

## Let us set out to become people "branded" for the mission

**Dear confreres,**

We greet you fraternally in the Lord who is among us, nourishes us and accompanies us in our life as missionary disciples.

With this insert, we of the General Secretariat for Formation would like to begin the journey that the *Guide to the implementation of the XIX General Chapter* proposes to us for these years.

As regards Ongoing Formation (FP), the *Guide* proposes that between 2023-2025 we make "a careful study of the Chapter Acts, in view of the elaboration of the six-year plans" and that we deepen our spirituality, identity and fraternal life in community, initiating paths that become assimilated practices of our lifestyle and mission.

We want the implementation of the Chapter to be a truly synodal journey, lived with the involvement of all the confreres, according to the various interdependent levels (local, continental and General Administration) and coordinated by the General Secretariat for Formation.

With this first letter, we would like to introduce you more specifically to the vision and journey of these years, so that it will be at once a common journey and also contextualised. Through these pages of the *Familia Comboniana*, we will regularly present you with aids for reflection and experiences, to enrich and stimulate us in reflection and sharing.

To achieve this goal, we invite you to share with us and among us the reflections and experiences made in your circumscriptions, helping each other to re-appropriate the soul of our missionary life. We invite you to send this material to the following address: [albertosilvamccj@gmail.com](mailto:albertosilvamccj@gmail.com).

### **This is the path we would like to follow in these years**

What we propose is not really a scheme, but a kind of framework, a sort of "pathway" that indicates a route to follow and on which to build a living body of reflection and lived and shared experiences, at various levels, especially the personal level and that of individual communities. We thought it would be useful to insert the themes harmoniously because spirituality is and becomes the deep soul of our identity as missionary disciples and our identity shapes our spirituality, making it specific. We will then see, according to the indications of the Chapter, how to nourish this specific spirituality and identity: with the Word received through *Lectio Divina*, and prayer, listening to Comboni and our *tradition*. And we will

reap various fruits, especially a better awareness of our identity and fraternal life in community for the mission.

### **A) Our Comboni spirituality and identity**

1. Spirituality becomes the soul of our life in all its dimensions, it is the power of Jesus who consecrates us with the fire of his Spirit, as he himself is consecrated by this fire, and makes us people *branded* for the mission. Comboni with his testimony as a man possessed by “a single passion” (*Writings* 6983) tells us that this is our soul and our identity: possessed by Christ (“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 *Cor.* 1:16).
2. Spirituality is substantially the personal experience of a profound and marked encounter with the person of the Lord-Jesus. It is a constant encounter, lived in contemplation and configuration, which becomes following and sharing his destiny; assuming the *wisdom of the Cross*.
3. This spirituality-consecration gives us our identity and becomes a specifically missionary and Comboni spirituality, expressed in an exemplary way in *RoL* 3:
  - The Comboni missionary contemplates and assumes the fundamental, founding attitudes of the Heart of Jesus
  - And *understands* evangelisation as integral liberation
  - to live his missionary life and service in the style of fraternal communion.
4. Thus, spirituality becomes a path of continual purification, conversion and growth, of struggle with temptations, making us capable of taking on the challenges of the mission, like a hidden stone.
5. Spirituality regenerates and recreates the person of the Comboni Missionary, building in him attitudes of joy, consolation, active resistance and *parrhesia*... The gift of the Spirit is the *power* that Jesus gives to his disciples by calling them to himself, so that they may become capable of living the mission.
6. This spirituality generates in the missionary “the spiritual pleasure of being a people” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 268-274). It enables us to touch the Lord's wounds in human misery because love for people “favours the full encounter with God” (*ib.* 272); it is a *spiritual force* that “opens wide our hearts to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts” (*ib.*), while closure to the other is a “slow suicide” (*ib.*). This is Comboni's experience: making common cause.

## **B) Nourish the life of the Spirit: the Word and prayer**

1. The Word-Wisdom of God “forms prophets and friends of God” (*Wis* 7:27). But the Word is not a thing: it nourishes the life of the Spirit in the person of the missionary because the Word is the Son of God himself, it is the Word made flesh, it is God who reveals himself and gives himself in his Word. In becoming flesh, he speaks with words and deeds, Jesus teaches by speaking and doing. In his Word, God dialogues with man “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (*Ex* 33:11), as he had done with Moses. By welcoming the Word made flesh, man receives not so much a doctrine and a law, but the Grace and the faithful and true love (truth) that generates him as a son in the Son.
2. We are called to welcome God who speaks:
  - To hearts that seek, listen, converse, question, are surprised and let themselves be led;
  - in life with its joys and hopes, disappointments, questions, daily challenges and daily activities;
  - in the poor and their history.
3. *Lectio Divina* is the art (not really a method even if it has a dimension of method) for prayerful dialogue with the Lord in his Word. This dialogue is personal with God and shared with the brothers/sisters of the community. The main objective of the *Lectio* is not the knowledge of the Bible, but that the believer himself becomes the Word of God. We will try to rediscover in the Psalms the *typical place* of this prayerful dialogue.
4. In this way, we experience the dynamic that makes us become the living Word of God: the Word is proclaimed – listened to – celebrated – welcomed – actualised – lived ... in order to continue to be it is proclaimed – listened to – celebrated – welcomed – actualised – lived.
5. The spiritual life is nourished by the Word of God, accepted in prayer and rediscovered in life: some *tools* can help us to grow in spirituality: the personal life plan, the wise re-reading of our life, personal accompaniment, ...

## **C) Our spirituality and identity – Cenacle of apostles as a sacramental sign of the new humanity**

Our *fraternal life in community* is born and nourished in spirituality and we rediscover it as an integral part of our identity.

1. *Fraternal life in community* is the fruit of the Spirit who inhabits and animates the heart of the believing disciple. Whoever welcomes the word of the *kerygma* and believes lets his heart be pierced and enters into a dynamic of conversion, which is the logic of love without distinction of any kind; he passes from death to life and is made capable of loving his brother, he becomes an *active* member of a community of believers who deepen their faith, celebrate, share and bear witness. He puts to death envy, jealousy, lies, judgement, suspicions, rancour and prejudices, and *puts on* the sentiments of Christ: acceptance, service, self-giving, truth, solidarity, sharing, mercy...
2. The Comboni Missionary rediscovers *fraternal life in community* as an integral part of his charism: it is not good for a missionary to be left alone. He discovers and lives life as a “Cenacle of apostles”, with a lifestyle marked by fraternity, harmony and sharing.
3. The Comboni Missionary discovers that interculturality, which is a set of common feelings, attitudes and styles of life, tools and concrete choices, is part of our identity and makes our community a missionary witness of the new humanity according to God’s plan.
4. But we will also have to ask ourselves, looking at our experience: what are the *models* – sometimes unconscious and often mixed with each other – that animate and inspire our practice of common life? Ex: community-nest; community-hotel; community of observance; community of self-actualisation; community-enterprise; community-cenacle for the Kingdom...
5. We would also like to take up some tools for the animation of fraternal life in community. Because if it is true that community life is the fruit of life in the Spirit it is true that, according to the logic of the incarnation, it needs concrete tools, such as the community charter, the community council, fraternal sharing meetings and fraternal correction.

## **Conclusion**

*Rooted in Christ together with Comboni*, we hope that these will be years in which we nurture the quality of our life to become ever more fruitful witnesses in the mission.

Fraternally, we wish you a journey that bears much apostolic fruit.

Rome, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Secretariate of Formation