeting with the Provincials was mainly focused on strengthening the unity of direction and on being more committed and responsible for the overall development of the Congregation and its spiritual growth.

It is precisely because of the internationalization of the Congregation that we are experiencing increasing differences in our Provinces, in particular about vocational perspectives, the average age of the confreres, the composition of our communities, the different possibilities of economic resources that are available.

All this makes us face two essential tasks. First of all the need to be more and more deeply rooted in our common Guanellian charism. Secondly, the task to become more and more able to experience collaboration and - therefore - coordination as a Congregation. These two things should generate among the confreres a greater generosity and willingness toward the mission, even outside their homeland.

Based on these convictions and sensitive to these needs, we would like to orient and plan our next

XX General Chapter that will be celebrated at Barza d'Ispra (Northern Italy) from April 9, 2018 on the theme of "Charism, Interculturality and Prophecy".

It should be our immediate and shared commitment to move with 'a spiritual tension' toward the Chapter, so that, we may celebrate such event more enriched in experience and more courageous in living the charism in creative fidelity, enabled to give freshness to our religious life and to adapt our apostolic and charitable services to the challenges of today's world.

We cannot but feel being in tune with what the Pope asks from Religious Life. We Guanellians have an 'extra duty' in the Church, a duty that comes from our charism,

as the Pope himself reminded us on November 12, 2015 with the three verbs that can very well sum up our journey of preparation for the Chapter.

Trust. It is the fundamental note of our charism by which we live with the certainty that God is a merciful Father. The Pope exhorts us to do what Father Guanella has done, "He so believed in the concrete and provident love of the Father, that he often had the courage to overcome the limits of human prudence, provided that the Gospel was put into practice."

Look. The Pope asks us to have a creative look at today's humankind; to look at the many human frailties, but even at our own weakness, so that we feel the need of God's mercy. The Pope asks us neither to be shortsighted, people who cannot move beyond their interest, nor to be far-sighted, people seeing only those who are far away, but not able to bend down on those who live next to them...

Hasten. This Pope's reminder reflects our Founder's attitude and challenge: His "run, run", his invitation "not to stop until..." and to work relentlessly, but "just until midnight..." It is not Guanellian having a brother or sister wait when they ask for our help!

We should always keep open the doors of our Houses as holy doors of charity, as the Holy Father asked of us.

If in our meeting we focused mainly on the issues of the preparation to the Chapter and the interculturality to be promoted in the Congregation, we have likewise discussed many other topics. As result of our discussions and reflections here now some guidelines and decisions that should be implemented in the coming months before the Chapter, and that will be specifically carried out in the concrete local organisms of the Congregation.

I mention here some guidelines and orientations that we have shared:

- **Priority on Formation and on the formators' training, preparation and support**

In the Congregation we are facing the great need of preparing confreres to be in charge of the initial formation and of accompanying the young confreres in the early years of their apostolic ministry. It is necessary, therefore, that we all feel responsible for this essential duty for the Congregation. It is often said: "each confrere is a formator". It's true! The quality of formation does not depend only upon the confreres directly responsible for that ministry, but it is the whole Congregation that passes on by osmosis the values she is called to bear witness to.

One issue we have experienced in recent years has been the vocational fragility of some of our confreres who have left the seminary or have decided to leave the Congregation and join a diocese. The fragility and the lack of perseverance beside depending on young people's vocational maturity, can also be caused by the lack of vitality of our formative stages or of our own community life.

Formation's commitment requires that Formators must be very close to the formandi so that they may know each other and create mutual trust that fosters discernment and personal growth in the values of Guanellian religious life.

- **Together with the issue of formation, we have shared the common concern of giving better attention to improve the vocation promotion ministry.**

... certainly by using updated methods and strategies, but especially through a more heartfelt prayer and community commitment to witness a religious life that puts us in tune with the deepest requests of today's youth, helping them with patience and courage ...

- **The need to concretely live and experience the Guanellian charism.**

...starting from the years of initial formation, in which, in addition to spiritual growth, the experience of serving the poor is much needed, as much or more than the academic preparation. At time, unfortunately, academic qualifications are seen as a means for personal fulfillment and less as opportunities to improve the effectiveness of our apostolate and charitable service.

- **We also recalled the guidelines on the initial formation that had already been published in the Charitas, April 2014, # 230...**

...especially concerning the Postulancy stage, an absolutely necessary phase in preparation for Novitiate. Likewise we stress again the nature and importance of Practicum (Regency) during which the religious in formation is in direct contact with the day-to-day life of our communities.

During this formative stage he can experience firsthand the beauty of our service among the poor, made visible by the community in which he is inserted and by which he feels welcomed not only for the service he carries out, but as a brother that enriches and stimulates community life.

- **We have taken time to reflect on the new missionary and charitable initiatives recently undertaken in response to the call of the Pope and the Church to go to the existential and geographical peripheries and to open ourselves to new poverties...**

...through simple projects complementing our traditional ministries, in cooperation even with other agencies or institutions. With this approach, we do not intend in any way to discard what we do in continuity to our tradition, but simply to stimulate both ourselves and those who - with us - care about the poor in their concrete situation of indigence, often hidden and new in its forms of expression. (The *creativity of charity* mentioned so many times!)

We confirmed our belief that, more than the work we do, it is rather the witness of our personal and community poverty and sobriety that evangelizes and enables the poor themselves to help us making our life more evangelical. Sometimes our religious life has become a little bit too 'upper class' and comfortable.

- **Another important topic that we discussed at the meeting was the need for a greater coordination to be implemented in various forms in the Congregation...**

- *between the Provinces of the same geographical area*: the three in Latin America and the two in Italy. In this regard, we have commitment to take concrete steps that may favor precisely our ability to read the signs of the time within the global society in which we are inserted. Such process should help us to make choices aiming at responding to the emerging needs, rather than assuring the mere maintenance of existing settings and 'status quo', made precarious by our current situations of weakness. This should be done in preparation for a future phase of reflection leading to a different organization of the Congregation's organisms.
- *between the Provinces and the General Government*, in order to achieve that unity of direction that should not be formal or mere centralism, but ability to make everyone feel responsible in living out and fostering the growth of the common charism, and in circulating the positive aspects present in our Houses and communities. In this respect, we should further improve our inter communication that engages effectively all confreres in knowing and appreciating what takes place in the Congregation.

Certainly, in addition to these aspects just highlighted, we can say that we have felt the 'pulse' of our Congregation, both as a whole and in its most peripheral ramifications and day-to-day realities. Despite our difficulties, we can say that the body and soul of the congregation are sufficiently prepared to face the continuous spiritual and apostolic conversion that Church, society, and our poor ask from us.

- **We have not forgotten finances...**

... and our responsibility to be sensitive and aware of the global crisis, experienced and particularly suffered by the poor; this calls us to be more realistic in our projects, to consolidate what we have undertaken, and to cooperate with God's Providence in making our centers more sustainable.

To all I extend my cordial greetings on behalf of the General Council.

In Charitate Christi.
P. Alfonso

Rome, February 2, 2017, World Day of Consecrated Life.

NB. Our next appointment will be in February when we will propose an itinerary in preparation for the General Chapter.