

READING OUR HISTORY AS VOCATION

A Formation Reflection Guide for Formees

Beyond Institutional Memory

“Our Claretian history is not that of a mere institution or organisation... We are a missionary community.”

This affirmation shapes the way we understand ourselves. If our history were merely institutional, it would consist of dates, statistics, chapters, foundations and suppressions. It would resemble the evolution of an organisation adapting to political changes and cultural shifts. But our history is more than institutional development; it is grace embodied in time, Providence interacting with human freedom, theology lived in concrete circumstances. We are not a religious corporation that survived revolutions; we are a missionary community born of a charism and sustained by men who believed that the Word of God must be proclaimed with urgency and apostolic daring.

A Community Constituted by Mission

To say that we are a missionary community means that mission is not one activity among others; it is our organizing principle. We are not a federation of individual apostles, nor simply priests and brothers sharing a residence. We are a community constituted by mission. Community life, prayer, governance and formation exist so that the Word may be announced more effectively. When community becomes self-referential, detached from mission, it loses the very reason for its existence. Our identity is missionary before it is structural.

History Read in the Light of Providence

Our history must therefore be read in the light of Providence. Without faith, we would see only secularisation, exile, suppression, martyrdom, numerical growth and decline. With faith, we discern something deeper: crisis becoming purification, exile becoming universality, martyrdom becoming fecundity, decline in one region becoming growth in another. History is not nostalgia. Nostalgia idealises the past and seeks to replicate it. Providence interprets the past in order to discern the movement of the Spirit. We do not remember in order to return; we remember in order to understand how God acted through fragile instruments.

Fragility as the Place of Grace

Those instruments were never perfect heroes. Our history includes internal tensions, political hostility, failed or short-lived missions, suppression of houses, departures and human limitations. Yet the Congregation endured. It survived because charism is stronger than weakness. Providence does not eliminate fragility; it works through it. The Mission House of Vic survived not because it was secure, but because it was missionary at heart. The exile of 1868 did not extinguish the Congregation; it universalised it. The martyrdom of 1936 did not destroy it; it purified it. Our story is not the triumph of efficiency but the perseverance of fidelity.

Descendants, Not Clones

We are described as descendants of the past, living in the present, moving toward the future. This means we are not self-generated. Our vocation is inserted into a story that began before us. We inherit spirituality, constitutions, mission fields, martyrs, wounds and hopes. To ignore our roots is to misunderstand ourselves. At the same time, we are not clones of the past. A child resembles his father but is not his clone. Creative fidelity requires resemblance without repetition. We do not reproduce nineteenth-century forms of mission; we embody the same apostolic fire in new historical conditions.

The Present as Responsibility

The present is brief and quickly becomes past. What we live today will become the inheritance of future generations. If we live superficially, superficiality will be transmitted. If we deepen prayer, fraternity and missionary audacity, depth will be transmitted. In this sense, we are not only heirs of history; we are builders of history. The Spirit who gathered five priests in Vic continues to act, calling new generations to carry forward a charismatic history of salvation.

History as Ongoing Vocation

History, then, is not nostalgia. It is Providence unfolding through fragile instruments. It is grace interacting with freedom. It is charism incarnating in changing cultures. It is the Spirit writing new chapters through missionary communities who remain rooted in their origins and bold in their mission. The past is entrusted to mercy, the present to love, and the future to Providence.

PHASE I: BACKGROUND AND CHARISMATIC GESTATION (1840–1849)

1. A Country in Turmoil: The Historical Context

The foundation of the Congregation cannot be understood without entering the dramatic landscape of 19th-century Spain. It was not a peaceful ecclesial environment but a wounded and fragmented society. The Carlist wars (1833–1840; 1846–1849; later 1872–1876) divided the nation politically and ideologically. Dynastic conflict, liberal reforms, and conservative resistance created deep instability in both civil and ecclesial structures.

Between 1835 and 1837, liberal secularisation measures drastically reshaped religious life. Male religious congregations were suppressed, monasteries confiscated, and their properties appropriated by the state. Around 24,000 religious were secularised. New professions and many ecclesiastical structures were prohibited. Missions and preaching were restricted or banned.

The Church was left weakened, disoriented, and deprived of many of its traditional evangelising forces. Religious communities that had sustained preaching, catechesis and spiritual renewal were dismantled. Parish clergy were often insufficiently prepared or unable to fill the vacuum.

This was the ecclesial desert in which the Claretian charism began to germinate.

2. Claret in the Midst of Crisis

Anthony Mary Claret did not found the Congregation in an era of institutional security. He lived amid:

- Political instability
- Anti-clerical sentiment
- Ecclesial fragility
- A shortage of missionaries
- Religious fragmentation

He witnessed firsthand the spiritual hunger of the people. Popular missions had traditionally been conducted by religious orders that no longer existed in Spain after suppression. The preaching ministry had collapsed. Entire dioceses lacked structured evangelisation.

Claret himself became an itinerant missionary throughout Catalonia (1843–1850), preaching tirelessly, organising catechesis, publishing booklets, and responding to spiritual neglect. His experience revealed two truths: the urgency of evangelisation and the impossibility of sustaining it alone.

Charism began not as an idea but as a pastoral anguish.

3. Progressive Attempts Toward a Missionary Body

The foundation of 1849 was not a sudden inspiration but the fruit of a gradual gestation. Several attempts preceded it, each revealing a maturing vision of structured missionary evangelisation.

In 1842, the **Germandat de Maria del Roser** emerged as an early priestly association with apostolic intention. Though short-lived, it showed Claret's desire to gather missionary collaborators.

Around 1845, the **Apostolic Brotherhood** took clearer shape. Claret even presented companions to Propaganda Fide to obtain the title of "Apostolic Missionaries." Their apostolate focused on three pillars: popular missions, spiritual exercises, and the dissemination of books and pamphlets. They lived radical poverty and operated under diocesan authority. Among its members were Esteban Sala, Manuel Vilaró and Domingo Fábregas—future co-founders.

The **Brotherhood of Jesus and Mary** represented another stage, distinguished by some degree of community life. Mission was not only activity but increasingly communal.

Finally, in 1848, Claret envisioned the **Brotherhood of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**, an ambitious project that included priests, laity and even women whom he referred to as "deaconesses." This initiative was not accepted by ecclesiastical authorities, but it revealed the breadth of Claret's missionary imagination and his Marian intuition.

Each of these attempts failed or remained incomplete. Yet none were wasted. They were steps in discernment. Charism matured through experimentation, rejection and perseverance.

4. The Foundation: 16 July 1849 – Vic

After returning from the Canary Islands, Claret discussed his intention with Bishop Luciano Casadevall of Vic and trusted collaborators. The political climate had slightly eased following the Second Carlist War. Some confiscated convents were returned to dioceses. A window of opportunity opened. On 16 July 1849, in the seminary of Vic, Claret gathered:

- Esteban Sala
- José Xifré
- Domingo Fábregas
- Manuel Vilaró
- Jaime Clotet

The founding ceremony consisted of spiritual exercises led by Claret. It was simple, discreet, and legally framed as a **Mission House of the Diocese of Vic**. Given civil prohibitions against founding religious congregations, this structure allowed missionary activity within legal limits.

What began that afternoon was not yet a canonical religious institute with vows. It was a missionary community responding to ecclesial scarcity. The name chosen—**Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**—already revealed a deep Marian and missionary identity.

The Congregation was born poor, uncertain and vulnerable.

5. Charismatic Insight: Charism Is Born in Crisis

The Congregation did not arise from abundance but from deprivation. It was not founded in a moment of ecclesial triumph but in a context of suppression and fragility.

Crisis did not suffocate charism; it generated it.

The shortage of missionaries provoked creative response. The ban on preaching intensified apostolic desire. Political hostility clarified missionary identity.

Charism, therefore, is not the fruit of stability but of evangelical urgency.

This phase teaches us that:

- Scarcity can generate creativity.
- Suppression can purify intention.
- Fragility can reveal authenticity.

The Mission House of Vic was not a strategy for expansion. It was a response to the cry of the people and the wounds of the Church.

6. Formation Reflection

This first phase confronts us personally and communally.

1. What forms of ecclesial or cultural scarcity do we experience today? Are we attentive to them, or do we seek comfort in established structures?
2. When we encounter crisis—decline in vocations, secularisation, cultural indifference—do we react defensively, or do we discern missionary opportunity?
3. Do I interpret difficulty as a threat to my security, or as a call to apostolic creativity?

The founders did not wait for ideal conditions. They acted within limitations. The same Spirit who inspired that first gathering in Vic continues to invite missionary communities to be born again wherever the Word is most needed.

Charism is always gestating where courage meets necessity.

PHASE II: FROM MISSION HOUSE TO RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION (1849–1870)

1. A Fragile Beginning: Identity Without Canonical Security

When the Congregation was founded in 1849, it was not yet a religious institute in the canonical sense. It began as a **Pious Union of secular priests**, later resembling what we would today call a **Society of Apostolic Life**. Civil legislation in Spain still restricted the establishment of religious congregations, so the foundation had to assume the juridical form of a “Mission House” under diocesan authority. This Mission House had three stated purposes in conformity with state law:

1. Popular missions
2. Spiritual exercises for clergy and laity
3. Correction of clergy

In practice, only the first two were central to the life of the missionaries. The community’s daily rhythm alternated between intense periods of itinerant preaching and times of prayer, study and common life at home. Even before formal vows, there was a clear missionary identity and a disciplined spiritual structure.

The Congregation was missionary before it was juridically defined.

2. The Gradual Legal Consolidation

The transition from Mission House to Religious Congregation was neither immediate nor simple. It unfolded gradually over two decades through perseverance, dialogue with Rome, and repeated revisions of constitutional texts.

Key Milestones

- **1857** – The first printed Constitutions were prepared after the Founder’s return from Cuba. These already showed a less local and more universal horizon.
- **1860** – The Holy See granted the *Decretum Laudis*, recognising the Institute as worthy of praise and placing it under Roman attention.
- **1865** – The Constitutions were approved *ad decennium* and *ad modum experimenti*, meaning provisionally and for trial.
- **11 February 1870** – Definitive recognition as a Religious Congregation of simple vows.

The constitutional process was demanding. Early texts were rejected for not incorporating Roman observations. Extraordinary General Chapters were convened. The Founder and Fr. Xifré studied the constitutions of other congregations (Jesuits, Redemptorists, Paulines) and sought canonical advice. Approval required humility, patience and ecclesial obedience.

This juridical maturation demonstrates that charism must pass through ecclesial discernment. The Church did not merely approve a structure; it tested and purified a spirit.

3. The Major Crises of the First Twenty Years

While the Congregation sought canonical stability, it endured severe internal and external crises.

1. The Founder's Appointment to Cuba (1849)

Just weeks after the foundation, Claret was appointed Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. His departure was a profound shock. The young community risked disorientation. However, he remained for about a year before departing definitively, allowing the missionaries to assimilate his spirit and missionary dynamism.

The absence of the Founder forced the community to stand on its own.

2. Deaths in 1852

The year 1852 was devastating. Bishop Casadevall (protector of the Mission House), Fr. Manuel Vilaró, and Fr. Ignacio Carbó died. These losses struck both institutional support and internal leadership. The community experienced vulnerability at its core.

3. The Progressive Biennium (1854–1856)

During this period, popular missions were again banned. Admissions ceased. The Mission House was threatened. Growth was paralysed.

The Congregation could neither expand nor fully exercise its apostolate.

4. The Revolution of 1868

This was the most dramatic crisis. The Spanish government dissolved the Congregation. The missionaries had to flee. Fr. Xifré led the survivors to France, first to **Prades** (1868–1872), then to **Thuir** (1872–1880).

There was widespread fear that the Congregation would disappear permanently.

5. Growth in the Midst of Instability

Despite repeated threats, the Congregation did not shrink; it grew.

- 1850: 12 missionaries
- 1868: 82 living members (plus deceased members)

New houses were founded in Gracia (Barcelona), Segovia, Huesca, Jaca and La Selva del Camp. The latter became the site of the first martyr of the Congregation, Fr. Francisco Crusats, killed during revolutionary violence in 1868.

Growth did not depend on political security. It depended on apostolic conviction.

6. Charismatic Insight: Providence purifies foundations.

This phase reveals a profound truth: the Institute survived because it was missionary before it was stable.

Legal approval came slowly. Structures were fragile. Leaders died. The Founder was absent. Missions were banned. The Congregation was suppressed and exiled. And yet it endured. Why? Because the foundation was not structural; it was evangelical. The early missionaries were not gathered around security, but around proclamation. Stability was a consequence, not a precondition.

Providence did not spare them suffering; it used suffering to deepen authenticity. Each crisis clarified intention:

- Was the Congregation attached to place?
- To political protection?
- To the physical presence of the Founder?

Or was it attached to mission?

The answer became evident in exile. Stripped of buildings and homeland, the Congregation remained itself.

Charism, when authentic, survives displacement.

6. Formation Reflection

This second phase confronts us personally.

1. What happens to my vocation when security disappears? When expectations are not met? When leadership changes? When recognition fades?
2. Am I attached to geographical stability, to comfort, to a specific apostolate—or to the mission itself?
3. If transferred unexpectedly, if misunderstood, if deprived of visible success, does my missionary identity remain intact?

The Mission House became a Religious Congregation not because circumstances were favourable, but because fidelity matured under pressure.

Formation must aim at the same maturity: a vocation rooted in mission rather than in stability, in charism rather than in comfort, in Providence rather than in guarantees.

PHASE III: FIRST GREAT EXPANSION (1870–1899)

1. From Suppression to Missionary Boldness

The Revolution of 1868 had dissolved the Congregation in Spain and forced its members into exile. What appeared to be an institutional catastrophe became the beginning of a new missionary chapter. The community relocated first to Prades (1868–1872) and then to Thuir (1872–1880) in France. These years of displacement were marked by uncertainty, poverty and perseverance. Yet exile gradually transformed the Congregation's horizon.

In 1875, following the restoration of the Spanish monarchy under Alfonso XII, the Congregation was able to return to Spain. Houses in Vic, Segovia and La Selva del Camp were recovered. Other communities that had remained quietly during the turmoil resumed full activity. The return did not signal a retreat into safety; rather, it coincided with expansion.

The numbers reveal this surprising vitality. In 1876, the first Claretian catalogue listed 334 members. By 1887, the number had risen to 908. Growth occurred not in a climate of privilege, but in the wake of persecution. The Congregation that had nearly disappeared now entered a period of unprecedented development.

2. Crossing Borders: The Geography of Universality

This phase marked the first true international expansion of the Congregation. Significantly, expansion began even before full stability was regained in Spain.

Barbastro (1869): During the revolutionary storm, a community was founded in Barbastro. This house would later become historically significant as the site of the martyrdom of 51 missionaries in 1936. What began as a courageous foundation in adversity would later become a symbol of heroic fidelity.

Algiers (1869–1888): The mission to Algiers, invited by Bishop Charles Lavigerie, was the first step beyond Europe. It aimed primarily at serving Spanish immigrants rather than evangelising indigenous populations. Though it lasted only about twenty years and ended due to difficulties and economic strain, it represented a crucial psychological crossing of borders.

Chile: The foundation in Santiago de Chile followed shortly after exile. Initial tensions with benefactors led the missionaries to relocate to a more marginal area, where they ministered among the poor. This experience strengthened the Congregation's missionary audacity and adaptability.

Cuba (1880): The Cuban mission became one of the most dramatic episodes of this period. Eleven missionaries arrived in 1880. Within months, yellow fever claimed nine of them. The remaining two eventually returned to Spain, deeply affected. The tragedy revealed both the vulnerability and the courage of the missionaries. Mission was not romantic; it demanded life itself.

Equatorial Guinea (1883): For the first time, the Congregation undertook the evangelisation of non-Christians. The mission in Spanish Guinea marked a decisive shift toward direct missionary engagement with African peoples. Many missionaries died from tropical diseases, yet volunteers continued to offer themselves. The zeal was so intense that the General Superior had to discourage excessive requests to go.

Mexico and Italy (1884): These foundations signalled broader ecclesial collaboration and strengthened ties with Rome. The Roman presence also included pastoral care in nearby villages and service as procurators before the Holy See.

Brazil (1895) and Portugal (1898): These later foundations expanded the Congregation's presence in Latin America and the Iberian world, consolidating its international profile.

Exile had broken geographical confinement. What began in Catalonia was becoming transcontinental.

3. The Role of the Brothers

A striking fact during this period is that at one point the number of Brothers (203) exceeded that of Fathers (164). This reveals an important dimension of Claretian identity. The Congregation was not conceived as clerical in spirit, but missionary. Brothers played vital roles in formation houses, missions, administration and practical support. Their numerical strength underscored the communal and apostolic nature of the Institute.

The missionary body was diverse, united not by ordination but by charism.

4. Formation as Strategic Foundation

Rapid expansion required structured formation. Two major formation centres were established:

- **Santo Domingo de la Calzada (1885)** – theological college and later headquarters of the General Government (1886–1906).

- **Cervera (1887)** – novitiate and philosophy house, which would house more than 500 missionaries at one time.

These centres ensured doctrinal solidity, spiritual depth and missionary discipline. Growth without formation would have been unsustainable. The Congregation understood that expansion required interior consolidation.

5. Structural Maturity: Creation of Provinces (1895)

As the number of houses and missionaries increased, the question of administrative division arose. After considerable debate, the VI General Chapter (Cervera, 1895) created two provinces:

- **Province of Catalonia** (including Mexico)
- **Province of Castile** (including Chile and Brazil)

Spanish Guinea, Rome, Madrid and formation centres remained under direct general jurisdiction.

At that time, the Congregation comprised 60 houses and 1,476 members.

This reorganisation marked the transition from a centrally governed missionary body to a more decentralised and internationally structured congregation. Governance adapted to universality.

6. Charismatic Insight: Persecution universalises charism.

Exile forced the Congregation beyond Spain. What began as survival became mission. Political suppression unintentionally prepared the Congregation for catholic expansion.

The Pyrenees were crossed. The Mediterranean was crossed. The Atlantic was crossed. The Congregation moved:

- From local to international
- From European to intercontinental
- From diocesan mission to global evangelisation

Persecution did not narrow the charism; it purified and expanded it. The early missionaries discovered that mission is not tied to homeland. It is tied to availability.

Charism grows when it is not protected by borders.

7. Formation Reflection

This phase challenges us deeply.

1. Does my heart remain confined to my cultural comfort zone? Do I unconsciously equate vocation with geographical familiarity?
2. Am I willing to cross symbolic “mountain ranges” and “oceans” for the sake of the Gospel?

Missionary availability is not primarily geographical; it is interior. It requires detachment from preference, language, climate and recognition.

Exile made the Congregation universal. Availability makes a missionary free.

The first great expansion teaches us that universality is not a strategy; it is the fruit of courageous fidelity under pressure.

PHASE IV: CONSOLIDATION & SECOND EXPANSION (1899–1922)

1. Leadership Transition: Fidelity After the Founding Generation

The death of Fr. José Xifré in 1899 marked the end of a foundational era. Xifré had governed the Congregation for forty years and had shepherded it through exile, expansion and canonical recognition. His leadership ensured continuity after the death of the Founder and safeguarded unity during persecution.

With his passing, the Congregation faced a new challenge: how to remain faithful without the direct presence of the founding generation. Leadership passed first to **Fr. Clemente Serrat** and later to **Fr. Martín Alsina**. This generational shift required institutional maturity. The Congregation was no longer a fragile body struggling for survival; it was a growing international missionary institute.

The question was no longer, “Will we survive?” It became, “How will we organise and expand responsibly?”

2. Apostolic Diversification: Broadening the Mission

During this period, the apostolate diversified significantly. While popular missions remained central, new pastoral forms emerged in response to ecclesial needs.

Parish Ministry (1904): The acceptance of parish ministry marked an important development. Initially, the Congregation had been conceived primarily for itinerant preaching. Parish work required stability, long-term pastoral accompaniment and administrative responsibility. This shift demanded adaptation without losing missionary identity.

The risk was clear: could parish ministry become routine maintenance rather than missionary proclamation?

Seminary Direction and Formation: Claretians were entrusted with the direction of diocesan seminaries. This apostolate extended their influence into clerical formation and intellectual leadership within the Church. It required theological competence, pastoral prudence and institutional discipline.

The missionary spirit now had to animate academic and formative environments.

Educational Institutions: Schools and colleges were founded in various countries. Education became an evangelising platform. Through intellectual formation and moral guidance, the Congregation shaped generations of lay faithful.

Education required administrative skill and financial organisation—further signs of institutional maturity.

The Press Apostolate: Faithful to the Founder’s passion for publishing, this period saw significant growth in printed evangelisation.

Notable initiatives included:

- **Editorial Ave María** (Brazil)
- **Editorial Corazón de María** (Madrid)
- *Ilustración del Clero*
- *Commentarium pro Religiosis*

The press became a powerful missionary tool. Claret’s intuition that “printing presses are the artillery of truth” found institutional form. Publishing allowed the Congregation to reach beyond physical missions into intellectual and cultural spheres.

Mission expanded from pulpits to print.

3. Canonical Consolidation: Stability Within the Church

The promulgation of the **1917 Code of Canon Law** required all religious institutes to adapt their constitutions and governance structures. The Congregation responded by revising its internal legislation and issuing the **General Dispositions of 1918**. These adaptations clarified:

- Governance procedures
- Formation norms
- Community discipline
- Vow obligations

Canonical conformity strengthened ecclesial communion. The Congregation's identity as a fully recognised religious institute was firmly established.

Institutional solidity was now unmistakable.

4. Growth and Expansion Continue

Despite new administrative demands, missionary expansion did not cease. Foundations continued in Europe and Latin America. By 1922, the Congregation had become a well-structured international body, with clear provincial organisation and increasing apostolic diversity.

Growth was no longer spontaneous; it was strategic.

5. Martyrdom in Mexico: A Sign of Ongoing Risk

The period also included moments of persecution. In 1914, during the Mexican Revolution, **Brother Mariano González** was martyred. His death reminded the Congregation that missionary life remained exposed to violence and political hostility.

Institutional maturity did not eliminate vulnerability.

The martyrdom of Brother Mariano linked this phase to earlier persecutions and anticipated future trials. It reaffirmed that the Congregation's identity was not secured by canonical recognition alone, but by witness unto death.

6. Charismatic Insight: Institutional maturity must not extinguish missionary fire.

This phase reveals a delicate tension. The Congregation became more structured, more educated, more legally secure, more diversified in apostolates.

But structure carries a risk: comfort.

The early missionaries had lived in poverty, exile and instability. Now there were provinces, schools, parishes, publishing houses and canonical clarity.

The danger was subtle: mission could become administration; zeal could become routine; expansion could become maintenance.

The true test of maturity is whether structure serves mission or replaces it.

The Congregation's challenge in this period—and in every period thereafter—was to ensure that organisation remained at the service of proclamation.

Institutional stability must deepen apostolic audacity, not soften it.

7. Formation Reflection

This phase raises questions for personal and communal discernment.

1. Do I balance structure and zeal in my own life? Do I hide behind organisation, or does my organisation enable mission?
2. Is my apostolate creative and responsive to current needs, or has it become repetitive and mechanical?
3. Do I allow responsibilities—administrative, academic, pastoral—to nourish my missionary identity, or to dilute it?

Maturity in vocation is not the disappearance of fire; it is fire disciplined by structure.

The second expansion teaches that growth must remain evangelical, and that missionary communities must continually purify their motivations lest stability replace urgency.

The Congregation consolidated its foundations—but it had to remember why it was founded.

PHASE V: VIGIL OF TRAGEDY AND MARTYRDOM (1922–1939)

1. A Period of Remarkable Growth

The years between 1922 and 1939 were marked by significant institutional expansion and missionary vitality. By 1935, the Congregation had reached 2,433 professed members distributed across 204 houses. This numerical growth reflected not only vocational increase but also geographic diversification and apostolic consolidation.

The Congregation had matured structurally, intellectually and pastorally. Formation houses were stable. Provinces were organised. Apostolates were diversified. There was visible confidence and momentum. From an external perspective, it appeared to be a period of flourishing and promise.

Yet beneath this surface stability, social and political tensions in Spain were intensifying. The anti-clerical climate that had marked earlier decades was re-emerging with renewed aggression. The Church was again becoming a target of ideological hostility.

Growth was approaching a crucible.

2. Expanding Horizons: The China Mission (1928)

In 1928, the Congregation opened a mission in China. This represented a bold step into East Asia and signalled the Congregation's growing missionary universality. Unlike earlier missions primarily serving immigrant communities, this was direct evangelisation among non-Christian populations. The China mission demanded:

- Cultural adaptation
- Linguistic immersion
- Resilience in isolation
- Deep apostolic commitment

Missionaries entered unfamiliar religious and philosophical landscapes. They had to embody both fidelity to their charism and openness to cultural complexity. This expansion demonstrated that the Congregation's missionary horizon was truly catholic—embracing continents beyond its European roots.

3. Beatification of the Founder (1934)

The beatification of Anthony Mary Claret in 1934 marked a moment of ecclesial affirmation and spiritual encouragement. It publicly recognised the holiness of the Founder and confirmed the evangelical authenticity of his charism.

This event strengthened internal identity. It provided clarity of origin and deepened confidence in the Congregation's spiritual patrimony. The building of the Temple in Rome further expressed this consolidation of identity and presence at the heart of the Church.

Ironically, just as the Founder was officially honoured, the Congregation was approaching one of the most devastating trials in its history.

4. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939): The Night of Martyrdom

When the Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936, the Congregation became one of its primary victims. Anti-clerical violence targeted religious communities. Houses were confiscated. Missionaries were arrested, imprisoned, and executed.

During these years, 271 Claretians were martyred.

Among them were priests, brothers and students. The youngest was only 16 years old. Many were in formation houses. In Barbastro alone, 51 young missionaries were killed, leaving behind written testimonies expressing forgiveness, fidelity and joy in suffering.

The martyrdoms were not the result of political militancy but of religious identity. They were killed because they were religious missionaries.

The Congregation was decapitated in some regions. Entire communities disappeared. Houses fell silent.

Yet what seemed like annihilation became testimony.

5. Later Ecclesial Recognition

The Church later recognised the heroism of these martyrs through successive beatifications:

- 1992
- 2013
- 2017

These beatifications did not create their witness; they confirmed it. The Church discerned in their deaths the unmistakable sign of fidelity to Christ and to their missionary vocation.

The martyrs of this phase became a permanent reference point for Claretian identity. Their blood became a foundational memory.

6. Charismatic Insight: Martyrdom confirms authenticity.

This phase reveals a decisive truth: authenticity is tested under hostility.

Institutional growth and ecclesial recognition are important, but they are not the ultimate verification of a charism. The ultimate test is fidelity under persecution.

The Congregation did not seek martyrdom. It did not provoke conflict. It simply remained faithful to its identity. When confronted with violence, it did not renounce its vocation.

Martyrdom stripped away every external support—buildings, organisation, social recognition—and revealed the inner core: adherence to Christ and missionary commitment.

In this sense, martyrdom is not an interruption of history; it is its purification. It confirms that the charism is not sustained by convenience but by conviction.

Where there is no willingness to lose everything, there is no radical discipleship.

7. Formation Reflection

This phase confronts us with sobering questions.

1. What does martyrdom availability mean today? It may not mean literal execution, but it always involves radical fidelity.
2. Am I prepared to lose reputation, comfort, influence or security for the sake of the Gospel?
3. Would I remain faithful under hostility—social ridicule, cultural marginalisation, institutional pressure?
4. Do I cultivate an interior life strong enough to sustain fidelity if external supports collapse?

The martyrs were not extraordinary heroes detached from formation; they were young missionaries shaped by prayer, community and charism. Their readiness was not improvised; it was formed.

Martyrdom availability begins long before persecution. It begins in daily fidelity, in hidden sacrifices, in interior detachment.

This phase reminds us that missionary identity is ultimately cruciform. Growth is important. Expansion is necessary. But authenticity is sealed in witness. The vigil of tragedy became the dawn of testimony.

PHASE VI: FIRST CENTENARY TO VATICAN II (1939–1962)

1. Rebuilding After Devastation

The period from 1939 to 1962 opened in the shadow of two immense traumas: the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the Second World War (1939–1945). The Congregation emerged wounded—especially in Spain—after losing hundreds of missionaries and suffering the destruction or confiscation of many houses, churches and formation centres. The immediate task was not expansion but survival and reconstruction: recovering buildings, reorganising provinces, restarting formation, and restoring communal life.

The General Government actively encouraged vocational rebuilding. A significant sign was the circular letter on “**The Missionary Vocation**” (1938), which urged provinces to promote vocations and create dedicated vocation promoters. Alongside institutional rebuilding, there was also a careful effort to recover the remains of martyrs and honour them with dignified memorials. Memory and mission were held together: the Congregation rebuilt not only structures but identity.

At the same time, the Second World War disrupted communications, caused isolation (1939–1945), and led to serious losses and destruction particularly in German and Polish regions. The German vice-province was “practically destroyed”. Yet even amid this global instability, the Congregation gradually regained momentum.

2. A Surge of Vocations and Apostolic Confidence (1940–1960)

In some ways, the war years were followed by two decades of remarkable vocational growth. The period 1940–1960 is explicitly described as one of significant increase in personnel. This growth was supported by renewed organisational stability and by the consolidation of apostolic initiatives, especially in publishing, formation, and specialised ecclesial services.

Publishing and communications were reorganised. In 1940, journals and the publishing house that had been dispersed during the war were once again concentrated in Madrid-Buen Suceso, and the magazine **El Misionero** was moved there. This was not merely logistical—it symbolised a return to the Founder’s intuition that the apostolate of the Word must use every available medium.

At the same time, the Congregation developed significant ecclesial service initiatives. In 1944, the magazine **Vida Religiosa** began publication, oriented especially toward religious life, and later became an influential instrument for renewal far beyond Spain. In 1939, an **Institutum Juridicum** was founded in Rome to promote canon law at the highest level, giving institutional form to a Claretian expertise already present. This period reveals the Congregation’s growing role in the wider Church: not only missionaries in the field, but contributors to theological, canonical and ecclesial renewal.

A further sign of this Marian and ecclesial engagement was the strengthening of Mariological scholarship. In 1940, the Spanish Mariological Society was founded, leading to Mariological Weeks and publications such as *Marian Studies* and later **Ephemerides Mariologicae**. The Congregation’s Cordimarian identity was not only devotional but intellectually cultivated.

3. A Centennial Crowned by Canonisation (1950)

The First Centenary of the Congregation (1849–1949) was celebrated with great solemnity, in a climate described as optimistic, even bordering on triumphalism. This culminated in a decisive ecclesial event: **the canonisation of St. Anthony Mary Claret by Pius XII on 7 May 1950**.

Canonisation was more than honour; it was confirmation. The Founder’s charism—once contested, misunderstood, and slandered—was now officially placed before the whole Church as a

reliable path of holiness. This moment strengthened Congregational confidence and stimulated major projects and new foundations. After the canonisation, ambitious initiatives were launched:

- construction of the new **General Curia**
- interprovincial theological college in Rome (**Claretianum**)
- interprovincial theological college in Salamanca

Not all projects endured long-term, but they expressed a strong desire to consolidate formation, scholarship and international coordination.

4. New Foundations and Missionary Expansion

While rebuilding continued, new missionary openings accelerated. A significant shift was the expansion beyond Spain into multiple continents. New missions and presences included:

- **Philippines (1947)**, later spreading to Zamboanga and Basilan, and linked with expansion into Japan and other regions
- Renewed strengthening of missions after expulsion from China (final expulsion in 1952)
- In **1953**, first Claretians arrived in **Canada**, and the United States was divided into East and West provinces
- Foundations in **Nicaragua (1960)**, and renewed presence in Puerto Rico
- Additional presences mentioned in this period include Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, and the Netherlands (though the Netherlands mission lasted only until 1970)

By the eve of the centenary, the Congregation had **240 houses** spread widely: 97 in Europe, 124 in America, 11 in Africa, and 8 in Asia. This distribution is important because it shows an emerging internationalisation even before Vatican II.

5. Signs of Ecclesial Prestige and Responsibility

The post-centenary era also brought visible ecclesial recognition. In 1959, **Arcadio María Larraona** was created cardinal—the first cardinal of the Congregation. This symbolised a growing Claretian contribution at the heart of Church governance and theological development.

At the same time, the Congregation invested heavily in formation structures: Claretianum in Rome (inaugurated 1959, later closed as a college in 1969) and the Salamanca theological college (opened 1960, closed 1971). Even when these projects changed form, they reflected an aspiration: to form missionaries capable of serving the Church intellectually and pastorally.

The period also saw formal developments in identity and collaboration. The 16th General Chapter (1961) confirmed the use of the adjective “Claretians,” established the Claretian Secretariat, initiated Claretian Collaborators, and drafted a Letter of Brotherhood for the Claretian family. These steps signalled a broader ecclesial and charismatic family awareness.

6. Toward the Peak (1966) and the Threshold of Vatican II

Although this phase ends at 1962, it points toward a numerical apex shortly afterward. In 1966, the Congregation reached its highest number of professed members: **3,607 missionaries**. This peak frame the period 1939–1962 as a long ascent—rebuilding turned into growth, growth turned into expansion, and expansion turned into confidence.

Yet such moments carry danger. Numerical strength can tempt a congregation to equate growth with holiness, expansion with fidelity, and institutional prestige with evangelical authenticity. The next phase—Vatican II—would soon call the Congregation to deeper renewal, purification, and return to sources.

7. Charismatic Insight: Growth requires discernment lest triumphalism replace humility.

This phase shows how the Congregation moved from ruins to rebuilding, from trauma to expansion, from persecution to ecclesial recognition. These are real graces, but they must be interpreted spiritually. Growth is not automatically a sign of maturity. It can produce complacency, institutional self-satisfaction, and the illusion that mission is secure.

The Congregation's challenge in this period was to ensure that expansion remained evangelical and that projects, prestige, and numbers did not replace simplicity, prayer, and missionary urgency. When success becomes an identity, charism becomes vulnerable. True growth deepens humility.

The Founder's canonisation is especially instructive here: it invites gratitude, but also fidelity. The canonised Founder does not permit the Congregation to "settle." He calls it to burn.

8. Formation Reflection

1. Does success make us complacent? Do we begin to seek stability more than availability, reputation more than witness, institutional pride more than evangelical poverty?
2. How do we safeguard missionary authenticity in expansion? Do our structures still serve mission, or do they become ends in themselves? Does our apostolate still carry urgency, or has it become routine?

This phase teaches that rebuilding and growth are gifts—but gifts must be purified by discernment. The measure of Claretian maturity is not how large we become, but how faithfully we remain missionary: humble, apostolic, and ready to be sent wherever the Word is most needed.

PHASE VII: VATICAN II & CONCILIAR RENEWAL (1962–1986)

1. Entering the Conciliar Moment

The period from 1962 to 1986 marks one of the most decisive transformations in the history of the Congregation. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was not merely an external ecclesial event; it profoundly affected religious life, theology, pastoral methods, ecclesial self-understanding, and missionary practice.

Nine Claretians participated in the Council as bishops, experts, or collaborators. Their presence symbolized the Congregation's integration into the broader ecclesial discernment underway. The Council called religious institutes to return to their founding charism and adapt to the "signs of the times" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 2).

For the Congregation, this meant a radical question: What does it mean to be Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a rapidly changing world?

The pre-conciliar model—strong institutional structure, numerous vocations, established apostolates—could no longer be assumed as stable. The Council demanded both *ressourcement* (return to sources) and *aggiornamento* (updating).

2. The "Chapter of Renewal" (1967)

The XVII General Chapter (1967), often called the "Chapter of Renewal," was the longest in the Congregation's history. It represented an intense moment of discernment. The Congregation confronted:

- Cultural secularisation
- The crisis of religious life in Europe
- Declining vocations in traditional provinces
- New theological currents
- Emerging social justice concerns

The Chapter did not seek superficial reform. It sought charismatic re-centering. Questions were raised about:

- Community life
- Evangelical counsels
- Apostolic priorities
- Governance
- Formation models

The process was demanding and sometimes tension-filled. Renewal requires conflict because it questions habits and inherited assumptions.

3. Constitutional Renewal

One of the most visible fruits of conciliar renewal was the drafting of new Constitutions.

- **1973:** First conciliar Constitutions approved *ad experimentum*
- **1986:** Definitive text approved by the Holy See

These Constitutions were not cosmetic revisions. They re-articulated identity around key themes:

- Missionary community
- Primacy of the Word
- Marian identity
- Evangelical counsels lived apostolically
- Ecclesial communion
- Ongoing formation

They reflected a more biblical, ecclesiological and missionary theology, deeply shaped by Vatican II's vision of Church as People of God and universal sacrament of salvation.

The **Directory** was also renewed to complement the new constitutional framework. Structures were simplified. Language became more evangelical and less juridical.

This was not abandonment of tradition. It was re-rooting.

4. Decentralisation and Structural Adaptation

The post-conciliar period emphasized subsidiarity and participation. Provinces were granted greater responsibility. Decision-making processes became more consultative. Governance moved toward shared discernment rather than centralized control.

A major development was the creation and strengthening of **Interprovincial Conferences**. These conferences allowed provinces within geographical regions to collaborate in mission, formation, and planning. The Congregation increasingly understood itself as a networked missionary body rather than a collection of isolated provinces.

Decentralisation aimed at flexibility. The world was changing rapidly—politically, culturally, economically—and missionary responses required contextual sensitivity.

5. Mission Reorientation

The Council's emphasis on evangelization, dialogue with modernity, and option for the poor deeply influenced Claretian self-understanding. The Congregation moved from a primarily sacramental-parochial model in some areas toward:

- Justice and peace initiatives
- Biblical apostolate
- Social communications

- Missionary presence in marginal contexts
- Interreligious and intercultural engagement

This reorientation was not uniform. Some regions adapted quickly; others struggled. Tensions arose between older pastoral models and emerging prophetic approaches.

The Congregation began to rediscover the Founder not as a static icon but as a missionary reformer and man of the Word.

6. Decline and Redistribution

This period also witnessed a significant numerical decline in Europe and North America. Vocations decreased sharply in traditional heartlands. Many left religious life. Houses were closed or merged.

Simultaneously, vocations began rising in Asia and Africa. The demographic centre of gravity gradually shifted southward.

This was not merely numerical change; it was cultural transformation. The Congregation was becoming intercultural in a new way. European dominance receded. Asian and African voices grew stronger in governance and mission. The Congregation had to learn:

- Intercultural community life
- Shared leadership across continents
- Re-reading charism beyond European categories

Renewal was not only theological; it was demographic and geopolitical.

7. Between Tension and Grace

The years between 1962 and 1986 were marked by intense discernment, experimentation, and sometimes confusion. Some experienced loss; others experienced liberation. The Congregation moved through instability toward a renewed equilibrium.

The definitive approval of the Constitutions in 1986 symbolized closure of one phase and consolidation of renewal. The Congregation emerged smaller in some regions but more globally conscious and mission-focused.

Renewal had cost comfort—but it had deepened identity.

8. Charismatic Insight: Creative fidelity: return to sources without returning to the past.

Vatican II did not call the Congregation to nostalgia. It called it to authenticity. Creative fidelity means neither rigid preservation nor reckless innovation. It means:

- Returning to the Founder's missionary spirit
- Reinterpreting it in new contexts
- Letting go of forms that no longer serve mission
- Preserving the core that defines identity

Renewal is painful because it asks what must die so that charism may live.

The Congregation learned that fidelity is dynamic. Stability without renewal becomes stagnation; renewal without roots becomes fragmentation. Creative fidelity holds both together.

9. Formation Reflection

This phase challenges each missionary.

1. Am I open to renewal, or do I cling to familiar forms? When change occurs in community or apostolate, do I interpret it as threat or as invitation?

2. Do I resist structural adaptation because it unsettles my security? Or do I discern whether the Spirit is leading toward deeper authenticity?

Renewal is not a historical event of the 1960s; it is a permanent vocation. Every generation must re-appropriate charism.

The conciliar period teaches that missionary identity must remain supple, attentive to the Spirit, and courageous enough to reform itself for the sake of the Gospel.

The Congregation survived persecution in earlier phases. In this phase, it had to survive change. Both require faith.

PHASE VIII: GLOBAL SOUTH EXPANSION & NEW HORIZONS (1988–2024)

1. A Shift in the Centre of Gravity

The period from the late 1980s to the present marks a profound transformation in the geographical and cultural composition of the Congregation. While earlier phases were predominantly shaped by European expansion and later by transatlantic growth, this phase witnesses a decisive shift toward Asia and Africa. New missions were established or consolidated in:

- **India** (rapid vocational growth and new provinces)
- **Nigeria**
- **Korea**
- **Indonesia**
- **Kenya**
- **Ghana**
- **Tanzania**
- **Malaysia**
- **South Sudan**
- **Zimbabwe**
- **Madagascar**

These foundations were not marginal extensions; they gradually became demographic and missionary centres of vitality. Vocations increased significantly in India and several African countries, while many European provinces continued to experience decline.

The Congregation's face was changing.

Languages, liturgical styles, cultural expressions of fraternity, and pastoral approaches diversified. The missionary body was no longer primarily Eurocentric; it became increasingly intercultural, with leadership emerging from Asia and Africa.

What exile had begun in the 19th century, demographic redistribution completed in the 21st.

2. From International to Intercultural

Earlier expansion had created an international Congregation. This phase required becoming an **intercultural** Congregation.

Internationality means coexistence of different nationalities. Interculturality demands mutual transformation.

Communities increasingly included members from multiple continents. Formation houses brought together young missionaries from different languages and traditions. Governance required cross-cultural sensitivity. This shift demanded:

- Deeper dialogue
- Patience with differences
- New formation models
- Humility in leadership

The Congregation began to recognise that charism transcends culture while always being embodied in culture.

3. Missionary Reorientation: Prophetic and Evangelizing Priorities

Alongside geographic expansion, the Congregation articulated renewed missionary emphases through successive General Chapters. Major initiatives included:

La Fragua (Forge): A spiritual renewal program inspired by the “Forge of Reus” in the Founder’s life. It sought interior transformation through Word-centred prayer, communal reflection, and missionary reawakening. La Fragua emphasized personal conversion as the basis of structural renewal.

Claretian Family Meetings: These gatherings fostered communion among all branches of the Claretian Family—religious men and women, secular institutes, lay associates. The Congregation deepened its understanding of charism as shared gift rather than exclusive possession. Mission was increasingly seen as collaborative.

Servants of the Word: This chapter reaffirmed the Congregation’s foundational identity as ministers of the Word. It highlighted biblical animation of pastoral life, theological reflection, and preaching. The Word was re-centred as the heart of missionary identity.

In Prophetic Mission: This chapter orientation stressed justice, peace, integrity of creation, and solidarity with the poor. It responded to global inequalities, ecological crises, and social fragmentation. Mission was not only sacramental and educational; it became explicitly prophetic.

Men Who Burn with Charity: Drawing from the Founder’s description of a “man on fire,” this theme emphasized zeal, apostolic passion, and radical availability. It invited missionaries to recover interior fervour in an age of distraction.

Missionarii Sumus: We are Missionaries. This expression reaffirmed that all members—priests, brothers, students—share equal missionary dignity. Identity is not clerical but apostolic.

Rooted in Christ, Audacious in Mission: Recent chapter orientations have stressed contemplative grounding and apostolic courage. Rootedness prevents activism; boldness prevents stagnation.

4. Structural and Demographic Realities

While the Congregation expanded in Asia and Africa, several provinces in Europe and North America were restructured, merged, or reorganized. Houses closed; new delegation models were implemented.

Leadership increasingly reflected global diversity. The election of Superiors General from non-European contexts symbolized this transition.

The Congregation became numerically smaller than its 1966 peak, but culturally broader. This period demanded realism:

- Managing decline without discouragement
- Encouraging growth without triumphalism
- Integrating generational differences
- Responding to digital culture and globalization

Mission fields also diversified:

- Urban peripheries
- Migrant communities

- Interreligious contexts
- Digital evangelization
- Ecological advocacy

The missionary horizon expanded beyond geography into cultural and existential frontiers.

5. The XXVI General Chapter (2021) and the 175th Anniversary (2024)

The XXVI General Chapter (2021) reaffirmed missionary identity amid global challenges such as secularization, polarization, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preparing for the **175th anniversary (2024)** invites the Congregation to read its history as grace and responsibility. Anniversary is not nostalgia; it is recommitment.

The Congregation stands today not as a European missionary body expanded outward, but as a global, intercultural missionary family seeking deeper unity and renewed zeal.

6. Charismatic Insight: The Congregation changes colour, but not identity.

This phase teaches a decisive lesson: charism transcends ethnicity and geography.

The cultural “colour” of the Congregation has shifted. Liturgies sound different. Leadership accents have changed. Mission contexts vary widely. But identity remains:

- Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
- Missionaries of the Word
- Apostolic community
- Prophetic presence

From Eurocentric roots, the Congregation has become an intercultural missionary body. This is not dilution; it is catholicity.

Authentic charism is not tied to one continent. It adapts without losing its core.

7. Formation Reflection

This phase confronts contemporary formees with urgent questions.

1. Do I embrace interculturality as grace, or do I resist it subtly? Am I willing to learn from cultures different from mine?
2. Is my Claretian identity deeper than my nationality? When cultural tensions arise in community, do I interpret them as threat or as invitation to maturity?
3. Am I prepared to serve in contexts radically different from my upbringing?

Intercultural missionary life requires humility, patience, and spiritual depth. It demands that identity be rooted in Christ rather than culture.

The Congregation’s future depends not only on numbers, but on the capacity to live communion across difference.

The global south expansion is not merely demographic; it is a spiritual test: can we be truly catholic?

The 175-year journey reveals that the Spirit continues to move. The Congregation changes colour, but the fire must remain the same.

FINAL FORMATIVE SYNTHESIS

A Charism in Motion (1849–2024)

From 1849 to 2024, the history of the Congregation unfolds not as a simple chronological sequence but as a spiritual journey shaped by grace, crisis, discernment and missionary courage. Each phase reveals not only events but a deeper pedagogical movement of the Spirit.

The Congregation was **born in crisis**. It emerged in 19th-century Spain amid secularisation, suppression of religious life, and ecclesial scarcity. It did not arise from abundance or institutional power, but from pastoral urgency. Charism was conceived not in comfort but in necessity. The Founder and his first companions responded to a wounded Church and a spiritually neglected people. From the beginning, mission was not optional; it was existential.

It was then **tested in exile**. Political upheaval expelled the missionaries from their homeland. Suppression threatened extinction. Yet exile expanded vision. What seemed like loss became opportunity. Displacement loosened territorial attachment and universalised the charism. The Congregation discovered that its identity did not depend on geography but on availability.

It was **confirmed in martyrdom**. The blood of hundreds of Claretians during the Spanish Civil War sealed the authenticity of the charism. Martyrdom revealed that missionary identity endures when structures collapse. The Congregation's deepest confirmation did not come from canonical approval or numerical growth, but from fidelity under persecution. Martyrdom purified intention and anchored identity in Christ crucified.

It **expanded through missionary daring**. From Spain to Africa, Latin America, Asia and beyond, the Congregation crossed borders repeatedly. Oceans were crossed not for prestige but for proclamation. Tropical diseases, poverty and hardship did not extinguish zeal. Expansion was not mere strategy; it was evangelical impulse.

It was **renewed by Vatican II**. The conciliar period demanded deep self-examination. Structures were reformed. Constitutions were rewritten. Mission priorities were re-evaluated. The Congregation faced decline in some regions and rediscovered its prophetic vocation. Renewal required courage to let go of outdated forms while returning to the founding fire. It learned that fidelity is dynamic, not static.

It was **globalised in the South**. In recent decades, the demographic centre shifted toward Asia and Africa. The Congregation became more visibly intercultural. New languages, cultures and leadership emerged. The charism did not lose identity; it changed colour. Universality became experiential, not theoretical. Missionary community had to learn communion across difference.

It remains **constantly reforming**. History shows that no phase is final. Crisis returns in new forms—secularisation, cultural fragmentation, digital transformation, ecological crisis. The Congregation cannot rely on inherited models. It must continually re-appropriate its charism. Reform is not a betrayal of tradition; it is fidelity to it.

Taken together, these movements reveal a deeper truth: history is not a museum of achievements. It is a spiritual itinerary. It is charism unfolding in time, shaped by the Spirit through human fragility.

History, therefore, is not memory alone. It is vocation in motion.

Each generation receives a living inheritance. The past is not simply admired; it is entrusted. The present is not simply endured; it is inhabited. The future is not predicted; it is awaited in trust.

The Congregation's journey can be summarized in a simple yet profound triad:

The past is entrusted to mercy.

The present to love.

The future to Providence.

To entrust the past to mercy is to accept wounds, failures and limitations without shame, seeing in them the action of grace.

To entrust the present to love is to live mission with charity, fraternity and zeal.

To entrust the future to Providence is to relinquish control while remaining courageous.

For formation, this synthesis invites a decisive question: Will we continue this story with the same fire?

The Congregation has crossed 175 years not because it avoided crisis, but because it embraced mission. Its history is not finished. It is written daily in the fidelity, creativity and generosity of its missionaries.

The Spirit who began this work in 1849 continues to act. The charism remains alive, not as nostalgia, but as invitation.