

**Formation Session for Provincial Superiors
October 7-12, 2019**

Inaugural Address: 07.09.2019

Words of Welcome

Good morning to you all. I deem it a joyous privilege to extend a very hearty welcome to each one of you to Rome for this Formation Session of the Provincial Superiors, on behalf of the members of the Central Administration and all the Brothers, Sisters and the lay collaborators of the *Casa Generalizia*. It is our earnest hope that each one of you will have a pleasant sojourn here in Rome and a fruitful and enriching experience during the Sessions, so that you can make a significant contribution to the Congregation, as animators and administrators of your Provinces.

I wish to say a special word of welcome to Brother Ronald Brissette, from the Province of Canada, who has agreed to be our Secretary during this Session, along with Bro. Sébastien Ndabunganiye from the Generalate Community, and who has in advance prepared all the prayers for our sessions. I also welcome Bro. Alain Henrion from the Province of France, and Bro. Michel Mendy of the Province of Senegal, who have generously consented to be our Interpreters. I wish to acknowledge with thanks the availability of Bros. Georges Le Vern and Marcel Chapeleau to be the Translators during the session.

Words of Thanks

Before I proceed further with an Inaugural Message, I wish to, in the first place, thank the Organisers of this morning's Opening Session, for the very meaningful, symbolic and inspiring prayer service, with the theme "Humanizing Education", pointing our thoughts towards the importance of our education mission. As Pope Francis rightly mentioned in his Message for the Launch of the Educational Alliance on 12th September, in view of the proposed global meet on 14th May 2020, *"Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity"*. Thank you, Brothers Pratap Reddy and T. K. James, also for reminding us of the Feast of the Holy Rosary. My thanks also go to Bros. Jean-Marie Thior and Michael Mathew and their teams for creating the beautiful ambience in this Hall, and for briefing the participants about the dynamics of the whole Formation Session and giving us in detail the general guidelines to make your stay pleasant and your session fruitful, without losing time in looking for persons and places!

Let me also take this opportunity to thank each one of you, dear Provincial Superiors, for having said “Yes” to take up this important responsibility of being the leaders of your entities. I do realise that it was not easy for those who said “Yes” for the first time, because they may not have fully known what they are getting into. I guess, it was not any easier for those who said “Yes” for the second time, and even a third time for Bro. Claude Marsaud, and for Bro. René Delorme, a return after being the Superior General for 12 years, because they already knew what it entails! We, the members of the Central Administration, wish you success in your mission and promise our prayerful good wishes and fraternal support.

Objectives of the Formation Session

As you are aware, the Formation Session for the Provincial Superiors is intended to be a moment of fraternal encounter and mutual understanding for the leaders of our Provinces, and of course, for reminding ourselves of certain basic attitudes and essential skills that the leaders should be equipped with in order to be more effective and more efficient in discharging our twin responsibilities of animation and administration of our different entities. Therefore several topics will be studied and reflected upon in order to achieve these objectives.

As I indicated in my latter letter of 12th September, the members of the Central Administration are grateful to each one of you for sending your responses to the questions on your expectations, specific topics to be dealt with, specific issues and concerns to be addressed and your suggestions and proposals. They will surely be taken into account, when we make our presentations or interventions.

The Call of 32nd General Chapter

The primary objective of our Session is, of course, to remind ourselves, the leaders of our Congregation, the call we have received from the 32nd General Chapter, and to make the Message and the Orientations of this Chapter a lived out reality in our Congregation, at the personal level, the Community level and at the level of the Provinces.

As it was stated on more occasions than one, the theme of the 32nd General Chapter is a progressive development of the themes of the 29th, 30th and 31st General Chapters as there exists a close co-relation between these 4 themes:

- 29th GC invited us to go further in our commitment for a Just Society towards the Kingdom.
- 30th GC was indeed a clarion call to return to the essentials of our life as consecrated persons, by striking a balance between the contemplative and apostolic dimensions of our lives.

- 31st GC reminded us that as consecrated persons, who are called “*to be brothers of Christ and brothers for a greater brotherhood in the Church*” (VC 60), we need to become “Authentic Leaders” with a mission to build “a Greater Brotherhood”.

As I mentioned during the Concluding Message of the 32nd General Chapter, several Brothers had expressed their immense happiness as soon as they heard about the theme of the 32nd General chapter: “*Fraternal Living and the Communitarian Dimension of the Montfortian Mission*”, for its relevance to meet the main challenges that we are confronted with in living our life and mission more meaningfully in the 21st century, reading the signs of the times. As Pope Francis beautifully put it in his message to the delegates of the 32nd General Chapter during the privileged Private Audience on 27th April 2018, “The theme chosen – Fraternal life and the community dimension in the Montfortian mission – is intended to situate your mission in our world marked by individualism and globalization, consumerism, efficiency and appearance, to try to be present in it as ‘inflamed’ souls, inspired by the Spirit and living in Wisdom”.

The Logo and the Motto of the 32nd General Chapter further amplified the theme and gave us the needed tools to face these challenges. The motto “Love with your heart and hands” calls us to build our fraternity with our Brothers and all those who share our Montfortian Gabrielite Mission with love, compassion and joy, and to express our love and compassion by concrete actions in our mission. The Logo with all its meaningful symbols, express our Christian identity, our Montfortian roots, the international character of our Congregation and finally reaffirming the powerful statement of Pope Francis, “*Where there are religious, there is joy*”, and that all our struggles in our life and mission as consecrated persons can be overcome with God’s grace. As Pope reminded us during the Private Audience last April, “*In your communities or in apostolic workgroups, fraternity must encourage each person to be available to the Spirit by forgetting himself. Moving from a communal life to a fraternal life can make the daily journey easier and more joyful... I invite you to form welcoming communities, in which it is beautiful to live, expressing to young people, in particular, the joy of following Christ and responding to His call.*”

It’s a Time of Grace

It is significant that our Formation Session for the Provincial Superiors is a “time of grace” on more counts than one. The whole month of October 2019 has been declared as the ***Extraordinary Mission Month*** by Pope Francis. This is to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Pope Benedict XV’s Encyclical ***Maximum Illud*** (the first Encyclical on Church’s missionary role), and to keep alive the universal mission conscience of the Church, with the theme “***Baptised and sent: the Church of Christ on mission in the world***”.

As followers of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, it is very significant that our Formation Session begins on the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary. It is evident from all the biographers of Montfort

that throughout his life the Rosary was one of the most common expressions of Louis Marie's Marian devotion. As Montfort wrote at the beginning of his ministry, "For myself, I know of no better way of establishing the kingdom of God, Eternal Wisdom, than to unite vocal and mental prayer by saying the holy Rosary and meditating on its fifteen mysteries" (LEW 193).

It is significant also that we had the joy of celebrating the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron of Religious Brothers, celebrated as the Brotherhood Day in India, which is very much in tune with the themes of our 31st and 32nd General Chapters.

On 9th we will have once again an opportunity to participate in the General Audience of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has made a tremendous impact in the world, through his new form of leadership, which we could define as "*evangelical*", revealing a Church that is free, poor and humble, close to the people and that bears witness to God's mercy.

On 11th we celebrate the feast of St. John XXIII, a person who had a relatively short five year reign as Pope, but who by convening the Second Vatican Council, ushered in the most significant changes in the Catholic Church in centuries.

Finally, on 13th some of us will have the privilege of participating in the canonization of 5 new saints of the Church:

1. Cardinal Newman of England, a great theologian and spiritual guide of the 20th century;
2. Sr. Mariam Theresia of India, the Foundress of the Holy Family Sisters, who dedicated her whole life for the Family Ministry and for nursing the sick;
3. Sr. Giuseppina of Italy, an ardent defender of the orphans;
4. Marguerite Bays of Switzerland, a lay person who was known as a humble friend of souls; and
5. Sr. Dulce Lopez Pontes from Brazil, who dedicated her whole life in sheltering the homeless.

Let us unite ourselves with the Universal Church on these occasions, and as leaders of our Congregation recommit ourselves to participate wholeheartedly in the triple common mission of the Church, namely, Evangelization, Witnessing and Human Promotion, through our varied ministries in our Provinces.

Conclusion

As we reflect and share during the coming days on our role as leaders of our entities, as animators and administrators of our Provinces, let us keep in mind the memorable words of Mahatma Gandhi of India, *“Be the change you want to see”*, and commit ourselves to lead by example, to strive to make our communities, and our Provinces as points of reference to our students, youth and adults (*cf. 31 GC 6*). It may not be out of place for me to quote here an exhortation given by St. Paul in his letter to Timothy: *“Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap”* (Timothy 3:1-3).

As the document *Starting Afresh from Christ* beautifully puts it, *“In rediscovering the meaning and quality of consecrated life, a fundamental task is that of the Superiors, a demanding, and at times, a difficult task... A Superior cannot renounce his mission of animation, of brotherly support, of proposing, of listening and of dialogue”* (No. 14). The same sentiments are echoed in Pope Francis’ Address to the newly consecrated Bishops recently: *“Our mission is to be for the Church and for the world the ‘sacraments’ of God’s closeness to God, closeness to God’s people, closeness to the Good Samaritan, closeness to the poor, and closeness to your priests, becoming Apostles of listening”!*

Brothers, I renew my hearty welcome to each and every one of you for this Formation Session for the Provincial Superiors, and wish you a pleasant stay in Rome, and a session that will bear abundant and lasting fruits... Thank you and God bless.

Br. John Kallarackal
Superior General