

GENERAL CHAPTER DOCUMENTS

1. Seventeenth General Chapter Document (1968)

Presentation

The Seventeenth General Chapter was convened to align the Congregation with the conciliar planning of the Church, specifically the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. Renewal is defined as a “constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the Institutes,” adapted to modern conditions. The Chapter emphasizes that renewal requires an interior conversion and the cooperation of every member to ensure both “renewal and fidelity” to the Claretian vocation.

Declaration on the Charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret as the Founder of Our Congregation

- **The Charism of an Institute:** A charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit entrusted to a founder for the service of the Church. It is received, embodied, safeguarded, and creatively transmitted by a community across generations, remaining faithful to its original inspiration while responding to new historical contexts.
- **The Apostolic Charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret:** The Founder’s charism was missionary, defined as the “service or ministry of the Word in the style of the Apostles”. Its roots lie in an intense communication with the Spirit of Christ and a son’s tender devotion to the Heart of Mary.
- **Transmission to the Congregation:** The Congregation’s identity is to preserve this apostolic mission, characterized by a son’s love for the Father, union with Christ through evangelical counsels, and a special consecration to the Heart of Mary.
- **The Common and the Particular:** While sharing the duty of evangelization with other institutes, the Claretian charism is distinguished by its specific missionary spirit and solidarity with the People of God.

Declaration on the Spiritual Heritage of the Congregation

- **Elements of the Claretian Vocation:** The vocation is built on Christological, Marian, apostolic, and ecclesial foundations.
- **Renewal and its Exigencies:** Renewal involves a deeper commitment to the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, lived within a fraternal community dedicated to the apostolate. It calls for a “solution of discovery”—finding modern ways to realize the Founder’s original idea.

Decree on Government

- **General Principles:** Government should be a service of authority exercised in a spirit of brotherhood and in accordance with the Church’s revised rules.
- **Chapters and Councils:** These bodies must be authentically representative, requiring consultation and cooperation from all members affected by their decisions.
- **Organs of Government:** Includes the Superior General, Provincial, and Local governments, assisted by consultors to foster unity and the Institute’s welfare.
- **Decentralization:** The Chapter encourages increasing the relative autonomy of Provinces in matters of formation, government, and finances.

Decree on the Coadjutor Brothers

- **Vocation and Spirit:** Brothers are intimately integrated into the life and missionary works of the Congregation.
- **Integration and Formation:** There is an urgent need for the specialized human, religious, and professional formation of brothers so they can cooperate more effectively in the mission.
- **Modifications:** Coadjutor brothers in perpetual vows now hold passive voice for the office of Local Treasurer.

Decree on Religious Life

- **Spiritual Life and Observances:** Focuses on intensifying spiritual life through the sacraments, prayer, and a renewed climate of piety.
- **The Vows (Chastity, Poverty, Obedience):** The vows are to be lived as a total dedication to the saving mission of the Church. Poverty specifically requires avoiding luxury and sharing goods between houses to ensure “equality”.
- **Household Regulations and Mortification:** Regulations are updated to focus on essential values rather than just external penance, emphasizing “interior mortification” and the edification of others.

Decree on the Apostolate of the Congregation

- **Reorganizing and Planning:** Calls for post-capitular pastoral planning that prioritizes the most “urgent, timely, and effective” needs.
- **Direct Service of the Word:** Emphasizes the use of communication media, parishes, and the apostolate of the laity to transmit Christ’s message.

Decree on Missions to Non-Christians

- **Missionary Character:** Reaffirms the missionary nature of the Congregation and the need for specialized formation for those sent to non-Christian missions.
- **Missionary Activity:** Focuses on the evangelization of the poor and the renewal of Christian life worldwide.

Decree on Christian Education

- **Apostolic Ministry:** Education is recognized as a vital apostolic ministry.
- **Centres of Education:** Schools should be “communities of apostolate” that foster priestly and religious vocations while addressing social needs.

Decree on Formation

- **General Criteria:** The purpose is to integrate human, Christian, religious, and Claretian-apostolic formation.
- **Stages of Formation:** Covers the fostering of vocations, the novitiate, and the pastoral year.
- **Ongoing Formation:** Formation is a lifelong requirement; missionaries must periodically renew their doctrinal and pastoral knowledge.

Decree on Administration

- **Use of Temporal Goods:** Administration is a “communion of love” where stronger organisms provide quotas to help needy ones and fund the general government.
- **Treasurers:** Requires competent, formed individuals who manage goods with a “spirit of fraternal service”.

2. Eighteenth General Chapter Document (1973)

Presentation

The Eighteenth General Chapter was convened to follow the norms of the Second Vatican Council, specifically *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. It aimed to enliven the Congregation with a renewing and prophetic spirit while maintaining continuity with the extraordinary chapter of 1967. The Chapter addressed the “dizzying changes” of the era, seeking to update 1967 doctrines while verifying the progress of renewal. Superior General Anthony Leghisa emphasized that renewal must avoid “exterior formalism” and instead revitalize life based on the authentic charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret.

Word of Greeting from Father General to His Holiness

Father General Anthony Leghisa reported to Pope Paul VI that the Chapter had spent two months in sincere self-criticism and faithful adherence to the Church's magisterium. He reaffirmed the Congregation's commitment to missionary work, particularly in developing nations and "ministerium verbi" (ministry of the Word).

The General Chapter in Audience with the Holy Father

Pope Paul VI addressed the Chapter, celebrating their spiritual affinity with St. Anthony Mary Claret.

- **The Claretian Image:** The Pope cited Claret's own words, describing a Claretian as a man "burning with charity who sets fire wherever he passes".
- **Bearer of Values:** He urged the Congregation to remain faithful to its roots, specifically the cult of the Blessed Virgin, dedication to the Word, and religious austerity, while adapting to changing times.
- **Fidelity to Your Traditions:** The Pope's final spontaneous exhortation was for "fidelity to the Church," which implies fidelity to Christ and the Gospel.

Open Letter to the Congregation from the XVIII General Chapter

- **The Chapter:** Described as a "gratifying experience of communion" among members from 41 countries, despite moments of anguish or confusion in searching for the right path.
- **How We have Seen the Congregation:**
 - **Personnel Trends:** The Congregation saw a 10% expansion in foundations but a 22% decline in personnel between 1966 and 1973. First professions dropped by 62%.
 - **Crisis Areas:** The Chapter noted a "vocation crisis," a "crisis of Claretian identity," and an "alarming abandonment of the life of prayer".
 - **Positive Elements:** There was also a noted deepening of vocational content and a sincere search for evangelical value in community life.
- **How We Judge this Reality:** The situation was found to be "more deficient" than expected in 1967. The Chapter called for a "moment of deepening" in the mystery of the Church-communion and the Founder's charism.
- **For the Immediate Future:**
 - The Chapter completed the work of adapting the **Constitutions**, though the **Directory** remained unfinished.
 - **Key Priorities:** Revitalization of local communities, reform of government structures, assuming collective responsibility for vocations, and establishing programs for "continuing education".

Community on the Local Level

- **A Shared and Co-responsible Community:** The community is defined as a "communion of life" where members share human and religious values.
- **The Plenary Session of the Community:** This is a new structure for collective discernment, evaluation, and decision-making regarding community life and apostolate.

Community on the Provincial Level

- **The Provincial Chapter:** Detailed norms for composition, including the provincial, local superiors, and elected delegates.
- **The General Assembly of the Province:** A fraternal gathering for all province personnel to review and plan life together.
- **Federations of Province:** Encouraged for organisms with geographical or cultural affinities to foster mutual collaboration.

Community on the General Level

- **The Superior General:** Acts as the sign of unity and governs with his council to keep the Congregation alert to the Church's needs.
- **General Officials:** Outlines the duties of the General Econome (administering goods in a spirit of poverty), Secretary General, and Procurator General.
- **The General Chapter:** The "highest expression of communion" and the supreme authority of the Congregation.

On the Organizational Structure of the Congregation

- **Major Organisms:** Reaffirms the "principle of territoriality" while allowing for flexibility in founding houses within other territories for grave reasons.
- **Distribution of Personnel:** Addresses the disproportionate distribution of members across different organisms.

Coadjutor Brothers

The Chapter emphasized the "integration" of missionary brothers into the apostolic work of the Congregation. This involves shifting indirectly apostolic responsibilities (like administration or technical tasks) to brothers to free priests for sacerdotal ministries.

Apostolate

- **Phenomenology:** A review of existing structures revealed that many pastoral councils were ineffective or "null".
- **Critical Evaluation:** Noted a lack of specialized organisms for distinct apostolates and an absence of grassroots participation.

Formation

- **Vocation Promotion:** Urges every community to offer a milieu of "apostolic enthusiasm" to attract young people.
- **"Renovationis Causam":** Approves the use of experimental faculties regarding the novitiate for another six years.
- **Dynamic Structures in Formation:** Every organism must create a "realistic planning for formation" accommodated to its specific needs.
- **Permanent Formation:** Establishes "intensified moments of renewal" and suggests alternatives like "sabbaticals" for specialized renewal.
- **The Ordo Studiorum Generalis (OSG):** Decided not to publish a general plan of studies currently, as many students attend outside centres.

Prayer

The Chapter identified prayer as the "paradigm of vitality or decadence". It moved away from "mechanical acts" toward a "sane pluralism".

- **Minimum Community Prayer:** Daily Mass and approximately 30 minutes of community prayer (like the Liturgy of the Hours).
- **Minimum Individual Prayer:** One hour of daily personal prayer or meditation.

Norms for Provincial Chapters

Provides technical rules for the election of delegates, replacements, and the conduct of the chapter itself.

- **Capitular Elections:** Specifies that the Provincial Superior, consultants, and econome are to be elected by an absolute majority after a “previous sounding” of the province.

Economy (Administration)

- **General Principles:** The General Econome must manage goods with “charity and justice” and provide annual accounts.
- **Local Level:** Emphasizes the spirit of “fraternal service” in managing temporal goods.

3. Nineteenth General Chapter Document: “The Mission of the Claretian Today” (1979)

PRESENTATION

The 19th General Chapter was held in the centennial year of the approval of the Constitutions. It aimed to define the Claretian mission for the modern era, moving from the structural renewals of previous Chapters to a deep focus on **Evangelization**. The document serves as a “charter” for Claretian missionary action in a world marked by rapid change and profound inequality.

PART ONE: OUR VISION OF PRESENT-DAY REALITY

The Great Family of Man (nn. 5-10)

The document notes a growing consciousness of human dignity and the desire for liberation. Despite technical progress, there is a deep sense of frustration as humanity struggles to achieve true brotherhood and unity.

Between Abundance and Need (nn. 11-16)

A “scandalous” gap exists between rich and poor nations. The document highlights the “institutionalized injustice” where a minority consumes the majority of the world’s resources, leading to the marginalization of millions.

The Difficult Task of Living Together in Justice and Peace (nn. 17-25)

The world is characterized by conflict, the arms race, and the violation of human rights. Political systems often prioritize power over the common good, leading to oppression and “structural sin.”

The Heritage of Culture (nn. 26-43)

- **Universalization of Culture and Cultures of Domination:** The dominance of Western technological culture risks erasing local cultural identities.
- **Important Cultural Phenomena of our Times:** These include secularization, the rise of scientific rationalism, and a shift in moral values.
- **Education and the Media of Communication:** These are recognized as powerful tools that can either liberate people or be used for manipulation and “cultural colonialism.”

The Present Crossroads of Evangelization (nn. 44-48)

The Church faces the challenge of preaching the Gospel in a world that is increasingly indifferent or even hostile to religious values. There is a need for an evangelization that is both “faithful to God and faithful to man.”

PART TWO: A REREADING OF THE CLARETIAN MISSION

Chapter I: Sources for a Rereading of our Missionary Charism

Article 1. The Missionary Experience of Claret and the Congregation

- **The Missionary Vocation of Claret (nn. 53-69):** Claret's mission was born from a deep encounter with Christ and a response to the "miseries" of his time. His "Definition of a Missionary" (burning with charity) remains the core identity.
- **The Missionary Experience of the Congregation (nn. 70-86):** The Congregation has evolved from a primarily "preaching" institute to one that embraces various forms of service, always seeking the most "urgent, timely, and effective" means.

Article 2. The Evangelizing Consciousness of the Church in our Time

- **From the Mission of Jesus to the Mission of the Church (nn. 91-96):** Jesus' mission was to proclaim the Kingdom of God. The Church exists to continue this mission.
- **The Good News which the Church Proclaims (nn. 97-101):** This includes the proclamation of salvation in Christ and the promotion of human dignity.
- **Proclaiming the Gospel to Every Creature (nn. 102-111):** Evangelization is a complex process involving witness, explicit preaching, and the transformation of cultures.
- **The Community that Proclaims the Gospel (nn. 112-122):** The entire People of God is responsible for mission, with a special emphasis on the local Church and small Christian communities.

Chapter II: Our Missionary Identity

Article 1. Finding Our Identity (nn. 123-134) Our identity is to be "Missionaries" in the style of the Apostles. We are a "Community of Disciples" sent to proclaim the Good News.

Article 2. Exigencies of our Mission (nn. 135-152)

1. **Following Christ the Evangelizer:** Mission requires a radical following of Christ.
2. **In an Evangelized and Evangelizing Community:** We cannot missionize alone; our community life is our first "witness."
3. **Through the Witness of our Life:** Poverty, chastity, and obedience are lived as missionary signs.
4. **In Creativity, Love and Joy:** The Claretian must be open to new "prophetic" ways of reaching people.

Article 3. Our Commitment to Mission (nn. 153-162)

- **An Option for Missionary Evangelization:** Prioritizing those who have not heard the Word.
- **An Option for a More Culturally Related Evangelization (Inculturation):** Respecting and embedding the Gospel in local cultures.
- **An Option for a Prophetic and Liberating Evangelization:** Denouncing injustice and working for the liberation of the whole person.
- **An Option for an Evangelization from the Viewpoint of the Poor:** Making the "preferential option for the poor" a reality in Claretian life.
- **An Option for an Evangelization that Multiplies Evangelizing Leaders:** Training laity to take their place in the Church's mission.

PART THREE: PROGRAMMING OUR MISSIONARY ACTION

Article 1. Preferred Recipients of our Missionary Evangelization

- **The Non-Christian World and De-Christianised Groups:** Reaching out to the "fringes" of faith.

- **The Poor:** Not just as objects of charity, but as protagonists of their own liberation.
- **Raising up and Forming New Evangelizers:**
 - **Evangelization of Youth:** Recognizing youth as the hope of the Church.
 - **Evangelization of the Family:** Supporting the “domestic church.”

Article 2. Objective and Lines of Action within the Framework of Local Churches

- **Knowledge of the Real World and Inculturation:** Missionaries must study the socio-economic and cultural reality of the people they serve.
- **Lines of Action:**
 1. Promoting the **Ministry of the Word** through all available means (press, radio, preaching).
 2. Transforming **Parishes** into missionary centres.
 3. Engaging in **Social Action** that seeks to change unjust structures.
 4. Utilizing **Education** as a means of liberating evangelization.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO HOPE

The document concludes by invoking the Heart of Mary. The Chapter calls every Claretian to a “new missionary departure,” leaving behind security and comfort to follow the Spirit into the “peripheries” of the modern world.

4. Twentieth General Chapter Document, “The Claretian in the Process of Congregational Renewal” (1985)

Presentation

The Twentieth General Chapter focuses on the operational level rather than doctrinal theory, aiming to provide guidelines for the life and service of missionaries in the coming years. The central theme is the person of the Claretian Missionary as the vital link between current discernment and future aspirations.

Where We Are in the Renewal Process

Introduction

The Congregation has embraced the Second Vatican Council’s call to renewal for twenty years, building upon the foundations laid by preceding General Chapters. This process is evaluated to prepare the Congregation for future challenges.

Lines of thrust that have spurred our renewal

The foundational concept for renewal is the **Claretian Mission**, understood through the spiritual heritage of St. Anthony Mary Claret. Key lines of thrust include:

- **Apostolic lifestyle:** Viewing evangelical commitments (chastity, poverty, obedience) through a missionary lens.
- **Missionary dimension of community:** Transitioning to a “community for mission”.
- **Our missionary activity:** Prioritizing pastoral insertion in the Church, attending to the “signs of the times,” and adopting prophetic, liberating evangelization.
- **Formation for mission:** Shaping both initial and continuing formation around the centrality of mission.

Lights and shadows in the renewal process

The renewal is a complex phenomenon with both successes and difficulties:

- **Renewal of the Constitutions and the Directory:** Official approval of the Constitutions and the creation of a new Directory aligned with Canon Law.
- **Spirituality of the Claretian Missionary:** A restored image of Claret and a rediscovered charism coexist with concerns over spiritual “mediocrity,” routine prayer, and a lack of contemplative depth. There is also a push to update the Marian dimension of the charism.
- **Missionary community:** Communities are more flexible and fraternal, but still struggle with individualism and superficial community planning.
- **Formation in the renewal process:** While formation is now more person-centred, there is a lack of prepared personnel for vocational accompaniment and an insufficient commitment to serious study.
- **Style of mission and revision of positions:** There are advances in youth ministry, but insufficient presence among the poor and non-Christians.
- **Revision of economic structures:** Despite progress in sharing goods, many Claretians maintain a privileged socioeconomic status that may dull their missionary spirit.

Validity of the renewal process

The Chapter affirms that the 20-year renewal process has been positive and valid, committing the Congregation to continued personal conversion and community discernment.

Principal Challenges that face us

Key challenges include a decrease in personnel and missionary brothers, an aging population in some areas (offset by growth in the Third World), and the need to overcome “spiritual flabbiness” with a renewed “gospel mystique”.

Anointed to be Sent

A Program for the Future

Introduction The Chapter proposes a program titled “United to be Sent,” requiring the grace of the Holy Spirit and the responsible cooperation of every Claretian.

The individual Claretian facing the future Development occurs through communion and community mission. The goal is to involve every member fully in the community’s mission to achieve personal growth.

Personal spirituality of each Claretian

- Spirituality must be rooted in mission, inculturated, and identified with the poor.
- Emphasis is placed on the study and contemplation of the Word.
- Claretians are called to be “contemplatives in mission,” seeking the grace of identifying with Christ through the Eucharist and the cross.

The Claretian in missionary community

- Proposes the “weekly community day” and plenary meetings as tools to overcome individualism.
- Superiors must prioritize dialogue and attention to the elderly and sick.

The Claretian in an ongoing process of formation

- Every Claretian should have a personal formation plan.

- Initial formation must include academic quality and specialized preparation for formation leaders.

Most urgent mission commitments

- **Reaffirmation of “Programming our missionary action”:** Maintaining the options and recipients established in previous documents.
- **Revision of our apostolic structures:** Re-evaluating positions to ensure consistency with the missionary calling. This includes creating communities among the poor and strengthening presence in Asia and Africa.
- **Our collective witness of poverty:** Communities must revise their style of life and resources to ensure solidarity with the poor and credible prophetic freedom.

Conclusion

The Chapter concludes with hope in the transforming power of the Claretian charism, trusting that the Spirit will continue to act through “lowly and sinful servants” to complete the work God began in the Congregation.

5. Twenty-First General Chapter Document, “Servants of the Word: Our missionary service of the Word in the ‘New Evangelization’” (1991)

INTRODUCTION

The XXI General Chapter took place during a time of global transition (the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War) and within the ecclesial context of the call for a “New Evangelization.” The document focuses on the Claretian identity as “Servants of the Word,” seeking to revitalize the missionary spirit through a deeper encounter with the Scriptures and a more prophetic presence in the world.

I. THE CLARETIANS FACING THE «NEW EVANGELIZATION»

Discernment for Our Time

- **A World in Transformation:** The document identifies a “globalization of culture” alongside deep social fragmentation. It notes the paradox of technical progress vs. extreme poverty and the rise of religious fundamentalism alongside secularism.
- **The Church’s Mission:** The Church is called to a “New Evangelization”—new in its ardor, methods, and expression.

Challenged by Reality

The Chapter identifies specific challenges for Claretians:

- The “thirst for God” in a materialistic world.
- The cry of the poor and the marginalized.
- The need for dialogue with other religions and cultures (Inculturation).

The «New Evangelization» as a Call of the Spirit

This is not a “new Gospel” but a new way of bringing the unchanging Gospel to a changing world. It requires a conversion of heart and a return to the foundational missionary charism of St. Anthony Mary Claret.

II. HEARERS AND SERVANTS OF THE WORD: Reflections and Proposals

Disciples of Jesus Christ in Community

- **Community as Witness:** Before preaching the Word, the community must be its first “hearer.” Fraternal life is a primary form of evangelization.
- **The Plenary Session:** Reaffirms the community’s role in discerning how to live and serve together.

Announcing the Gospel of the Kingdom

- **The Ministry of the Word:** This is the specific Claretian “service.” It must be prophetic, clear, and aimed at the transformation of society.
- **The Content:** Centred on the person of Jesus Christ and the values of the Kingdom (justice, peace, and the integrity of creation).

Our spirituality as hearers and servants of the Word

- **Biblical Spirituality:** A call to “Lectio Divina” (prayerful reading of Scripture). The Word must penetrate the life of the missionary so he can speak from experience.
- **Marian Dimension:** Mary is the model of the “Hearer of the Word.” Like her, Claretians must “ponder the Word” in their hearts.

Structures and Means for a renewed ministry of the Word

- **Updating Methods:** Encourages the use of modern social communications (press, radio, digital media).
- **Ecclesial Collaboration:** Working with the laity and within the structures of the local Church.

Formative processes of initiation and training for the ministry of the Word

- **Specialized Formation:** Intellectual and pastoral training must be rigorous to handle the complexities of modern culture.
- **Ongoing Formation:** A commitment to lifelong learning and spiritual renewal.

III. SERVANTS OF THE WORD ON FIVE CONTINENTS: Challenges and Lines of Action

Servants of the Word in Africa

- **Context:** Extreme poverty, ethnic conflicts, but great religious vitality.
- **Priorities:** Inculturation of the faith, promoting justice and peace, and forming local leaders.

Servants of the Word in Asia and Oceania

- **Context:** Religious pluralism and vast populations.
- **Priorities:** Interreligious dialogue, presence among the “little ones” (the poor), and the formation of small Christian communities.

Servants of the Word in Europe

- **Context:** Secularization and religious indifference.
- **Priorities:** Proclaiming the “joy of the Gospel” to a skeptical world, youth ministry, and “re-evangelizing” traditional Christian sectors.

Servants of the Word in America

- **Context:** Deep social inequality and the growth of sects.
- **Priorities:** The “Option for the Poor,” defending human rights, and the “New Evangelization” of both the North (secular) and South (marginalized).

CONCLUSION

The document concludes with an act of trust in the Holy Spirit. It calls on every Claretian to be a “living Bible”—a person whose life is so infused with the Word of God that their very existence

becomes a proclamation of the Kingdom. It emphasizes that the mission is not ours, but God's, and we are merely "servants."

6. Twenty-Second General Chapter Document, "In Prophetic Mission: Prophetic Dimension of our Missionary Service of the Word" (1997)

INTRODUCTION

The XXII General Chapter was held in the context of the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It seeks to deepen the "prophetic" dimension of the Claretian charism, urging the Congregation to respond to the challenges of the modern world with the same apostolic fire that moved St. Anthony Mary Claret.

I. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF REALITY

1. All different: a complex and diversified reality. The world is marked by a "clash of cultures" and diverse speeds of development. While some regions experience technological abundance, others suffer from extreme deprivation, ethnic conflict, and social exclusion.

2. In a single world: sharing a globalized reality. Globalization is a double-edged sword. It offers opportunities for communication and solidarity but also imposes a neoliberal economic model that marginalizes the weak and standardizes culture at the expense of local identities.

3. A reality that stimulates our prophetic response. These "signs of the times" are a call from God. The Chapter notes the "cry of the excluded" and the environmental crisis as urgent prompts for a missionary response that is not just charitable, but prophetic—addressing the root causes of suffering.

II. PROPHETIC LIFESTYLE

1. Heirs of a prophetic lifestyle The Claretian prophecy begins with the *way of life*. It is rooted in the "Definition of a Missionary" given by the Founder: a man on fire with charity.

2. To make Jesus' way of life our own (CC 5) Prophecy requires a radical following of Christ. This involves a commitment to prayer, a life of community, and a continuous conversion that makes the missionary a credible sign of the Kingdom.

3. So that our poverty may be a personal and community sign of the Gospel (CC 25) Poverty is presented as a "prophetic protest" against consumerism. The Chapter calls for a lifestyle that is simple, transparent, and in solidarity with the poor, moving beyond mere legal observance of the vow.

4. So that the world may believe (CC 10) Community life is a prophetic witness. In a fragmented world, a community that lives in diversity and reconciliation is a powerful proclamation of the Gospel.

5. To keep abreast of the times (CC 56) Ongoing formation is essential to maintain a prophetic edge. Missionaries must be "lifelong learners" who can read the Word of God and the reality of the world simultaneously.

6. To invite others to embrace the Lord's calling (CC 58) Vocation promotion is seen as a prophetic task—proposing a counter-cultural way of life to young people and inviting them to join the mission.

III. PROPHETIC MINISTRY

1. Heirs of a prophetic ministry Claretian ministry is the “service of the Word.” This service is prophetic when it denounces what is contrary to God’s plan and announces the hope of the Kingdom.

2. To communicate the total mystery of Christ (CC 46) The mission is not limited to social work; it is the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ. Prophecy involves helping people find meaning and salvation in Him.

3. To collaborate in the evangelization of the people (CC 50) This involves inculturation—letting the Gospel take root in different cultures—and engaging in interreligious dialogue, especially in areas where Christians are a minority.

4. To help all those who are seeking to transform the world according to God’s design (CC 46) The Chapter emphasizes Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). It calls for a more active presence in the “Areopagi” of the modern world: human rights, ecology, and the defense of life.

5. To keep the Congregation ever ready to serve the Church and the whole human race in keeping with the needs of various times and places (CC 136) Prophetic ministry requires “apostolic mobility.” We must be ready to leave established positions to go where the need is greatest and where others do not want to go.

6. To seek the salvation of men and women throughout the world (CC 2) The document reaffirms the “Universal Mission” of the Congregation, encouraging the sharing of personnel and resources across different Provinces to serve the global Church.

7. Twenty-Third General Chapter Document, “That They May Have Life” (2003)

This document serves as the declaration for the sexennium 2003-2009, focusing on the defense of life and the revitalization of the Claretian mission in a world facing serious threats.

I. MISSIONARIES AT THE SERVICE OF LIFE

- **1. The God of Life and the Threats to Life:** The document begins with a theological reflection on God as the source of life. It identifies “forces of death” in the modern world: structural poverty, war, terrorism, ecological destruction, and the exclusion of the majority of the human family from the benefits of progress.
- **2. Jesus, Who Gives Life to the Full:** The Claretian mission is rooted in the mission of Jesus, who came “that they may have life” (Jn 10:10). Following Christ means standing in solidarity with those whose life is threatened.
- **3. The Spirit, the Giver of Life:** The Holy Spirit is the one who sustains the missionary in the face of vulnerability and discouragement, providing the “apostolic fire” necessary to transform reality.
- **4. Mary, Mother of Life:** As Sons of the Heart of Mary, Claretians look to her as the one who welcomed Life itself. She inspires a missionary style that is welcoming, tender, and committed to the protection of the weak.
- **5. Claret, Servant of Life:** St. Anthony Mary Claret is presented as a model who used every available means—preaching, writing, social work—to ensure that people had life both spiritually and materially.

II. THE CONGREGATION TODAY AND ITS NINE PRIORITIES

The Chapter evaluated the state of the Congregation and established nine key priorities to guide its action:

- **Priority 1: Spirituality and Word of God:** Returning to the Word of God as the primary source of life. Promoting “Lectio Divina” and a spirituality that integrates prayer with missionary action.
- **Priority 2: Community Life for Mission:** Moving away from individualism toward communities that are “schools of communion,” where fraternal love becomes a credible witness to the Gospel.
- **Priority 3: Vocation Promotion and Initial Formation:** Accepting collective responsibility for vocations and ensuring that formation is personalized, missionary-oriented, and inculturated.
- **Priority 4: Ongoing Formation:** Emphasizing that renewal is a lifelong process. Every Claretian should have a personal plan for human, spiritual, and pastoral growth.
- **Priority 5: The Ministry of the Word:** Prioritizing the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, especially through new technologies and in dechristianized environments.
- **Priority 6: Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC):** Integrating the social dimension of the Gospel into all ministries. This involves defending human rights and promoting ecological sustainability.
- **Priority 7: Presence Among the Poor and the Marginalized:** Strengthening the “preferential option for the poor” by physical presence and effective service in the “peripheries” of society.
- **Priority 8: Youth and Family Ministry:** Recognizing youth as the present and future of the Church, and supporting families as the foundational “domestic churches.”
- **Priority 9: Sharing with the Laity and the Claretian Family:** Deepening the “Shared Mission” with lay people and other branches of the Claretian family (Lay Claretians, Claretian Sisters, etc.).

III. GUIDELINES AND PROPOSALS

This section outlines practical steps for implementing the priorities:

- **Government and Authority:** Superiors are called to exercise authority as a “service of life,” fostering dialogue, co-responsibility, and a sense of belonging to the universal Congregation.
- **Interculturality and Solidarity:** Encouraging the exchange of personnel and resources across different geographical regions (Major Organisms) to meet the needs of the universal mission.
- **Economy at the Service of Mission:**
 - **Transparency and Control:** Reorganizing the General Economic Council to include professionally prepared Claretians and lay experts.
 - **Development Plans:** Assisting needy Organisms in creating plans for self-sufficiency.
 - **Solidarity Fund:** Strengthening the Aid Fund to ensure that resources are shared equitably across the Congregation.
- **Communication:** Utilizing modern media not just for information, but as a “pulpit” for the New Evangelization.

CONCLUSION

The document concludes by entrusting the results of the Chapter’s discernment to the whole Congregation. It calls every missionary to be a “prophet of life” who, guided by Mary, moves forward into the new century with hope and creative fidelity to the charism.

8. Twenty-Fourth General Chapter Document, “Men on Fire with Love: Called to Live Our Missionary Vocation Today” (2009)

INTRODUCTION

The Chapter invites every Claretian to revisit the “missionary dream” of the Founder. It focuses on the “Definition of the Missionary”—a text that summarizes the Claretian vocation—to discover how to live that identity in a world marked by secularization, economic crisis, and new digital frontiers.

I. A WORLD THAT CRIES OUT FOR THE FIRE OF GOD’S LOVE

1. A world of contrasts and hopes. The document notes the rapid changes in the global landscape: the digital revolution, the growth of the Church in the Southern Hemisphere, and a growing ecological awareness. However, these coexist with deep “shadows.”

2. The shadows that challenge us

- **The “Globalisation of Indifference”:** A world that often ignores the suffering of the poor.
- **The Crisis of Meaning:** Many people live in a “spiritual desert,” searching for purpose in consumerism or fragmented ideologies.
- **Violence and Injustice:** Wars, human trafficking, and the exclusion of migrants.

3. The Church in a state of mission. The Church is called to be a “missionary communion.” The Chapter emphasizes that Claretians must serve the Church by being specialists in the “Ministry of the Word,” helping the People of God to encounter the living Christ.

II. THE FIRE THAT ENKINDLES US: OUR IDENTITY

This section reflects on the “Definition of the Missionary” (Aut. 442).

1. “A son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary” - Our identity is fundamentally Marian. Mary is the one who “forges” the missionary in the furnace of her love, making him fit to withstand the heat of the mission.

2. “A man on fire with love” (Caritas Christi urget nos) - The heart of the Claretian is the “fire of charity.” Without this interior fire, mission becomes mere social work or bureaucracy. This love is nurtured through a deep life of prayer and the Eucharist.

3. “He spreads its flames wherever he goes” - The missionary is essentially an “evangelizer.” His presence should be transformative, bringing the light of the Gospel to every environment, especially the most difficult ones.

4. “He desires nothing and aims at nothing but that God be known, loved and served” - This speaks to the purity of intention and the vow of poverty. The missionary is “disinterested,” seeking only the glory of God and the salvation of people.

III. TO SET THE WHOLE WORLD ABLAZE: OUR MISSION

1. Servants of the Word The primary mission is the “service of the Word.” The Chapter encourages “Biblical Pastoral Ministry,” ensuring that the Bible is in the hands and hearts of the people.

2. In Prophetic Mission Prophecy involves “seeing the world with the eyes of God.” It means denouncing the “idols” of the world (power, wealth) and announcing the hope of the Kingdom.

3. In Shared Mission The mission belongs to the whole Claretian Family. The Chapter calls for a deeper collaboration with the laity, recognizing them as “co-responsible” for the charism and the mission.

IV. FEEDING THE FIRE: OUR LIFE IN COMMUNITY AND FORMATION

1. Communities that are “Houses and Schools of Communion”: Community life is the “first word” of the mission. A community that lives in joy and reconciliation is a prophetic sign. The Chapter warns against the “acid of individualism.”

2. Formation: Learning to be “Men on Fire”

- **Initial Formation:** Should focus on internalizing the charism and developing a strong missionary personality.
- **Ongoing Formation:** Is not just “updating knowledge” but a continuous “conversion of heart” throughout all stages of life.

V. PRIORITIES FOR THE SEXENNIUM (2009-2015)

The Chapter established several operational priorities:

1. **To deepen our life of prayer and centralize it on the Word of God.**
2. **To strengthen our community life as a witness of fraternity.**
3. **To prioritize the “New Evangelization” and the “Missio ad Gentes.”**
4. **To significantly increase efforts in Vocation Ministry.**
5. **To promote Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) as an integral part of our mission.**
6. **To continue the restructuring of the Congregation to better serve the mission.**

CONCLUSION: “PASSING ON THE FIRE”

The document ends with an appeal to the younger generations of Claretians. The older members are called to “pass on the fire” of the charism, while the younger ones are encouraged to receive it with “generosity and daring,” ensuring that the flame St. Anthony Mary Claret lit continues to burn brightly in the 21st century.

9. Twenty-Fifth General Chapter Document, “Witnesses and Messengers of the Joy of the Gospel” (2015)

INTRODUCTION: WE ARE MISSIONARIES!

The Chapter reaffirms the foundational identity of the Congregation: “We are Missionaries.” It emphasizes that the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. The document is presented as a call to permanent conversion and a “going forth” to the existential peripheries.

I. CHALLENGES FROM GOD IN OUR TIMES

- **The cry of mother earth:** In light of *Laudato Si’*, the Chapter recognizes the ecological crisis as a missionary challenge, calling for an “ecological conversion” and a defense of our common home.
- **The clamour of the poor and for justice:** Globalization has increased inequality. The Chapter listens to the cry of those marginalized by an “economy of exclusion.”

- **The dream for peace and reconciliation:** In a world of “fragmented war,” Claretians are called to be artisans of peace and reconciliation.
- **The meaning of life and its care:** Challenges include the “culture of waste” and the need to protect life from conception to natural death.
- **The new digital and technological continent:** This is a new mission territory that requires presence, ethical discernment, and new languages for the Gospel.
- **A Church going forth:** Following Pope Francis’ vision, the Congregation seeks to move from a “pastoral of mere conservation” to a “decisively missionary pastoral.”
- **Among the people with many faces and charisms:** Recognizing the richness of cultural diversity and the role of the laity in the Church.
- **Seduction by the Spirit:** Amidst secularization, there is a persistent “thirst for God” that calls for authentic spiritual accompaniment.
- **The grace of being a missionary community:** The challenge is to overcome individualism and live as a “fraternal community” that is itself a message.
- **The fidelity to the Claretian missionary vocation:** Addressing the challenges of vocation “fatigue,” aging in some areas, and the need for fresh apostolic fire.

II. CHARISMATIC TRAITS IN MISSION

- **Missionaries with Spirit:** Our mission is a participation in the mission of the Spirit. It requires a deep interior life and “apostolic mystical” grounding.
- **Listeners and Servants of the Word of God:** Reaffirming the XXI General Chapter, the Claretian is one who first listens to the Word to be able to serve it prophetically.
- **Missionaries in community:** Community is not just a place to live, but a “community of disciples” where the shared charism is lived and celebrated.
- **Sent to evangelize listening to the poor:** The “option for the poor” is not an ideology but a Christological requirement. We learn from the poor how to live the Gospel.
- **With the whole Church and those seeking the transformation of the world:** Collaboration with the Claretian Family, the laity, and all people of goodwill (Shared Mission).
- **Open to the whole world in prophetic dialogue:** A commitment to interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a way of building a more human world.

III. PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

The Chapter proposes three fundamental “Processes of Transformation” for the sexennium:

1. A Congregation going forth

- **Revision of Positions:** Courageously leaving behind ministries that are no longer urgent or “Claretian” to go to the “peripheries.”
- **New Presences:** Creating small, mobile communities among the poor and in new cultural frontiers.
- **Restructuring:** Moving toward more agile and missionary organizational structures.

2. Being a community of Witnesses and Messengers

- **The Joy of the Gospel:** Making joy the “trademark” of Claretian life.
- **The Ministry of the Word:** Using all means—traditional and digital—to announce the Kerigma (the core message of Christ).
- **Vocation Ministry:** Every Claretian is a “vocation solicitor” through the witness of a happy and committed life.

3. Men who adore God in the Spirit

- **Biblical Animation:** Making the Bible the “soul” of all pastoral action and formation.

- **Spiritual Accompaniment:** Investing in the formation of Claretians who can accompany others in their spiritual journey.
- **Integral Formation:** Ensuring that formation (initial and ongoing) is missionary, inculturated, and socially conscious.

CONCLUSION

- **To Mother Mary of Pentecost:** The Chapter entrusts the Congregation to Mary, asking for her “maternal forge” to shape us into true missionaries.
- **Address of Pope Francis to the members of the XXV General Chapter:** The document includes the Pope’s personal exhortation to the Claretians to be “adorers of God,” “missionaries who go forth,” and “men of hope.”

10. Twenty-Sixth General Chapter Document, “Querida Congregación: Rooted in Christ, Audacious in Mission” (2021)

THOSE WHO CONTINUE “A GREAT WORK”

The Chapter begins by acknowledging the “great work” started by St. Anthony Mary Claret. It recognizes that Claretians are part of a history of salvation and are called to continue this legacy in a world changed by the pandemic. The title “Querida Congregación” (Beloved Congregation) reflects a sense of deep affection and belonging among the members.

CONVERSATIONS FOR TRANSFORMATION

The methodology of this Chapter was based on “appreciative discernment” and “spiritual conversation.” Instead of focusing solely on problems, the Chapter looked for the “seeds of life” already present in the Congregation to foster a culture of dialogue and mutual listening.

“SEEDS OF LIFE” IN THE PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

The document builds upon the three processes of transformation initiated in the previous General Chapter (2015), identifying specific “seeds of life” (positive trends) and areas for further growth.

THE FIRST PROCESS: “A CONGREGATION GOING FORTH”

Seeds of Life

- **Moving out to the peripheries, places of dialogue, and biblical ministry:** A growing commitment to being where life is most threatened and engaging in the “Biblical Animation of all Pastoral Ministry.”
- **Commitment to Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC):** Increased awareness of the “cry of the poor” and the “cry of the earth,” aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and *Laudato Si’*.
- **Solidarity and universal mission:** A greater readiness to share personnel and resources across borders.

The Transformation we want to achieve

- To move from a “pastoral of maintenance” to a “pastoral of encounter.”
- To strengthen the presence of Claretians in international organizations (like the UN) to advocate for the marginalized.

- To consolidate the “Somi” (Solidarity and Mission) structures at all levels.

THE SECOND PROCESS: “BEING A COMMUNITY OF WITNESSES AND MESSENGERS”

Seeds of Life

- **The Claretian Family and Shared Mission:** A deepening relationship with lay Claretians and other branches of the family, recognizing that the charism is shared.
- **Youth and Vocation Ministry:** A renewed effort to accompany young people in their search for meaning.
- **New languages and digital presence:** Adapting the message of the Gospel to the digital world.

The Transformation we want to achieve

- To foster “communities that are houses and schools of communion” where diversity is celebrated.
- To implement the “Claretian Vocation Directory” effectively across all cultures.
- To develop a “culture of safeguarding” to protect minors and vulnerable adults.

THE THIRD PROCESS: “MEN WHO ADORE GOD IN THE SPIRIT”

Seeds of Life

- **Rootedness in the Word and the Eucharist:** A return to the spiritual “furnace” of the Heart of Mary.
- **Integral and Ongoing Formation:** The publication of the New General Plan of Formation (2020) as a tool for lifelong growth.

The Transformation we want to achieve

- To bridge the gap between “what we say” and “how we live” (authenticity).
- To ensure that every Claretian has a personal life project that integrates prayer, study, and mission.
- To prioritize the formation of formators who are capable of accompanying others in a changing world.

GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMY AT THE SERVICE OF MISSION

- **Governance:** Authority is viewed as a “service of love” (Amoris Officium). The document calls for leaders who are close to their brothers and capable of fostering discernment.
- **Economy:** Principles of transparency, accountability, and solidarity. The economy must support the mission, ensuring that resources are used ethically and sustainably.

CONCLUSION: AN AUDACIOUS AND HOPEFUL FUTURE

The Chapter concludes with a call to “audacity.” Like Claret, the contemporary missionary must not be afraid of new challenges. The document ends with a prayer to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, asking her to help the “Querida Congregación” remain rooted in Christ and bold in its proclamation of the Kingdom.

GUIDELINES TO STUDY THESE GENERAL CHAPTER DOCUMENTS

Studying the General Chapter documents of the Claretian Missionaries (from the XVII to the XXVI) is a journey through more than 50 years of the Congregation's history, spirituality, and mission. Because these documents evolve in response to the "signs of the times," they should not be read in isolation.

Here are general guidelines to study this body of work effectively:

1. Adopt a "Diachronic" (Historical) Perspective

Do not read these documents as static law, but as a living dialogue between the Claretian charism and the changing world.

- **The Starting Point (XVII-XVIII):** These documents were heavily influenced by the immediate post-Vatican II period, focusing on "appropriate renewal" and the reorganization of structures (Constitutions, Directory, Government).
- **The Evangelizing Shift (XIX-XXI):** You will notice a shift toward *Mission*—the "Ministry of the Word," the "New Evangelization," and the prophetic nature of the missionary.
- **The Consolidation & Transformation Era (XXIII-XXVI):** These recent documents focus on "processes of transformation," the defense of life, shared mission with the laity, and responding to a digital, globalized, and ecological reality.

2. Identify the "Constant Core" (The Golden Thread)

Regardless of the era, certain themes appear in every document. Use these as your anchor points:

- **The Definition of the Missionary:** Almost every document refers back to the "Definition of the Missionary" (Autobiography, n. 442). Use this as a lens to evaluate the rest of the text.
- **The Heart of Mary:** This is the spiritual fountainhead of the Congregation. Observe how the Marian dimension transitions from a devotional piety to a missionary/evangelizing style.
- **Service of the Word:** This remains the primary ministry. Notice how the *method* of this service changes (from pulpit preaching to digital/prophetic engagement), but the *essence* remains the same.

3. Study the "Processes of Transformation"

Beginning with the XXV and XXVI Chapters, the documents are structured around "Processes of Transformation." Treat these as your actionable roadmap.

- **"A Congregation Going Forth":** Look for how they define their presence in the world (Peripheries vs. Centres).
- **"Community of Witnesses":** Analyse their view on community life—moving from "living together" to "missionary communion."
- **"Men who Adore God":** Study the spiritual requirements—how the document links deep prayer (adoration) to radical mission.

4. Practice "Spiritual Reading" (Lectio Divina)

Since these are not just legislative documents but spiritual declarations, do not study them solely for information. Use a meditative approach:

- **The "See-Judge-Act" Method:** In each document, identify:
 - *The Context:* What was happening in the world/Church at that time?
 - *The Discernment:* What did the Spirit say to the Congregation then?
 - *The Call:* What is the "seed of life" that still applies to your current situation?
- **Dialogue and Discernment:** Many of the recent documents (especially the XXVI) emphasize "spiritual conversation." If possible, study these chapters with others, sharing your insights rather than just reading silently.

5. Contextualize with the Universal Magisterium

Claretian General Chapters do not happen in a vacuum. To understand the “why” behind the documents, keep the corresponding Church documents nearby:

- **XVII-XVIII:** Read alongside *Perfectae Caritatis* (Vatican II decree on Religious Life).
- **XIX-XXI:** Read alongside *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI) and *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II).
- **XXV-XXVI:** Read alongside *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis).

6. Summary Checklist for Every Chapter

When you open a new document, create a simple note for yourself using these four headers:

1. **The “Call of the Spirit”:** What is the one major challenge (e.g., secularization, social injustice) the Chapter is trying to answer?
2. **The “Missionary Identity”:** How does the Chapter describe a “Claretian” in this specific moment of history?
3. **The “Structural/Operational Change”:** What specific changes did they make to government, formation, or economic structures?
4. **The “Personal Relevance”:** If I were a formee during *this* Chapter, what would be my one specific “call to conversion”?

By following this approach, you will see the Congregation not as a collection of disjointed rules, but as a single, breathing entity striving to stay “Rooted in Christ and Audacious in Mission.”