

COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

XVIII General Chapter

Comboni missionary disciples called to live the joy of the Gospel in today's world

Thematic Synthesis for Discernment

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFJN	Africa Faith and Justice Network
BF	Basic Formation
CA	<i>Chapter Acts</i>
CBC	Comboni Brothers Centre
CCE	Comboni Course for the Elderly
CCOF	Central Commission for Ongoing Formation
CLM	Comboni Lay Missionaries
CMS	Comboni Missionary Sisters
CRC	Comboni Renewal Course
CSM	Comboni Secular Missionaries
CYOF	Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation
EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>
EV	Evangelization
GC	General Council
GD	General Direction
JPIC	Justice & Peace & Integrity of Creation
MA	Missionary animation
OF	Ongoing Formation
PS	Provincial Superior
RL	<i>Rule of Life</i>
TCF	Total Common Fund
VP	Vocations Promotion
W	Daniel Comboni's <i>Writings</i>

Dear Capitulars,

A warm welcome to each and every one of you from the members of the Pre-Capitular Commission.

It is a grace for each one of us to be here on behalf of the whole Institute to celebrate our XVIII General Chapter.

The work of this Chapter does not start now. We are here to reap the fruits of a long journey of preparation which started with the Inter-Chapter Assembly of 2012. This continued in the month of February 2014 with the meeting of the newly elected Superiors of Circumscriptions at the beginning of their mandate. It was in these two meetings that among other things, the directive emerged of engaging the help of a facilitator with the purpose of having someone to accompany us in this process.

On June 27, 2014, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, the General Council sent the letter of convocation of the XVIII General Chapter to all the members of the Institute and announced the inspirational theme: ***Comboni missionary disciples called to live the joy of the Gospel in today's world***, sending also *Instruments for reflection and participation in the XVIII General Chapter*.

Guided by the challenges of the mission today and in respect for and continuity with the last General Chapter, the General Council invited us to prepare this XVIII Chapter starting with the four dimensions that shape our lives as Comboni Missionaries. These dimensions – **Persons, Spirituality, Mission and Reorganization** – were already identified in the guide to the implementation of the 2009 General Chapter.

Each Circumscription has therefore elected its delegates to the Chapter while, thanks to the questionnaire sent, reflection began first at personal, at community and, later, at circumscription level. The Continental assemblies tried to put together all this work done by the Circumscriptions respecting the particularities of each local reality and reflection. A significant number of confreres, personally or as groups, sent us their reflections and proposals reminding us that the Chapter is not just about Capitulars but all the members of the Institute.

The working instrument that you have in your hands is thus a result of this long journey of preparation to the Chapter. In a synthesis, it collects all contributions coming from individuals and groups of confreres, Circumscriptions, continental assemblies and from the General Direction.

For each dimension we present a working guideline divided into four parts:

- Reality and challenges;
- Lights and shadows of the last six years;
- Open questions for the Chapter discernment;
- Some emerging proposals.

A list of other proposals is attached to this working document.

In this way, this thematic synthesis has the objective of providing the Chapter with some data and stimuli to accompany the work of the study groups and to facilitate discernment, with no intention of substituting the Chapter's work or influencing its outcome.

We wish you good discernment to make decisions that help the Institute continue and be a Cenacle of apostles that lives and proclaims and bears witness to the joy of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Pre-Capitular Commission

INSPIRATIONAL THEME

Comboni missionary disciples called to live the joy of the Gospel in today's world

1. The biblical icon of the Good Shepherd at the centre of our charism can enlighten well the inspirational theme of the Chapter.

The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. [...] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away (Jn 10: 3.10-12).

2. **Disciples:** We are disciples of Jesus, called to carry on his project. The first characteristic of the disciple is the personal encounter with the Good Shepherd to listen to his voice and to savour his love. Jesus calls the disciples by name: there is a relationship of familiarity and intimate knowledge with each one of us.

3. **Missionary:** To which mission is Jesus calling us today? To promote a full life for all, aware that we operate in a world in which powerful forces carry forward a project of death and destruction: *What is called for is an evangelization capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values (EG 74).*

4. **Comboni:** Saint Daniel Comboni is our charismatic reference and calls us to act as a small cenacle of apostles (W 2648), always ready to update our charism in the face of new missionary challenges: *Through their consecration the missionaries fulfill in a new way their faithfulness to the original inspiration of the Founder. Their communion with the Lord and among themselves, and their dedication to the work of evangelization are deepened and enriched by the individual and community practice of the evangelical counsels (RL 1, 3)..*

5. **Called to live:** The same characteristics of the Good/Beautiful Shepherd: familiarity with the sheep, readiness to give his life. *To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people (EG 268).*

6. **The joy of the Gospel.** A life devoted to Jesus and his people is a beautiful life, a life that gives joy. As Comboni said, *the happiest day in my life will be the one on which I will be able to give my life for you* (W 3159).

7. Indeed, it is a joy with a high cost: to defend the full life of the sheep we must confront wolves and thieves. The Comboni martyrs remind us of this. In particular, we remember the words of Fr Ezekiel Ramin, killed exactly 30 years ago in Brazil: *Today, there are many marginalized, forgotten, excluded from human life. How can we remain indifferent before this human pain? I am happy when I can help, when I receive Christ, when I spend my day well. I am happy when I truly live.* We missionaries live truly when we love people with passion and struggle in order that all men and women can live a full life, a life that is more human.

8. **In today's world:** it is our theological place, dominated by the self-centred hedonism of paganism (EG 193) and by the globalization of indifference, but in which we are called to sow and cultivate the seeds of the globalization of fraternity and love.

9. It is a multicultural world which expects from us a joyful witness that is not only possible but also beautiful and gives joy, as we live fraternity among persons of different continents and cultures. We have a wealth and a great joy to announce to the world of which perhaps we are not always fully aware.

10. We Comboni missionary disciples are grateful for the gift of having been evangelized by the persons and from the people with whom we have journeyed together. We will continue to work as pilgrims in communion with the Church (EG 130), to fulfil Jesus' mission today: *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10).

PERSONS

On entering the Institute, the missionary accepts in faith all its members as brothers given him by the Lord to realize the common missionary vocation together (RL 36, 4).

The Comboni missionary ideal that we wish to embody and propose is a person open and available to a journey of integral human and spiritual growth. [...] The Comboni missionary loves the local people and the local culture and knows how to live serenely and collaborate with others in a pluralistic and multicultural context. He is faithful in everyday things and maintains a simple life-style. He reads reality critically and evangelically, and is dedicated to the missionary service of the poorest, making common cause with them (cfr. RL 5) (CA '09, 78).

Reality and challenges

11. Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses that preceded us in the missionary service (Heb 12:1), we acknowledge that persons are the main wealth of the Institute. Our Founder's charism reached us thanks to their witness, generosity and availability to give their life for the good of the brothers. We recall among these Bishop Antonio Roveggio, Fr. Bernardo Sartori, Fr. Giuseppe Ambrosoli, Br. Giosuè dei Cas and Sr. Giuseppa Scandola.

12. We are called to live in the joy that flows from the encounter with the risen Christ through the Word and the relationship with the brothers and sisters we meet in our activities.

13. We recognize that our Institute is experiencing a turning point with regard to persons: the multiculturalism of confreres has grown tremendously and is an opportunity and a challenge for us. Each year the number of members is decreasing and we still have many commitments in the four continents. The Lord is still sending vocations, mostly African, but the continuing large number of confreres leaving the Institute tests us.

14. The elderly confreres are on the rise and many of them are sick, others are in particular situations due to wounds related to their personality, or due to the trials of community life or difficult experiences of mission.

15. Yet, the words of the Gospel resonate in our hearts: *But take heart! I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33) or those of Comboni: *I die but my work will not die*. We are therefore invited to witness with humility the beauty of our life.

16. We feel challenged to revisit our model of formation for mission, our lifestyle, the commitments we carry forward, and always to place the person and the message of the Lord at the centre of our existence.

17. To fulfill in the daily life of mission the personal life project, personal accompaniment and spiritual direction remain a challenge to take care of ourselves and of community relationships, learning also how to face conflicts.

18. A continuity between vocation promotion, basic formation and ongoing formation is necessary in order to live in an attitude of growth and ongoing discernment, and to be missionaries of the joy of the Gospel.

Lights and shadows of the last six years

19. In our Institute we have people who are well identified, generous and willing to give their lives for Christ and the mission. It is enough to think of the martyrs and of those who, in silence, spend their lives everyday in the various services entrusted to them.

20. The presence of confreres who are witnesses of the Risen Lord in the midst of the poor and marginalized is for us a blessing which reminds us of the reason for our choice and option of life. They are for us "existential parables", benchmarks in the various services we perform.

21. We also thank the Lord for the elderly and sick missionaries who bear the witness of serenity and missionary wisdom. They occupy an important place in our Circumscriptions. We are called to care for and be close to them, assuring them dignified living conditions, for them to continue to serve the mission wherever they are.

22. Thanks to the hard work of the last years, we realize the importance of OF. We want to give reason for our hope in the society and in the Church in which we live (1 Pt 3:15).

23. The moments that help us grow and evaluate our missionary life (CYOF, CRC, CCE, various courses, specializations ...) have been well received, despite some resistance, as an opportunity for creative fidelity in view of a more qualified service.

24. The *Code of Conduct* began to guide us as an expression of concern that the Institute must and needs to have in order to help its members to live in full the fidelity to their missionary vocation, through a radical and joyful self-giving to God and to the mission .

25. On the other hand, we often speak of the *Cenacle of Apostles* and of the need to carry out our mission as a community, but we find it hard to give up personal projects. There is a strong need for conversion to the Gospel values to give up our tendency of being protagonists.

26. We have not always been in solidarity with the poorest. At times, we have looked for our profit and interests, for fear of suffering or of being disturbed in our comfort.

27. Many things empty our lives or threaten our balance: routine, activism, misuse of goods, stress, burnout, difficulties in the area of affectivity, conflicts, various addictions...

28. The weakness of some confreres in one of these fields and behaviour inconsistent with our missionary vocation to consecrated life are the shadows that accompany us with their entourage of suffering for all, wounds and counter-witness.

Open Questions

29. In recent years we have made an assessment of **basic formation** in order to respond to the new challenges from society and the Church. Is it opportune to review our style of formation, our formation structures, the two years of missionary service? How can we cultivate in all our communities a vocational culture of joy? How can we ensure the welcoming of young people in open and flexible communities?

30. The cultural diversities in our Institute are a serious and urgent theme to deepen. How can **interculturality** be lived as value and prophecy for today's world, in an attitude of encounter, fraternity, understanding, respect and trust? How can we, in the whole Institute, build and enhance more our international communities?

31. Joy is the expression of intimacy with the Lord, of faith and spiritual life lived intensely and deeply. It is a gift of the Spirit present in us. What do we propose concretely that would help us **to come out of pessimism** and **prolonged sadness** that do not make us witnesses of the Gospel of joy? How can we structure our OF in order to prepare and accompany each confrere to confront these issues?

Some proposals received

32. To create a Secretariat of Human Resources for an effective programming of the activities and management of the personnel according to the needs of the Institute.

33. Provide clear guidance on the ongoing formation of major superiors and the GC, that they may be assisted by facilitators and experts and can cope with greater competence and professionalism with the challenges of their ministry.

34. Make a reflection on the concrete application of the *Code of Conduct*. Update it in the light of recent decisions of the Holy See; contextualize it in all Circumscriptions; identify people who can assist the Circumscription superiors in the instruction and implementation of the various necessary canonical practicalities.

35. To dedicate a year of reflection and OF to the theme of interculturality.

SPIRITUALITY

The personal encounter with Christ is the decisive moment of the missionary's vocation. Only after the discovery that he has been loved by Christ and conquered by him, is he able to leave everything and to stay with him. The missionary is enabled to follow Christ by continually reliving this encounter and by deepening his communion with the Lord (RL 21.1)

We want to be missionaries open to the action of God in us; missionaries who live meeting the Lord as disciples wholly consecrated to mission, called to live a deep affective and effective relationship with Jesus in order to be witnesses of his love, carrying hope to his people. We identify ourselves with Him, Word and Missionary of the Father, who gave his life for all. (CA '09, 22)

Reality and challenges

36. *Jesus summoned those whom he wanted to be with him and to send them (Mk 3:13-15).* The encounter with Jesus, through the charismatic gift lived by St. Daniel Comboni, makes us Comboni missionary disciples. A life in the Spirit that we live in different contexts and in four continents.

37. The XVII General Chapter singled out spirituality as one of the dimensions of life that needed particular attention. After six years, we have a positive perception of the progress made, although there is still need for growth.

38. We feel the need of a deep spirituality that heals us and makes us human, able to integrate our and others' humanity, with its limitations, frailty and inconsistencies. We know that what is human is not necessarily an obstacle to God's love for us.

39. We want to live an integrated spirituality that touches and inspires every dimension of our missionary life (person, community, mission, finances, government ...).

40. We are called to live an intimate relationship with God and to share it with those around us. To read life and history in the light of faith so that spirituality guides us towards a new lifestyle, a life of communion, made of evangelical choices.

Lights and shadows of the last six years

41. We grew in personal and community prayer. We used proposed means such as themes from the GD, documents of the Church, various anniversaries and celebrations, participation in courses, spiritual exercises...

42. Growth was also witnessed in the personal and community relationship with the Word of God. The *Rule of Life* was taken more into account. The wealth and strength of our charismatic heritage is well recognized (the Good Shepherd of the Pierced Heart, the Cross, the poorest and most abandoned ...). The relationship with the Founder and with the *Writings* has also been of importance.

43. Criteria for evaluating our spirituality are our passion for mission, closeness to people, spirit of self-giving and our feeling good about ourselves, which derive from the experience of God as a loving Father.

44. On the other hand, many of our personal and community problems (individualism, activism, bourgeois life, lack of belonging, inadequate lifestyles...) are effects of a poor spirituality. Other signs of a weak spirituality are lack of passion for mission, spirit of sacrifice and inability to be with people.

45. We look for sources of spirituality outside the Institute, we are neither persevering nor disciplined in spiritual life. In our judgments, we focus more on the negative and we do not see the good that God is doing in us and with us. We give more importance to doing, neglecting being and the relationship with the Lord and with others.

46. Sometimes we fall into a spiritual life made of devotions, rituals and lifeless formalisms. Some of us, then, do not yet have a clear idea about what is proper to the Comboni spirituality and as a consequence do not live it.

Open Questions

47. Spirituality consists in living daily the **encounter with the Lord**: in the Eucharist, listening to his Word, in personal prayer, regular spiritual direction, individual and community spiritual discernment, in dialogue and discussion with the community, listening to the reality around us, welcoming the cries of children and the poor, in communion with the local Church. How can we make sure that the **personal life project and the community project** will help us to achieve this goal?

48. **The Word of God** must be listened to, lived, celebrated and announced. How can we make sure that the Word is increasingly the source of personal and community life, to make us even more authentic small **Cenacles of Apostles** (W 2648), **fraternal communities, welcoming and outgoing?**

49. The heart of the apostolic spirituality is the **passion for Christ and his people** (EG 268). Which means can help us to live with passion today, where we are present, a spirituality that regains the joy of being Comboni missionary disciples?

50. The Institute's growing **interculturality** invites us to a **conversion** and a **profound communion** around our spiritual heritage. How can we update and inculturate the spirituality of the Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd in the traits of attention, tenderness, mutual love, mercy, solidarity and sharing?

Some proposals received

51. Create a commission for the revision of the *Rule of Life*. We propose a work of revision, involving Circumscriptions and communities, as it was done in the process of discernment for the *Ratio Missionis*.

52. That the General Chapter choose a theme, which makes reference to a central dimension of our life as Comboni Missionaries, for the next six years. The GC choose at the beginning of its mandate for every year an aspect that deepens the overall theme.

MISSION

Following Christ, the missionary becomes one with the people in their life, work and journey, sharing their lot (RL 60).

Mission implies being near to the people, making common cause with them, involving ourselves affectively and effectively in their lives (CA '09, 58.3).

Reality and Challenges

53. The world is characterized by the globalization of social inequalities, injustice and poverty, which the Pope has called *globalization of indifference* (EG 54): the others are no longer perceived as brothers and sisters in humanity, but as objects and discarded. Today's new forms of poverty do not exist only in the southern hemisphere as the whole planet seems to be an authentic mission land.

54. Several of our communities live in situations of war, political repression, social and environmental violence, religious intolerance, xenophobia or others, which accompany people who find themselves in conditions similar to those of slavery. Humanity is desperately searching for the meaning of life and justice with people often forced to leave their countries.

55. As Comboni Missionaries, we too are pilgrims in this search and we wonder how we can proclaim the joy of the Gospel in such contexts, in solidarity with the immigrants, promoting reconciliation and interreligious dialogue, rediscovering the mystical dimension and spirituality of relationships at all levels (interpersonal, social, environmental). The first field in which we are called to live this spirituality is that of the Comboni Family (MCCJ, CMS, CSM and LMC).

56. Pope Francis exhorts us to be an outgoing Church, committed against an economy that kills. The missionary project that he proposes to us is the "globalization of fraternity". This means putting at the centre what the world rejects: in God's plan, the stone rejected becomes the cornerstone (Mt 21:42).

Lights and shadows of the six-year period

57. As the GC points out, despite our fragility there are experiences of mission marked by determined efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, with its consequences of the struggle in the defence of justice and peace.

58. We have grown in the awareness of a new paradigm of mission that challenges us to reorganize the activities in the line of ministries (cf. *Institute of Social Ministry in Mission* and the various ministries in schools, universities, parishes, with refugees, displaced persons, migrants, accompaniment of HIV-AIDS victims, commitments in diocesan offices, interreligious dialogue, etc.).

59. Our commitment and consciousness of the spiritual and cultural wealth of discarded minorities has increased (especially Afros and Indios, Pygmies and nomadic pastoralists...): we are increasingly trying to approach them as subjects and agents of their own liberation and rebirth, so that they have greater confidence in their wealth and potentialities.

60. Our commitment to justice, peace and environmental protection as an intrinsic element of evangelization increased, in keeping with various courageous pronouncements of the local Churches, having as point of departure the Social Teaching of the Church.

61. Our presence in areas of conflict or war, in which we continue to make common cause with the people living there, is quite significant.

62. In many of our Circumscriptions, groups of CLM, with whom we collaborate in the mission, were born. The collaboration among Comboni media has also grown.

63. The growth of the local Churches has enabled us to hand over some commitments and to requalify our presences, taking on new ones.

64. On the other hand, *we have lost the clarity of theological objectives, clarity of places and methodologies. We struggle to break new ground. The preparation and specialization of personnel for the mission has also been lacking. The theme of insertion has not been taken up or deepened sufficiently and, practically, there were no new or significant experiences. We have worked on many open fields without focusing on priorities* (Report of the GC to the Chapter XVIII, n. 45).

65. We were not able to reshape a common plan for the Institute; few Circumscriptions have assumed an effective method of planning and monitoring. The difficulty of the reduction of strategic commitments has led in some cases to the risk of burnout of some confreres.

66. It is difficult to translate Pope Francis' exhortations into practical life, even though we regard them with great esteem.

Open Questions

67. To take up more strongly the **prophetic choice of Comboni for the poorest and most abandoned**. The proximity with the poor is for us a source of joy, and must transmit joy. How can we accomplish the invitation of the GC to assume as the only – or at least the first – priority, the mission among the poorest of today?

68. To give value, firstly among ourselves, to **interculturality, hospitality, and friendliness towards differences**. The world is immensely in need of this witness. How can we turn this wealth into a missionary presence at the service of intercultural and interreligious dialogue?

69. To rediscover, in the new global mission, **the joy and commitment to follow the people in their search for meaning, justice and life**. In this research, what is our specific contribution as Comboni Missionaries? Which attitudes do we need to cultivate?

70. To rediscover the **Comboni family** (MCCJ, CMS, CSM and CLM) as a **charismatic place** without which we could not grasp wholly the prophetic intuition of St. Daniel Comboni. Could this family be the hermeneutical place from which we can reconsider our being missionaries?

Some proposals received

71. To develop a reflection at theological-charismatic level and to take practical decisions, identifying the places of the Comboni mission today. To give continuity and re-contextualize the process of reflection on the *Ratio Missionis*.

72. To juxtapose territorial organization with a more ministerial approach, forming working groups on specific issues between Circumscriptions and as Comboni family, defined as "Interprovincial Ministries".

73. To resume the practice of specializations to meet the new challenges of mission. The CCOF should be tasked with the process of a comprehensive plan for the specializations in the next six years.

74. To deepen our interaction with CLM, binding them to us at a deeper level than the purely professional one. To be open to the collaboration of the laity in some sectors where they are more competent than us.

75. The last Chapter invited all Circumscriptions to consolidate insertion in frontline situations. To revive this initiative for the next six years.

76. To move towards smaller structures that are easy to manage. To make available our underused big structures to host immigrants and refugees.

77. To ensure greater stability and continuity of confreres working in particular or specific areas or ministries.

78. To invest more resources in interreligious dialogue (Islam, traditional religions...) and ecumenism through specializations and requalification of our presence.

79. To reconfirm the choice of the TCF that requires from us all a conversion to the mission as a community, beyond individual projects.

80. To commit ourselves to promote pastoral activities and lifestyles that are sustainable in the long term. To promote local self-reliance projects in tune with our charism and with the documents of the General Secretariat for Finance and the local Churches.

81. The General and Circumscription bursars verify with ever-greater attention and with the advice of experts, the ethics of our financial investments, promoting ethical banks and avoiding the use of banks or funds that invest in weapons or other types of businesses that contradict our values and our positions.

82. To network better, valuing the alliances that we have already achieved (Vivat International, AFJN and Red Eclesial Panamazónica).

83. Internationalizing the news desks of the Comboni media.

For the Brothers

84. Reiterate the importance of the Comboni Projects of Human Promotion, to evangelize in areas that are not strictly parochial.

85. Invest resources in promoting the brother's vocation.

86. For the mission in Africa, prepare brothers especially in the fields of education and health.
87. All brothers should get a degree before reaching the CBC.
88. Maintain a formative presence – perhaps with a new form – in Latin America (Bogotá CBC).
89. That in each continent, there is a brother who is an animator and reference person for brothers.

REORGANIZATION

The Institute on its journey of faith in the world and for the world is intimately connected with humanity and its history. Consequently, while the missionaries live and interpret events in the light of the Gospel, they remain open to new questions and situations, and revise their attitudes, institutions and methods and seek new solutions (RL 16).

Continents should continue the process towards clustering begun at the Intercapitular of 2006 and should work out concrete proposals for the Intercapitular of 2012. The GC should accompany and supervise the journey of the continents. All progress made should be evaluated at the Intercapitular, passing on then to the action stage. In 2013 when the new Circumscriptions have been formed, new PSs would be elected. By 1st January 2014, the Institute's new configuration will become effective (CA'09 priority 10).

Reality and challenges

90. The significant decline of personnel and resources is a reality known by everyone in our Institute. In the period 2001-2014, we have gone from 1,808 to 1,582 confreres. Because of the economic crisis that is gripping the world since 2008, we also notice a substantial decrease of offerings for the mission, especially in poorer countries.

91. The challenges of the mission are changing and they seem to require from us more and more energy. It is now impossible to keep all the commitments that we have, in a context of decline of confreres and economic means at our disposal.

92. This reduction makes us aware that the reorganization of the Institute is especially necessary in order to offer a quality service to the mission. The biggest challenge is to live this situation not as a sign of decline, but as an experience of evangelical weakness (*kenosis*) and an appeal of the Spirit for an essential and creative requalification, in the sign of joy.

Lights and shadows of the six-year period

93. In the past six years all Circumscriptions have been engaged in a reflection on the reorganization of the Institute. Some concrete steps were taken towards the merging of two or more Circumscriptions in

one. However, the realities and traditions of some of our Circumscriptions and the socio-political situation of others seem not to favour a generalized process of unification.

94. To a large extent, it was concluded that the time for the merging of several Circumscriptions is premature. There is a widespread resistance towards merging by many confreres, probably due to lack of knowledge of the reality lived by the Institute in this historic moment. Some consider the unification more as a survival strategy of our Institute than a requalification towards a better service to the mission.

95. Some Circumscriptions, however, have been able to overcome these obstacles, fears and difficulties and were merged (Northeast and South Brazil, Egypt and Khartoum). In other Circumscriptions, there has been an increase of cooperation in several fields (postulancy and interprovincial novitiates, collaboration between magazines and other joint projects), waiting for the time to ripen for a real and proper merging.

96. An effort – though perhaps not sufficient– was made towards the internal requalification of Circumscriptions. In total, we closed 109 community and opened 87 (22 communities less).

97. Continentality has been developed through regular meetings between Superiors of Circumscriptions, continental assemblies and a greater cooperation between Circumscriptions. The recent publication of the *Vadamecum of Continentality* reflects the experience so far, trying to revive and develop it further.

98. The emphasis on reflection on the merging of Circumscriptions overshadowed a reflection on other important issues such as-structures and new forms of government in the Institute.

Open Questions

99. **On the journey towards merging:** Is our main concern the **survival** of the Institute or a **qualified service** to the mission? What are the fears to be confronted?

100. **Decentralization of government structures:** different Circumscriptions urge recovering in depth a reflection on the governing structures of the Institute, which takes into account the functioning of the GD and the General Secretariats. It is a topic that needs to be addressed at least on three fronts:

- a) How to streamline the structures of the GD and reduce the number of its secretariats and offices?
- b) How to find more agile forms of government, delegating more to local realities, avoiding excessive centralization?

- c) The experience of continentality has been positive: how can it be strengthened and made more effective?

101. The **reorganization** of the Institute can also be effected through local **requalification**:

- a) How to reorganize internally our Circumscriptions?
- b) Is it also possible to reorganize the Institute qualifying ministerial services that go beyond the boundaries of Circumscriptions?

Some proposals received

102. With regard to the requalification and a better choice of our fields of work, the Chapter should give a clear mandate to the GC or to a special commission. It is not enough to make recommendations.

103. That the Chapter studies the issue of government and takes a decision that falls within its competence to avoid deferring everything to the next Chapter. The Chapter could be suspended, create an *ad hoc* commission to study, in a short period, the question and then reconvene for a final decision on well-defined proposals.

104. To unify the secretariats and offices of EV, MA, LCM and JPIC in one Secretariat for Mission or, if it is preferred not to change the RL, to appoint one Secretary of Mission for these sectors.

105. To appoint assistants general to the activities so far undertaken by the Secretaries of MA and EV and the office of JPIC, even for greater subsidiarity within the GD; enhance the articulation role of the Secretary General.

106. To internationalize all Circumscriptions, particularly those in Europe, to strengthen inter-cultural dynamics.

107. To return to the founder's inspiration, asking to transform the Institute into a mixed one, that is not clerical.

Formation

108. To make basic formation, from the beginning to the end, a concern of the whole Institute and not only of the province that is home to the formation structure.

109. To reduce the formation houses and concentrate particularly the scholasticates (one in English, one in French, one in Italian, one in Spanish, one in Portuguese and one CBC), strengthening the formation teams with more qualified formators.

110. To open a formative community (a sort of inserted scholasticate) in the Arab world.