



Rome May 1st, 2025 - Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker

Dear Confreres,

GOING BEYOND

The General Council, after having written the two letters on economics and formation in our Institute, decided to write this third letter on mission. The goal is to help us to reflect on the current lights and shadows of our missionary activity after the 19th General Chapter.

Carrying out the Church's evangelizing mission - according to the charism of St. Daniel Comboni - is the aim of the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (RV 13). We are grateful to the Lord for the many signs of apostolic grace we have experienced in the past three years. For example, the witness of many missionaries willing to give their lives for the Gospel in many times difficult situations among the neediest peoples and human realities to be evangelized; or the making common cause with various suffering peoples in war, injustice and oppression. So too is the Institute's openness to the signs of the times, in the light of the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church, which invites us to go out to migrants, indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, to respond to their cry and to the cry of the earth, for example through the various centers inspired by the encyclical *Laudato si'* that are springing up in various circumscriptions. We feel that God's grace works through us when we experience the local Church calling and engaging us, such as through the call of Comboni bishops, or through the appreciation of the people we work with. We are grateful for the missionary outreach efforts of the Comboni media, devoted to prophetic information, to seeking the truth of our common humanity and sonship, to bearing witness to God's love for all humanity and creation, and to animating God's people in promoting the Kingdom.

Today more than ever, these signs of grace - and so many others not mentioned here - make us resonate with the invitation of the Holy Spirit, through the words of Pope Francis we received during the 19th General Chapter:

This motto should “make noise” in your heart: going beyond, going beyond, going beyond, always looking to the horizon because there is always a horizon; to go beyond. The spurring of the Holy Spirit is what makes us go out from ourselves, from our closure, from our self-referentiality, and it makes us go towards others, towards the peripheries, where the thirst for the Gospel is greatest. (...) Go, go, go! Go to the horizon, and may the Lord accompany you.

The 19th Chapter responded to this invitation by formulating a dream, which was expressed in these words:

We dream of a missionary style more inserted into the reality of the peoples we accompany toward the Kingdom, capable of responding to the cry of the Earth and of the impoverished. A missionary style that is also characterized by simpler lifestyles and structures within intercultural communities where we witness to fraternity, communion, social friendship and service to local Churches through specific pastoral care, ministerial collaboration and shared pathways (AC 2022, 28).

To realize this dream, we must **bring mission back to the center**, in relation to the various dimensions of the Institute's life. The economic dimension, particularly sustainability, must be seen in relation to the research for models of missionary presence and ministry, for lifestyles capable of closeness, compassion and tenderness toward the peoples we accompany. Indeed, our structures and models of sustaining our missionary service affect our relationship with the people and the local Church. Without forgetting that an obsessive preoccupation with our material sustenance would eventually divert our attention and energy from the service of evangelization. On the contrary, precisely the material need is an opportunity to involve ourselves at a deeper level in the challenge of evangelization in the global economy.

Fraternal life in community, with the witness of the conviviality of differences, is fundamental for a credible proclamation of Jesus Christ, for an authentically evangelical witness, which Pope Francis reminded us - during the 19th Chapter - we bear not “not so much as individual missionaries, «but as a community, and this entails not only care for your personal style, but also for your community style». The ministerial approach, through specific pastorals, collaboration and synodality, is essential for the requalification of our missionary service.

Even the issue of merging should be understood in the light of the ministerial approach: it is not a matter of a trivial geographical enlargement of circumscriptions, but of an approach aimed at giving greater weight to continental priorities and specific pastorals, with more substantial communities, aiming at a greater capacity for dialogue, confrontation, research, exchange and collaboration.

Bringing the mission back to the center also requires a significant contribution of formation, both ongoing and initial formation, to stimulate and nurture reflection and research on mission following Comboni's footsteps, the development of specific pastorals, and response to the signs of the times. We note that formation in ministeriality needs more attention and support as a crucial point in the journey of requalification.

Restoring the mission back at the center, no matter how obvious it may seem, is not a cheap commitment, for this demands a profound conversion from each of us. As *Evangelii gaudium* reminds us, going beyond means overcoming the temptation of self-preservation (EG 27), the comfort of rents of position, of an ordinary clerical-style pastoral ministry. An outgoing church is called to go beyond established patterns, with a missional, ministerial and synodal approach. In other words,

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities (EG 33).

We note, however, **that a concerning clerical trend is emerging** in various contexts, sometimes including formation. For example, we detect a concentration of our presence in traditional parishes and in a type of ordinary pastoral ministry more related to the past than to today's missionary challenges and social ministry according to the Comboni charism. In this way the role and space of the Comboni brothers is also reduced. This type of orientation contributes to other problematic aspects, such as:

- = the weak response to chapter guidelines and commitments on mission - for example, the assumption of Integral Ecology as the fundamental axis of our mission (AC 2022, 30), or the commitment to adhere to the *Laudato si'* Platform of Initiatives at all levels (AC 2022, 30.1).
- = the disproportion between commitments made and forces at hand, limiting the investment of personnel and their preparation according to continental priorities and related specific pastorals.
- = the tendency not to want to restart, to lose the impetus for mission *ad extra*.

Thus, on the one hand we are called **to make a discernment** in all circumscriptions and to go beyond customary adding new commitments to past ones, without the courage to make choices, which may be painful, but which, if they reflect God's will, also prove generative. On the other hand, we are invited to invest more circumscription staff in **specific pastorals** according to continental priorities. The process of requalification passes through these two points of reference.

In this regard, we give mandate to the General Secretariat of Mission to do a study to document what the reality of specific pastorals is on the ground. We need to know, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the situation of our commitments as an Institute on the front of these specific pastorals and then go even further through shared paths of research and reflection.

To place mission back at the center also means focusing on **overcoming “coloniality”**, i.e., that condition of the modern world built on racial, economic and cultural hierarchies created in colonial times and still operative today. St. Daniel Comboni anticipated this critical thinking: in the century when European colonialism thought to bring “civilization” to Africa, Comboni was dedicated to the regeneration of Africa with Africa, to build together the civilization of love. The magisterium of Pope Francis has much insisted on this point with the image of the polyhedron (EG 236), explaining that it «reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone».

This vision can only be understood by having in mind the eschatological dimension of the mission, which will be complete only at the end of time. As *Dilexit nos* reminds us, “*from the Heart of Jesus flow rivers of living water to heal the wounds we inflict on ourselves and to walk together toward a just, supportive and fraternal world, until we will celebrate together the banquet of the Kingdom: there will be the risen Christ who will harmonize all our differences with the light that flows from his open heart.*” (DN 220).

Then, to go beyond coloniality means, from the perspective of evangelization, to develop its character of **prophetic dialogue** in the Comboni missionary ministry and to promote the **inculturation** of the Gospel (EG 68-70; 116-126).

Summarizing, since the XVIII General Chapter (2015), we have made our own Pope Francis’ dream «of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation» (EG 27). And this means that «pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”» (EG 33). In conclusion, we wish to take up the

invitation that *Evangelii Gaudium* makes to us «to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities» (EG 33) and, above all, to let ourselves be carried away by the passion for evangelization, going out towards the geographical and existential peripheries.



The General Council