

From The Editor

This is the tenth and last issue of the Congregational magazine "Brothers FIC" produced by the General Council 2012-2018. 2018 is a chapter year for the FIC Congregation. In the provinces of Indonesia, Chile, Malawi, Ghana, the brothers held sessions of their provincial chapter which ended with the election of new leadership teams. In the Religious House Netherlands(RHN), they held a conference which resulted in the election of a Religious House Council. In August 2018, we had our 35th General Chapter in "Elisabeth Huize" Dennekamp, The Netherlands. It is a six-yearly event that brings together delegates from our provinces. In this issue we are glad to present to our beloved readers reports of the General and provincial chapters of our provinces including the conference of Religious House Netherlands.

Besides the resolutions adopted at the end, each chapter ended with the election of a new leadership team: at the General Council level and also in the Provinces and Religious House Netherlands. We are happy to provide our readers with a variety of photographs of these teams on the desks of the General Council and Provincial Event. We do hope that our readers will have an idea what happened in each of the provinces and Religious House and who the new leaders are. At the "Picture News" desk, we have provided photographs of the 35th General Chapter.

Since this issue is the last produced by the General Council 2012-2018, we present to you two articles written by Bro. Martin Handoko and Bro. Guido Sukarman who have completed their function as General Superior and Vicar respectively. In these, they have given their experiences, impressions, wishes and expectations for the General Council 2018-2024 and the Congregation as a whole. We appreciate very much their presence and contributions in the council for the past years of their service. They have given us an example of how to serve the Congregation in terms of leadership, spiritual life, being truly human, Christian and as Brothers FIC.

The rest of articles are the profile of our newly elected General Superior 2018-2024, Bro. Augustine Kubdaar, the impressions of the General Chapter by Bro. Martin Dariyo and Bro. Seregeous Dery, an article on Mary Immaculate, and News from the Vatican.

To end this introduction we would like to quote what Bro. Martin expressed in his article namely, "As religious Brothers, we should continue to improve the quality of our lives on all aspects: physical, spiritual, social, psychological and professional. Moreover to be witnesses of God's love we need to be close to the people, especially those in need: the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the unloved." According to us this is also applicable to all of us, Christians. Let we try to be witnesses of God's love to the people around us anytime and anywhere.

Lastly we would like to greet you all warmly, "Happy Christmas 2018 and Happy New Year 2019".



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General Chapter 2018: Flashback and Follow-up

With a sense of gratitude we are looking back on a very significant happening of the year 2018, namely the 35th General Chapter of the Congregation. This six-yearly event took place at "Huize Elisabeth" in Denekamp, The Netherlands, from 5 to 25 August 2018, and brought together 30 chapter members from all provinces, The Religious House Netherlands, members of the General Council and the General Treasurer. After three weeks of deliberations the Chapter came out with a new team of General Council and about 20 resolutions.

In the evaluation that took place on the last day of the Chapter, all members expressed their feelings of satisfaction with the proceedings and the outcome of the Chapter. Looking back at what we have gone through, we all realized that the three weeks of encounter was for us a real moment of grace, where we had the opportunity to have a real encounter with ourselves, with fellow Brothers, and surely with God the One who calls us. We were also very happy with the atmosphere of brotherhood and mutual respect we established throughout the Chapter.

I am fully aware that the Chapter is not meant to solve all problems of the Congregation. However I am convinced that throughout the Chapter we have mutually given and also received enrichment in many aspects of our religious life. Next to this, the resolutions of the Chapter give a clear direction towards the policy and the way we are moving forward as a Congregation, at least for the coming six years. Some resolutions can be carried out immediately, but others might need to be digested further by the General Council. In this case the General Council is still to make a detailed plan in terms of the way and timeframe of implementing those resolutions.

Among the urgent resolutions to be carried out by the General Council is The FIC Leadership Workshop (resolution 8A). Based on the past experiences, the leadership workshops for newly elected General and Provincial Councils in the past have become a very effective way of building a common vision and direction for the FIC leadership

in the Congregation. This kind of workshop generates the spirit of unity and solidarity, and above all the willingness to function as a solid team for a common goal.

To the newly elected General and Provincial Councils we wish them well and success with their function as leaders of the Provinces/Congregation. Let us all continue to remember that we are expected to inspire and stimulate, to further mutual unity and cooperation, to listen to what is alive among the brothers, etc (cf. Const. art. 50). In short we are to follow the example of Jesus "who came to serve and not to be served" (Mt.20:28). Servant leadership therefore is most likely the best type of leadership we need to develop as leaders of the Congregation.

Br. Martinus Handoko

Br. Martinus Handoko



GENERAL SUPERIOR



In the just ended FIC General Chapter 2018, it became very clear that a deeply felt experience or awareness of God's presence in our lives is the source of our religious life. Therefore the quality of our life as religious requires more attention than the number of members we have.

Based on the theme of the Chapter "We consecrate ourselves to be witnesses of God's Love", we tried to explore ways to make our apostolate a more practical way of expressing our love for people.

To be oriented toward God also means to grow as a contemplative in action, to grow as a person who more and more joins with God (in contemplation) and also loves the neighbour (in action). A closer look at the life of Christ, the apostles, and the saints of active apostolic life, suggests that there is an inseparable bond between the spiritual and the apostolic dimensions of Christian living. Vincent de Paul told the Sisters of Charity to "leave God for God. If the poor arrive even during prayer, the Daughter of Charity should feel free to leave the conversation that she is having with the Lord in prayer in order to converse with the Lord in the person of the poor". Even our Founder, Louis Ruten, was an incredibly active man, but he was also a man of deep prayer.

A person imbued with an apostolic spirit views prayer as a means, an instrument to enable the individual to more discerningly and fully serve the neighbour. As indicated in "The Apostolate of the Laity", Pope Paul VI said "The greatest temptation for brothers is that we become so caught up in our apostolic work that we lose contact with the energizing vision, the driving force that animates those works. Of course our apostolate is important. We must love God "with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms, but our apostolate must flow from our experience of God, of his Spirit, bursting out of the very heart of human existence". In other words, our spirituality must be fully alive through works of mercy.

REFLECTION

Our Witnessing through Prayer

Bro. Raphael Besigrinee, FIC

If the Spirit is fully alive in us, the apostolic activities will surely be a striking sign in the world that the Kingdom of God is at hand. As Chittister says, "The religious who does not attend to the spiritual life does not have one. The religious whose life is bound up in the spiritual quest never knows failure and never expects success, never knows success and never gives in to failure. It is finding God in what we do that is the measure of success. It is walking with God wherever we go that makes failure impossible".

Apart from prayer, our apostolic life has a number of supporting systems which are closely linked. Apart from it being spiritually rooted, apostolate should be done in the spirit of Jesus who is the source of it and entrenched in the spirit of our Founders. To be deeply infused with an apostolic spirit, we first of all need to have the personal experience of being sent to be a witness of God's love among God's people. Therefore prayer, in whatever form is "the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." It renews the strength of the apostle on his missionary journey of apostolate. The active worker who has no interior life does something else and not apostolate. Prayer and action should go hand in hand. Divorced from action, prayer tends to be an escape route.

Raphael Besigrinee, member of General Council 2012-2018 and 2018-2024



Twelve Years Serving the Congregation

By Bro. Martin Handoko, FIC



“After 12 years of experience as General Superior I can say that I am very grateful for all the experiences I ever had, especially the experience of being closer to my fellow brothers and being of service to my beloved Congregation.”

Personally I am very happy that the Chapter has been able to elect a new leadership of the Congregation in accordance with the expectations of the brothers. It gives me a feeling of trust and hope for the good direction and continuation of the Congregation in the years to come. Having these positive feelings, I can go back now to my home province with a sense of peace and joy.

Personal background

To be honest I have never dreamt of becoming a General Superior of the FIC Congregation. When I entered the Congregation I had only a very simple intention, namely to be a good person and to have a meaningful life. This is most probably due to my simple family background. I come from a very simple family. My father and mother were both farmers and practically illiterate. The source of our daily living was mainly from the rice field and the small garden around our house. It was not easy for my parents to get the financial means to enable us, their three children, to go to school.

I entered into the formation stage of the FIC brothers in 1970, and was allowed to make my first profession in 1972. So I have been living religious life for 46 years now. The apostolate assigned to me was mostly in the field of education and leadership. For many years I was a teacher in several Teacher Training colleges and Vocational Schools, after which for a long time I was involved in the management team of Pangudi Luhur School

There is a season for everything" says the book of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3. "A time for giving birth, a time for dying; a time for planting, and a time for uprooting what has been planted, etc". The same pattern is the journey of one's life, including that of myself. There is a time to start and there is a time to conclude; there is a time to come, and there is a time to go.

I have just completed my function as General Superior of the FIC Congregation after 12 years of service. It started when I was elected General Superior by the General Chapter 2006 in Wahlwiller, The Netherlands, and continued when I was re-elected in the General Chapter 2012 in Salatiga, Indonesia. Based on art. 128 of our Constitutions a General Superior is elected by the General Chapter for a period of six years and can be re-elected only once for a consecutive six year term of office. Accordingly my term of office ended in the year 2018. Although the recent General Chapter elected a new General Superior in August 2018, the sitting General Council was asked to remain in office till the official handing over on 21 November 2018.



Audience with Pope Francis in November 2016

Foundation. After finishing my Doctorate degree in Counseling Psychology, I was employed by the Soegijapranata Catholic University of Semarang, Indonesia, until the time when I was elected General Superior in 2006 and had to move to Maastricht, The Netherlands.

Becoming the General Superior

Becoming the General Superior was a very new experience in my life. I did not have any experience in this kind of leadership. I had never been a Provincial Superior, neither was I ever a member of the General Council, nor even a member of a Provincial Council. But all of a sudden I had to function as the leader of the Congregation. It was somehow a drastic change in my life in terms of my apostolate, but I tried to accept this as a new and enriching experience in my life as a religious. In the beginning I was wondering whether I would be able to function as General Superior as expected by the General Chapter. Despite this doubt I was not afraid of functioning as a leader, since I would not work alone but within a team and with many other support staff. The most important thing for me was to work in collaboration with other people, and above all continue to believe that God who calls and chose

me will also guide me until the end.

After 12 years of experience as General Superior I can say that I am very grateful for all the experiences I ever had, especially the experience of being closer to my fellow brothers and being of service to my beloved Congregation. Despite all limitations, the brothers accepted me and were very supportive to me, so that I was able to function as expected by the Chapter. The good cooperation between the Provincial Councils and the General Council is one factor that contributed to the success of my task. At the end of the term of office of this past General Council we can say that we have been able to carry out all resolutions made by the Chapter 2018. This gives me a feeling of fulfillment and surely of satisfaction.

Basic Principles and Challenges

In many conferences and meetings with brothers I kept on saying that religious life is in fact a spiritual journey. Unless we continue to nurture our spiritual lives, we will lose our direction. Spiritual life is the essence and the core of our being religious. Other aspects of religious life, such as community life and apostolate, will be growing prosperously when our

spiritual life is taken care of properly. On the other hand the community life and apostolate also enrich our spiritual life.

Another important point to remember is that religious life is a matter of quality of life, rather than quantity. Surely the quantity of human resources is important and has direct impact on the amount of work we can perform. It is said in art. 30 of our Constitutions that "What we do is important, yet of even greater worth is who we are". The function of religious life in this present time is to be voice and prophet to the world, to be witness of God's love, and not just a labour force.

To enhance the quality of our lives as mentioned above, we need to have a good program on continuing formation. "Not only during our formative years, but throughout our lives we should be open to development, formation, and deepening the meaning of our lives. Our vocation requires us to go on training ourselves for our task, to keep abreast of developments in the church and society, to have a ready eye to the signs of the times, and to continue developing our spiritual growth" (Const. art. 115).

Still one more basic principle which I would like to emphasize is to work with all people of good will. It is not possible for us to develop our apostolate without working together with other people of good will. We are limited in human, financial, and many other resources. What we mean by people of good will includes all stake holders of our apostolate and the society at large. In this modern world the success of our mission mostly depends on our skill of building networks and working together with people, both individuals and groups.

Looking forward

Despite all challenges we are facing, we have to see the future full of hope and with open heart and mind, since we believe that we live this way of life because of His calling; He is God of Love. We keep on believing that God is saying something through the signs of the times. Believing in God we see our common daily life in a new light; believing in God we experience His love and faithfulness in all circumstances of our common daily existence; finally believing in God we shall often experience darkness, but even then His love is like a cloak around us (cf. Const. art. 55).

In connection with the emphasis on quality of life of

our being religious, we should continue to improve the quality of our lives on all aspects: physical, spiritual, social, psychological and professional. Moreover to be witnesses of God's love we need to be close to the people, especially those in need: the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the unloved.

Looking at the situation of the Congregation over the past years, we realize that the number of brothers has been decreasing steadily due to the fact that the incoming candidates are far less than the number of deceased brothers and withdrawals. Responding to this reality, we have to continue introducing our Congregation to the people, especially the youth, most of all through the witness we make, by being and doing good for the people, by being happy and loving personalities, by siding with the people in need, and by living the spirit of brotherhood wholeheartedly.

Conclusion

After 12 years of service as General Superior of the Congregation I can look back on all the past experiences with gratitude. Despite the fact that I was not able to fully develop my career as a scientist and lecturer in the University, I have enjoyed more than what I could imagine. I enjoyed so much support and love from my fellow brothers and many more people whom I met. My feeling of fulfillment was complete when we were able to elect a new General Council team in accordance with the expectations of the Chapter. It really gives me a sense of peace, trust and hope for the good direction of the Congregation in the years to come.



A General Councillor For Three Consecutive Six Year Periods

By : Bro. Guido Sukarman

Looking back and reflecting on the experiences of being part of a team (General Council) entrusted by the Congregation with the service of leadership, I would like to share with you the followings:

1. First of all I am very grateful especially to the Brothers in The Netherlands for their spirit of FIC brotherhood I have been privileged to experience and enjoy during the span of 18 years of my stay in The Netherlands. When I joined the General Council in August 2000, the Congregation was still at its early stage of becoming an International Congregation. Members of the General Council consisted not only of Dutch Brothers but also of non Dutch. From that time until today the seat of the General Council has been in The Netherlands. The question on livability in The Netherlands for the non Dutch received great attention. It was not surprising, therefore, that when I arrived at De Beyart in January 2001 I was very warmly welcome. The Brothers looked very happy to welcome me; so did the Brothers' personnel. The FIC Brothers were still many (the majority) at De Beyart, and the FIC atmosphere was very obvious.

From the time of my first arrival until the time of leaving The Netherlands for good, I experienced the Brothers have much interest in me. Each, in his own way and capacity, has been trying to make me feel at home and help me with what I need. Many times I was offered some help even before I asked for it.

In short, my stay in The Netherlands as a whole has been an enjoyable one. I had hardly been "home sick". If there were ever inconveniences or struggles, they have to do with making adjustments to food and winter at the beginning; and a little later on with my being allergic to pollens (hay-fever). As far as food is concerned I have learned to follow my reasoning more than my tongue.

2. To exercise the service of leadership, the General Council endeavours to facilitate and animate the continuous movement of the Congregation to keep the heritage of the Congregation alive, to promote appropriate renewal, and to serve the spiritual and



material needs. The specific or concrete areas to focus on are determined by the six yearly General Chapter resolutions.

During my 18 years being part of the General Council, INTERNATIONALITY, COMMUNICATION, FORMATION and RULES of CONDUCT (to promote child protection and avoid sexual abuse in all places where brothers and co-workers have regular contact with minors) were among the significant areas that drew our great attention. Those areas are closely related in giving them shape in our day to day life. Those areas of focus lead us to the question, among others, "what does this mean for our initial and on-going formation".

In the early 2000 the Congregation was still at its initial stage of becoming an International Congregation. The General Council needed to study and reflect a lot on the issue of internationality: about the characteristics to develop and nurture; the cost of being international, the congregational activities (programs) and habits to develop, etc. Communication and formation became important topics on the agenda of our international meetings. In short I could say that in rendering its services the General Council had been conscious of the need to



continuously promote and develop our international spirit and characteristics as FIC Brothers and at the same time to come to more clarity about our FIC spirituality, the spirituality of FIC Founders. Thus the development of, among others: the Congregational website; the international meetings on formation and the formation in human sexuality and spirituality; and the program FIC Journey to Spiritual Enrichment.

We can be grateful that the sense and the spirit of being an international congregation continue growing among the brothers as individuals and as a Congregation. This has been obvious, among others in the experiences of our international gatherings like: Congregational and General Conferences, encounters organized by IFCC, international meetings of formators, OASIS, and during the recent Apostolic Congress. One of the very clear and strong characteristics of our being an international Congregation seems to be our longing for and desire to be in true solidarity with one another, among our provinces which is expressed in many ways at our international gatherings.

There are other signs, demands, cost or consequences, of our becoming international, such as: the values of provincial exchange/visit of brothers; the eventual production of the core curriculum to guide our work of forming our candidates; the congregational manual for our financial administration; and also the congregational magazine "Brothers FIC - Called to be good and to do good". There are surely still other signs that signify our becoming a more and more international Congregation.

3. I am very grateful also for the generous gift individual Brothers have given me by sharing the stories of their life-journey: their gift of vision and insight, the challenges they face, the energy and courage they are blessed with. These personal encounters gave me the opportunity to listen to what

GENERAL COUNCIL

is alive among them, to show my understanding for their difficulties and challenges, to stimulate and encourage, to affirm and to show support. On the other hand, listening to their life-stories, I also experienced being inspired, nourished and spiritually enriched. These personal encounters that have helped me experience the Brothers' generous trust, openness, honesty and love, strengthen the sense of being truly brothers of one another and the sense of belonging to each other in this beloved house called FIC Brotherhood. All these have helped renew and deepen my commitment to the service of leadership which has been entrusted by the Congregation.

4. As far as working in three different leadership teams is concerned, there are at least three significant learning experiences for me. From the first team (2000-2006) I especially learned the value of efficiency in our work; from the second (2007-2012) the virtue of patience, humility, loyalty and goodwill when there is distrust and suspicion; and from the third (2012-2018) I especially experience the joy, peace and love as the by-products of the gifts of trust, openness, patience, honesty, respect and generosity of heart.

5. As conclusion, I would like to say that yes, obviously our Congregation has become more international than how it was 18 years ago. Yet there is also a reality that the presence of the Dutch Brothers in our international gatherings / meetings has become less and less. This, however, does not mean that the role and contribution of the Dutch Brothers to the continuous growth of the Congregation has become less and less. No! Their role and contribution just continue in a different way. Moreover as Congregation we cannot miss the presence of our "experienced Dutch Brothers" in our international meetings, even though the topics of the meeting, (like initial formation and apostolic mission), may seem irrelevant to the reality of the brothers' life in The Netherlands: no work on initial formation and only few brothers are involved in external apostolic activities. They, the Dutch Brothers, have their learning experience, conviction and wisdom that can be shared with the rest of the Brothers that can inspire and stimulate our FIC living.

Bro. Guido Sukarman

Farewell Celebration

After several years of service in the FIC General Council, our two Bros. Martin Handoko and Guido Sukarman had to return to their home province of Indonesia. To say goodbye to them, a farewell party was organized for them at Hotel Derlon in Maastricht on 16th of November 2018. It was attended by more than 25 people including the staff of the General Council, members of Emmaus community, the Religious House Council, friends and collaborators.

In a warm and friendly atmosphere, we shared a glass of wine in the lobby and exchanged pleasantries before settling down for a extended dinner. As characteristic of farewell parties, there were a number of speeches and presentation of gifts to our two brothers. Bro. Raphael Besigrinee, on behalf of the General Council (GC) and staff, expressed his gratitude to Bro. Martin Handoko for his excellent leadership as General Superior for the past 12 years and Bro. Guido Sukarman as Councillor for the past 18 years. He highlighted the uniqueness of each of them during the past six years of their exceptional and quality service they rendered not only to the Congregation as a whole but also the individual brothers, staff and associated members. Finally, he and the General Superior-elect, Bro. Augustine Kubdaar presented some gifts to them on behalf of the GC and staff, and wished them good luck and success in their future assignments.

Bro. Wim Luiten, Superior of the Religious House Netherlands spoke on behalf of our Dutch brothers. He expressed their gratitude to the two brothers, and as a sign of appreciation, presented a bouquet of flowers to each of them. Mr. Willy Bastiaens, executive secretary of the GC, on behalf the other members of staff, also seized this opportunity to express his feeling of gratitude for the excellent working relationship they had enjoyed from the two brothers. A gift of appreciation was also given to each of them.

As would be expected, the two at the centre of the celebration had their turn to say a few words. First Bro. Guido Sukarman, who became the Vicar of the



immediate past General Council, shared his feelings during his time as a member of General Council and conveyed his appreciation and gratitude to his colleague GC members, the staff and other collaborators for the support, encouragement and useful contributions to the success of his mission here in The Netherlands.

At last Bro. Martin Handoko, who is the out-going General Superior of the Congregation took the floor. He expressed his sincere gratitude to each member of the past GC, staff member and other collaborators, for the support and excellent working relationship he benefitted from during his term of office. He expressed his admiration for the support and availability he enjoyed from the GC staff and other individual collaborators. Finally he thanked Bro. Lo Koeleman who doubled as the organizer and Master of Ceremony for this memorable gathering. He used the occasion to introduce the General-Superior elect, Bro. Augustine Kubdaar to the gathering. Bro. Augustine on his part, was grateful to the two brothers for their invaluable contributions to the life of the Congregation and hope for their continuous support and wise counsel for the new General Council.

GENERAL COUNCIL

Report General Chapter 2018

By : Bro. Raphael Besigrinee

The 35th General Chapter of the FIC Congregation came to a successful conclusion in the serene environment of "Huize Elisabeth" at Denekamp, The Netherlands. The six-yearly congregational gathering, which had the theme "We Consecrate Ourselves to be Witnesses of God's Love", took place from 5-25 August 2018. The encounter represents the supreme authority of the Congregation, and brought together 30 delegates from our provinces including Chile (2), Ghana (6), Indonesia (10), Malawi (3) and the Religious House Netherlands (4). The rest were the General Council (GC) members (4) and the General Treasurer.

In the Eucharistic celebration that marked the beginning of the event, five candles were lit to signify that we are united in Christ and in our common mission. The General Superior of the Congregation, Bro. Martinus Handoko in his official opening address, outlined the task of the General Chapter which include, among others, the promotion of appropriate renewal in our Congregation and making of regulations which are binding upon the whole Congregation. He entrusted the whole process of the Chapter to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The first week was dedicated to the General Council report 2012-2018. The content of the 159-page report gives an account of the functioning of the General Council and includes the general picture of the Congregation, the functioning of the General Council, how the last General Chapter resolutions were implemented, international meetings and the financial policy pursued during their term of office. After subjecting the report to a thorough scrutiny, members commended the GC for their hard and serious work in trying to implement all the resolutions of the General Chapter 2012. The GC was highly praised especially for their spirit of teamwork and cordial relationship during their term of office. Members also gave comments on the areas of attention the General Council formulated at the end of the report as the most important conclusions. The Chapter underlined these issues, also as points of attention for the new General Council.

A recollection on the theme of the Chapter concluded the discussion on the General Council report. It was led by the facilitator of the Chapter, Fr. Bernard Mardiatmadja, SJ. He invited us to recall the very personal experiences of our call to religious life and as people who believe in God and try to be witnesses of His love. What are our memories? What are the experiences of our faith life? We tried to listen to what the Spirit revealed to us. After a substantial time of personal reflection we could share our experiences with another Chapter member.

The second week was devoted to the discussion on proposals and formulation of policies. The discussion focused on a wide range of issues including our Congregational Statute, FIC leadership, formation, vocation promotion, promotion of association, communication (with a focus on social media), our mission towards the poor and needy, care for the environment, FIC logo, our spirituality as lived through prayer, apostolate and community life, and the dogma of Immaculate Conception of Mary, which bears our name.

The discussion on the proposal on the Religious House Netherlands (RHN) took a long time as participants wanted more clarification on the administrative role of lay people in the House, and to what extent they participate in decision making in the Congregation. To enhance the understanding of the style of administration within the RHN, especially where lay people are involved, a copy of the statute of the House was provided. This led to a clearer picture of this new development in the Congregation.

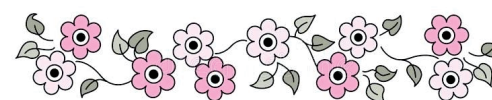
What engaged the members of the Chapter in the final week was seen as the heart of the encounter, namely the election of the new General Council. The process which began already in the first week included discussing in provincial as well as in mixed groups, the qualities of the brothers that will be elected into the General Council and a number of proposed General Council teams consisting of the General Superior and three Councillors. All these discussions ended up in plenary. The process was

done in an atmosphere of silence and prayer to enable the Holy Spirit work within each of us, and in serious consideration of the requirements and qualities listed earlier for members of the new General Council. Finally on August 22, the election proper was conducted with the following results: Bro. Augustine Kubdaar (General Superior) Bro. Raphael Besigrinee (1st Councillor), Bro. Theodorus Suwaryanto (2nd Councillor), Bro. Valentinus Daru Setiaji (3rd Councillor). This was followed by a festive get together in which brothers congratulated members of the newly elected General Council and expressed gratitude to God. Later during the day the new General Council met and proposed Bro. Theodorus Suwaryanto who was later elected as Vicar.

Having accomplished the last major task of the Chapter, we spent the last three days putting final touches to important issues, namely working on the final version of the Chapter message, voting on proposals and evaluation. The newly elected members of the GC and the outgoing members also had the opportunity to meet during these last days. During AOB (Any Other Business), Bro. Wim Luiten addressed the Chapter on behalf of the RHN. He presented a paper to Chapter members, with the title "What we, the Dutch brothers want to pass on as part of 'The story continues ...'". All Chapter members were deeply touched by the message of the Dutch brothers. It was an emotional moment for all because the message was indicative of an advice of an ageing parent to the younger generation. However, deep down, the brothers were grateful for it.

At the official closing on 25 August, the chairman invited the General Superior-elect, Bro. Augustine Kubdaar, to deliver his closing address, after which he declared the Chapter officially concluded.

Bro. Raphael Besigrinee, Secretary of General Chapter 2018



Provincial Chapters 2018

1. Conclusion of Provincial Chapter Chile

The third session of the Provincial Chapter of Chile which started on Sunday, 30 September 2018, ended successfully on 3 October with the election of a new Provincial Council team to govern the province for the next three years. Issues discussed during the third session include the following: reviewing the proposals of the General Chapter 2018, some issues of the province that are directly related to the General Chapter proposals, namely the role of brothers in mission, the possibilities of starting a new apostolic activity and the study of our current apostolate. Lastly, the election process and the chapter message were concluded. Taking into account the specific situation of the Chile Province, the Provincial Chapter decided to limit the working period to three years: 2018-2021. The session which was held in Buin maintained the theme "Called and sent to encounter life", and concluded successfully with the election of the following brothers:

Bro. Diego Izquierdo Gallego (Provincial Superior)

Bro. Patricio Guentelican P. (Vice Prov. Superior)

Bro. Lucio Torres Martín (Provincial Councillor)



2. Final Session of the Provincial Chapter Ghana 2018

The third session of the Provincial Chapter of Ghana was convened on September 23, 2018 at St. Louis community conference hall under the theme:

"Deepening our Apostolic Mission through Prayer and Community Life". Apart from the most important task of this final session, namely the election of the new Provincial Council, the following issues, among others, were dealt with during this session: finalizing the discussion on some proposals, discussing the report of the Financial Verification Committee and concluding the chapter message. On the fifth day, the main agenda item was the election of a new leadership team. At the end of this exercise the following brothers were chosen to lead the Province for the coming six years:

Bro. Seregeous Dery (Provincial Superior)
Bro. Clement Nangpiire (Vice Prov. Superior)
Bro. Godwin S. Kuu-Ireme (Provincial Councillor)
Bro. Fabian Bezel (Provincial Councillor)
Bro. Patrick Binneh (Provincial Councillor)



The chapter message which forms part of the fruits of this six-yearly gathering was also approved. An excerpt of it is as follows: "The future of our Province lies in the collective responsibility of every brother."

To keep the flame of our Founders burning, there is the need to invest in the human resource of the Province, promote vocations, and engage in a conscious and personal continuous formation as well as personally keeping a healthy lifestyle. The Chapter appeals to all brothers to be more prudent in managing the finances of the Province. This we believe will help improve on our financial base so as to enable us undertake more of the pressing needs of the Province. We have completed discussions on proposals and passed them into resolutions for the incoming PC to implement. Some of these

resolutions will directly allow leadership to tackle the areas of attention for the development of the Province. We recognize that most of us brothers are gifted in one way or the other; we should make ourselves available and willing to accept roles and responsibilities that will take the development of the Province to another level".

3. Conclusion of the Provincial Chapter 2018, Indonesia

From 1- 4 November 2018, the brothers in Indonesia held the final session of their Provincial Chapter at Syalom Retreat House, Bandung under the theme "Confirming the Identity and Mission of FIC Brothers in the Present Time". At the end of it, a new provincial team was elected for the next six years. The new Council consists of the following brothers:

Bro. Frans Asisi Dwiyatno (Provincial Superior)
Bro. Michael Sidharta Susila (Vice Prov. Superior)
Bro. Anton Karyadi (Provincial Councillor)
Bro. Yohanes Bosco Purwanto (Provincial Councillor)
Bro. Martinus Hans Gendut Suwardi (Provincial Councillor)



4. Final Session of the Provincial Chapter Malawi 2018

Having dealt with most of the issues in the last session, the third assembly of the Provincial Chapter of Malawi concentrated on a few matters, among others the chapter process, finalizing a new Provincial Statute, voting on proposals, concluding the chapter message and the elections. A full day of

recollection preceded the day of election which resulted in the choice of four brothers to form the provincial team for the working period of 2018 - 2024. The new Provincial Council is made up of the following brothers:

Bro. Lawrence Sitima (Provincial Superior)
Bro. Andrew Makocho (Vice Prov. Superior)
Bro. Thomas Chikoti (Provincial Councillor)
Bro. Trustful Mwachande (Provincial Councillor)



The chapter also decided to hold a mini-chapter in 2021 in order to evaluate the functioning of the Provincial Council. As would be expected, a number of resolutions were adopted to chart the course of the next six years.

5. New council Religious House The Netherlands

On 14 and 15 November 2018, the brothers in the Netherlands held their Religious House Conference at the office-house of Prins Bisschopsingel, Maastricht. The meeting was attended by the six members of the interim-council (4 brothers and 2 lay people), eight members elected by the brothers (all brothers), and one associated member. Bro. Wim Luiten as co-ordinator of the interim-council was the chairman. Mr. Jos van Eijden, associated member, was the facilitator and Mr. Willy Bastiaens took care of the minutes.

On 14 November the topics discussed were: the report of the Provincial Council 2015-2017, the report of interim-council Religious House 2017-2018, the Financial Report 2012-2017, and some

proposals. After that the election of the new council was prepared. This includes asking the brothers mentioned whether they were available to serve in the new council for the coming three years.

On 15 November the main topic was - beside the recommendations of the conference - the election of the new council. In three groups the members shared their opinions about the available candidates and 'constructed' one or two council teams of three brothers: one superior and two council members. After sharing and explaining the results of the three groups the real elections took place with ballot notes.

The outcome of the election was the following:

Bro. Wim Luiten (Superior)
Bro. Frans School (Member)
Bro. Gerard Langelaan (Member)



These three brothers will lead the Religious House for the coming three years, with the help of advisors: brothers and lay people.





General Chapter members in session.

Support Staff of General Chapter 2018
Left to Right: Fr. Bernard Mardiatmaja SJ (Facilitator),
Bro. Thomas Bone MTB (Translator),
Claudia T. (Minutes taker),
Bro. Remy Nyukorong (General Treasurer),
Leny Last-Ubachs (Assistant Secretary),
Willy Bastiaens (Executive Secretary),
and Bro. Lo Koeleman (Accommodation and others)



Chapter members and Support Staff on their outing day



Morning prayer at the small chapel of the FSGM Sister' house



A session of the General Chapter 2018 in Denekamp (The Netherlands)

Sitting together during break time



A BRIEF PROFILE OF BRO. AUGUSTINE PUFAADEM KUBDAAR



a. Family Background

Bro. Augustine PufaaDEM Kubdaar, the newly elected General Superior, is a Ghanaian. In Ghana he comes from a little but very important village in the Upper West Region called Tantuo. He was born on the 6th of June, 1966 (52 years ago). His parents (Mr. Edmund Kubdaar 78 years old and Mrs. Marceline Yayour 76 years) are still alive. Bro. Augustine is the eldest child of his parents. He has five siblings (two brothers and three sisters): Robert, James, Alberta, Martha and Felicia. Mr. Robert Kubdaar lives at home and takes care of our aged parents.

b. Education Background

Bro. Augustine began formal education in his native village school and then proceeded to complete Puffien Middle school where he first met Bro. Raphael Besigrinee (General Councilor). Bro. Augustine had his secondary education in the southern part of Ghana, Ashanti Bekwai. From 1987 to 1990 he was trained as a professional Teacher in the Nusrat Jahan Ahamadiyya Teacher Training College, Wa. He was among the first batch of students of the Catholic University College of Ghana, Fiapreh where he graduated with First Class Honors in Religious Education (major) and Business Administration (minor). From 2013 - 2015 Bro. Augustine had another professional training in the United States International University (USIU) of Eastern Africa where he acquired a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology. Two years ago (2016) Augustine got enrolled as a PhD student in Clinical Psychology in the Open Univasiteit of Heerlen, The Netherlands.

c. Vocation Story

Bro. Peter Saatuo perhaps was the first FIC brother Augustine met in his life. This was when Bro. Saatuo visited Bro. Augustine's village and later on taught in the Puffien Middle School where Augustine was a pupil. This initial encounter with an FIC Brother provided a significant introduction to a change of an initial desire to become a catechist or a priest. At that time, Augustine's maternal uncle Mr. Romanus Yayour was a catechist and Augustine admired the role his uncle played in the church especially conducting the village church choir. In the year 1986, through the counsel of a friend Mr. Tantuo Maalo (now a teacher in St. John's Technical and Vocational School, Nandom) Augustine applied to the then Wa Diocesan Priest Vocation Director (Fr. Peter Dakurah) and at the same time to the Aspirancy Coordinator of the Brothers FIC (Bro. Gracious Sangber Der) to be an aspirant. The response of the latter came with an invitation to attend contact days at Kaleo. In a personal talk with Bro. Gracious during the contact days, Augustine was advised to consider being trained as a professional teacher. As a student in the Teacher Training College the link and chain of events in his life were phenomenal. At the Teacher Training College, a very precarious moment of discerning his vocation, Augustine appreciated the regular visits and influence of Bros. Peter Agboso, Patrick Binneh and Alpitio Kog (a childhood friend) as part of God's

plan to assist him properly opt for the FIC way of life. He feels very much grateful to these brothers and the many other people and events that spurred him on to come thus far in life. In the year 1992 Augustine started the FIC initial formation program together with Bros. Remy Nyukorong (General Treasurer), Bro. Stephen Bangnabayi and another candidate who absconded after the canonical year novitiate program. On September 15th, 1995, Bro. Augustine and his formation colleagues made their first profession of Religious vows. Seven years later, again on the 15th of September, 2002, Br. Augustine took his final vows.

d. Apostolate

Bro. Augustine taught in many basic schools in Ghana: St. Cecilia's Primary School, Nandom; St. Mary's Primary School, Chinchang, where he was once appointed headmaster in the academic year of 2001; St. Gabriel Primary/Junior High School and St. Anne's Junior High School, Damongo. He also taught in Nandom Senior High School. When he was a young brother, he played an active role in youth formation. At one time he was appointed as the Zonal Coordinator of the Young Christians Students (YCS) movement in Tumu. Bro. Augustine is also particularly grateful to Bro. Methodius Kuusoro and his team of Councilors at that time, who per his appointment as Aspirancy Coordinator from the year 1997 to 2001 challenged and encouraged him to begin developing some leadership skills. From the year 2006 to 2012 Augustine was the Provincial Superior of the Ghana Province. From 2016 - 2017, he also taught in the Nursing And Midwifery Training College, Sunyani; and the Catholic University College of Ghana, Fiapreh (his alma mater). Until his election as General Superior he was happily and comfortably working as a Clinical Psychotherapist in the St. Theresa's Hospital Nandom.

e. Dream as a General Superior

In the view of Bro. Augustine, leadership in an international congregation such as ours requires a multidimensional approach, skills and discernment to select a number of leadership principles to be utilized in any situation in order to lead the brothers and God's people. Bro. Augustine's dream therefore is to be a discerning leader; a leader who can listen and understand the will of God for the FIC apostolic mission in the church in this contemporary era. He also hopes to be a leader who is available to

understand the needs of his fellow brothers, associate members and those people we are called and sent to serve in the society. He feels inspired by the assertion of John Q. Adams who would have us believe that if a leader's actions inspire more people to learn more, to do more and to be more than they are, then you are indeed a successful leader. Together with his team of councilors, fellow brothers, the supporting staff, and all collaborators of the FIC congregation Augustine hopes that in the coming years we will together discern the best options of growing the vision and mission of the FIC apostolic presence in the provinces and in the ecclesiastical Church. He entrusts himself absolutely to the prayers, brotherly counsel and an unrelenting support of everyone.

Bro. Augustine P. Kubdaar is the current General Superior (2018 - 2024)



WHAT WE, THE DUTCH BROTHERS, WANT TO PASS ON AS PART OF 'THE STORY CONTINUES...'

CONCRETE ACTIONS OF LOVE

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words and talk but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3: 16-18)

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS CHRIST

We, the Dutch brothers, have become brothers in this congregation to go in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, to follow him as members of his Church in concrete service to the coming of God's Kingdom. Thus we pass on the good news of the Gospel. We try to live and work in the spirit of our Founders Louis Rutten and Bernardus Hoecken, by:

- * forming a fraternity in which we are indeed brothers of one another and of the people whom we meet;
- * living in solidarity with the poor, the weak and the most deprived;
- * being attentive to spiritual and religious needs;
- * being attentive to a contemporary and culturally integrated transmission of faith;
- * keeping the focus of our apostolate on education, formation and teaching;
- * understanding the signs of the times and searching for appropriate answers;
- * giving Mary an important place in our life.

ACROSS OUR BORDERS....TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

We, the Dutch brothers, have crossed the borders of our homeland – sharing in the mission of Christ's Church and inspired by our own charisma as a congregation of brothers - so as to bring the good news of God's Love to the ends of the earth. We were able to do so through the spirit of sacrifice and the strength of being a community of brothers. Since 1920 in Indonesia and since the fifties and sixties in Chile, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Spain, Zambia, Ghana and Pakistan, the Dutch brothers have committed themselves to make God's Kingdom visible by founding communities of brothers and by living and working with the people in the spirit of the Founders.

GROWTH OF INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD

We have trained indigenous brothers and have welcomed them as our fellow brothers into our FIC brotherhood. They have lived and worked with us imbued with the same ideals. They in turn have taken upon themselves to continue the work of our Founders and also to be administratively responsible for their own region/province and to be a great asset to the general administration - all this for the well-being of the whole congregation. They too have crossed the borders of their homeland and sent out brothers to other regions and provinces.

In this way we have gradually become an international congregation, in which brothers - from different cultures and with different customs - live and work together, have all kinds of contact, meet one another and reflect together, across borders.

Thus we have to come to know one another better, do we feel welcome and at home with each other, and has the mutual relationship grown strong?

Thus in the course of time an international brotherhood has been realized. We feel united with each other, we live and work imbued with the same ideals, we are nourished by the spirit of our Founders, we believe in the love of God, we experience Jesus as our brother, and are challenged to proclaim his good news of love to all people.

WHAT THE DUTCH BROTHERS RECOMMEND TO THOSE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Just as a grateful mother at the end of her life urges her dear children to remain united in love and care for each other, we, the Dutch brothers, want to urge our fellow brothers in the other provinces:

- remain welcoming to the poor and the deprived in the spirit of our Founders;
- remain immersed in the social, cultural and spiritual development of the country where you live and work, remain as FIC congregation, united with each other – as a unity in diversity;
- remain internationally oriented and focused on each other as an international brotherhood;
- remain steadfast in showing solidarity to each other, helping and supporting each other; in accepting responsibility for each other, for the congregation and the apostolate;
- remain close as fellow brothers in mutual respect, appreciation and love.

Thus you remain witnesses of your dedication to the coming of God's Kingdom and contribute to a world of love, justice and peace.

Our message to you that remains in force also for the future: live - also across borders - brothers living together in loving unity, serving people, anywhere in the world!

Maastricht, 15 August 2018

The brothers of the Religious House The Netherlands FIC



My Impression of the General Chapter 2018

By : Bro. Seregeous Dery

The 35th General Chapter of the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Brothers FIC) took place in The Netherlands at Denekamp from 5th - 25th August, 2018.

My impression of this Chapter is positive. It was a well organized Chapter which ended with rich outcomes. It was an occasion that offered me another opportunity to meet and interact with fellow Brothers from other Provinces vis-à-vis our common joys, challenges, concerns and future aspirations for our Congregation. The experience brought me to a greater awareness of where we have come from as a Congregation, where we are now amidst the myriads of potentials, gifts as well as challenges that stir us in the face and where we aspire to be, as we grope into the future.

Chapters are meant to keep the heritage of Congregations alive, to promote appropriate renewals, to elect new leadership, to ratify resolutions that are not only aimed at providing the spiritual and material needs of Congregations, but also to make the Congregations responsive to current trends. In my view, these needs were fulfilled through this Chapter. These find concrete expression in our General Chapter message, Chapter resolutions and the young team of General Council we elected.

Personally, I experienced this Chapter not only as a decision making meeting but also a true spiritual and social celebration of our FIC Brotherhood. Participants demonstrated seriousness in all Chapter proceedings. Discussions were marked by good sense of humour, keen and empathic listening, and mutual respect for each other's views, yet remaining constructively critical.

The wealth of creativity brought to bear on our liturgical celebrations was very enriching and reflected the international character of the



Congregation. We celebrated one another through birthdays, feast days etc. Equally, we had a day of outing to the neighboring country, Germany. We also had time to recreate together after each hard day's work. Though the entire Chapter period was intensive, these interspersed activities helped participants to relax without feeling overworked. Also the serene nature of the Chapter environment added value to the entire experience.

In conclusion, it would be reiterated that this General Chapter was a great success. It yielded the desired results with a call on all Brothers of the Congregation and our associates to live the Chapter message wherever we are, for the sake of promoting the Kingdom of God. It is my fervent hope and prayer that, through the implementation of these Chapter resolutions, we may each experience the desired renewal and work selflessly for the greater glory of God.

Bro. Seregeous Dery, Provincial Superior, Ghana (2012-2018 and 2018 - 2024)

My Impression of the General Chapter 2018

By : Bro. Martinus Dariyo

This was my second experience of a General Chapter, and I feel this was a wonderful moment of gathering of brothers, in the sense that participants demonstrated a high level of seriousness, but at the same time there was time for relaxation. I felt free to express my opinion, feelings, and ideas. I felt the spirit of brotherhood and an atmosphere of a religious encounter. This atmosphere enabled us to learn from and enrich one another.

The detailed report of the General Council is indicative of the seriousness and hard work of the General Council for the last six years (2012 - 2018). In so many ways I felt I was part of the report.

There are two proposals that impressed me very much. The first is Proposal 19: "Deepening on community living, prayer and apostolate". The General Chapter 2018 requests the General Council to initiate and stimulate a congregational movement of deepening on community living, prayer and apostolate among the brothers in the Congregation. This proposal is meant for each one of us. It encourages us to deepen our quality of life as this is what determines the quality of our apostolic activities.

The substance of the proposal is taken from art. 32 of our Constitutions. Community living, prayer and apostolate are three elements that are deeply connected. We all feel borne by the apostolic spirit that animated our Founders. The word "spirit" in "apostolic spirit" refers to the fruit of community living and prayer, that affect our apostolic work. This point makes us realize that the goal of our work is related to the spirit of our Founders, which is: for the sake of the Kingdom of God. "As brothers we are called together and thus sent out to continue the work of Jesus".

The second proposal that I am so impressed about is proposal 28 on "Care of our environment". The essence of the proposal is derived from the encyclical "Laudato Si'" of Pope Francis. The encyclical states that there is a strong connection between the (lack of) care of our environment and poverty. Degradation of our environment spoils our



precious resources such as water, energy, air, trees, minerals etc. Taking care of our environment and helping others to do the same is a real and structural contribution to the well-being of people, especially those who are underprivileged. As stated in the encyclical there are some simple steps or actions that can help us preserve the environment, namely planting trees, doing gardening, switching off lights when not in use, turning off taps to prevent wastage of water, proper disposal of rubbish, planting flowers to beautify our surroundings, maintaining cleanliness in our surroundings, among others.

Apart from the General Chapter message, what impressed me also was the message presented by the Brothers of the Religious House Netherlands. It was very touching and was warmly welcomed by all Chapter members. There are 5 points stated there namely, concrete actions of love, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, across our borders... to the ends of the earth, growth of international brotherhood and recommendations to those in other provinces. This message will ensure that the story of FIC continues long into the future.

Bro. Martinus Dariyo, Provincial of Malawi (2012-2018)

Pope on All Saints' Day: "Live for heaven, not the world"

By Hannah Brockhaus

If a Christian wants to reach heaven, he or she should ask themselves if they are living for the pleasures of the world, or if they are striving after holiness with all their strength, Pope Francis said on the feast of All Saints.

"Let us ask ourselves what side we are on: that of heaven or that of the earth? Do we live for the Lord or for ourselves, for eternal happiness or for some fulfillment now?" the pope said.

"Let us ask ourselves: do we really want holiness?" he continued. "Or do we content ourselves with being Christians without disgrace and without praise, who believe in God and esteem others but without going too far?"

"In short, either holiness or nothing!" he said.

The pope led the Angelus from a window overlooking St. Peter's Square in honor of the feast day. In his message before the prayer, he said it is good for Catholics to let themselves be encouraged by the saints, who did not live their lives by "half measures."

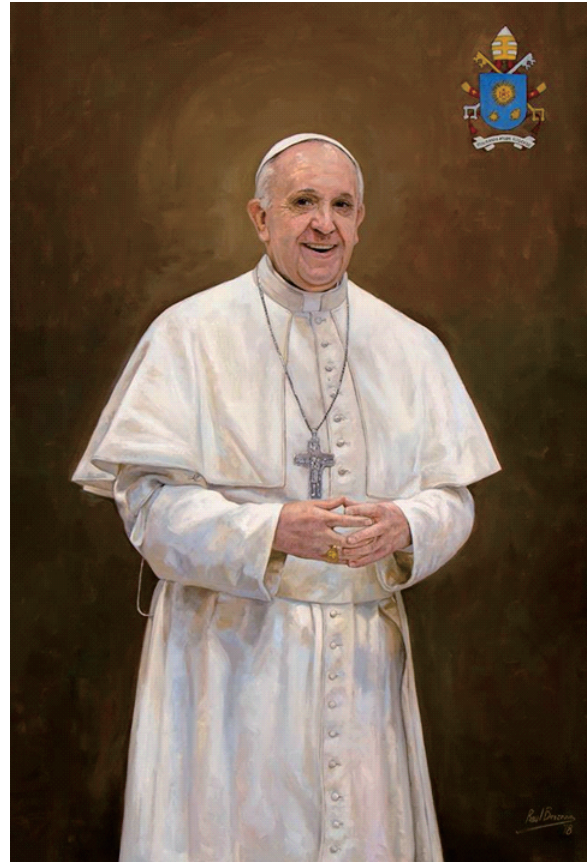
In heaven, the saints "cheer" for those on earth when they see them "choose God, humility, meekness, mercy, purity," he said. The saints "understand us, they love us, they know what our true good is, they help us, and they wait for us. They are happy, and they want us to be happy with them in paradise."

He noted that among the saints are also those who may not be known to us, or who are not on the Church's liturgical calendar, but are nevertheless with God in heaven. And they are all one's brothers and sisters - making the feast of All Saints, "a family party," he said.

Pope Francis recalled a significant point in the Mass, when the "Sanctus," or "Holy, Holy, Holy," is recited or sung. "It is a hymn - that the Bible says - comes from heaven," he said.

When singing the "Sanctus" at Mass, Catholics "not only think of the saints, but we do what they do [in heaven]: at that moment, in the Mass, we are united with them more than ever."

The saints encourage people to follow the Beatitudes, which are "the path of happiness," he said. He acknowledged that this is not always easy,



especially because the world says, blessed are the rich and the arrogant, not "blessed are the poor in spirit" or "blessed are the meek."

But as the day's first reading from the book of Revelation says, the saints have "palm branches in their hands," which is a symbol of victory, the pope said, adding that the saints "have won them, not the world, and they exhort us to choose their part, that of God who is holy."

Today Christians are called to hear and to put the Beatitudes into practice, Francis said. Winning the victory of heaven is not always about doing extraordinary things but is "about following this path every day... in the family, at home."

"Today we glimpse our future and celebrate what we were born for: we were born to never die again, we were born to enjoy the happiness of God!" he said. "May the Holy Mother of God, Queen of the saints, help us to firmly walk the path of holiness."

By Hannah Brockhaus

Vatican City, Nov 1, 2018 / 07:44 am (CNA/EWTN News)

Mary's Immaculate Conception : Source Of Joy, Trust and Courage

By : Bro. Johan Muijtjen

We may believe that we as a Congregation have received this title of Mary as an invitation and inspiration, purposefully, and not just accidentally. It was the representative of the Catholic Church, who, inspired by what was 'in the air' in that time, proposed to our Founder to call the Congregation after this title of Mary. We may see this as a loving act of Providence.

However, even when especially our Founder in his Autobiography trustingly calls Mary by that title, the deeper meaning for our faith and life has been unclear to many of us. Why are we not called after e.g. Mary, mother of the poor, or Mary, Mother of the Child Jesus - or another more 'fitting' title of Mary?

The feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is (in first instance, see below) about Mary who, without original sin, is received in the womb of her mother. The way of wording, imaging and thinking reflects the biological and theological knowledge and general understanding in the nineteenth century. These historical limitations makes it difficult for many to understand the deeper meaning of this explicit teaching of our Church.

The conviction of faith, expressed in the biological imaging and theological thinking of that time, is, of course, much more important: God lavishly prepared Mary, from the beginning of her life, in view of her important task and role in the life of Jesus. The "freedom from original sin" indicates the depth and strength of the grace God bestowed on her. Because of this received grace she was able to



totally surrender to God's desire: to be the bearer and mother of Jesus.

Of course we honor Mary, when we celebrate this feast. In a deeper sense, however, this feast is more about God, who providentially blessed Mary from the origin of her life. This 'being blessed from the origin' can also be seen in other examples in the Bible. Just two examples: God says to Jeremiah (1:5): Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. Or Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (1:4) : God chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. The initiative is with God and his grace is effective. So, grateful for Mary, we celebrate first of all how God is providentially loving all of us.

Mary is a model for all of us. She is a model for us how we, blessed by God, can live in surrender to God. We may consider Mary as our oldest sister, another human being, very blessed and prepared

for her task. Mary is an example of human possibilities. She shows what God can do with all of us. Specifically when we are aware of and accept our limitations (see Mary's Magnificat) it can happen to us that we experience God's unconditional grace.

We need not fear when we are challenged, when life asks from us more than we think we can do. God is very true to us and He knows what we need. We may be very joyful, trusting and courageous, not because of our own powers, but because it is God who calls AND helps. We all, like Mary, have found favour with God (Luke 1, 28).

This providential and effective Love of God does hold for each of us personally but also for the community which we form.

- **PERSONALLY:** Jesus, in his life and words, shows us abundantly that each individual person is seen and loved by God. Jesus does not let fall anybody. There always is the possibility of a new beginning and above all - despite of everything - God is deeply true to every creature and certainly to every human person. The intuition of the faithful regards Mary is an example par excellence of what holds for each one of us. Each one of us is blessed from the beginning and may fully trust in God's grace in all circumstances of his/her life.

- **COLLECTIVELY:** The true and effective support by God also holds for our community as such. Our community, not just the sum of the individual members, but as a dynamic whole, as a body with a multitude of interactions and interrelations, with specific values and aims, with its own levels of organization, is also abundantly blessed. Also this 'body' receives its own blessing, from the very beginning, and even 'before' the beginning, namely by what is stirred in the hearts and minds of the initiators, our Founders. And where did they come from? Yes, also as a community we may count on God's help in the different situations and developments of its existence. This means that, e.g. at a general chapter, we may fully trust that this body of persons is helped and inspired. We are not left alone. It is not only our human efforts that makes a good result, but, when we are open, it is God by the Spirit who works also in the collectivity; who brings



forth unexpected and beautiful fruits...

Meaning for our spirituality

We as Brothers of Mary Immaculate should be extra deeply convinced of God's true and effective help during our whole life and in all circumstances. We should be examples of joy, trust, confidence. We should be, inspired by Mary, people with great courage, who are not afraid of risks or uncertainties - not because of our own strength, but because we 'know' that we are not alone, that our whole life and work is always carried by God. This is the secret of many saints, who were in a sense 'invincible'. They were committed and relaxed at the same time. They knew that God does not ask the impossible from us, but that He appreciates us so much that He challenges us in order to get the best out of us and to make our life as fruitful and happy as possible!

Grateful conclusion: The dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception is a teaching full of joy, hope, trust and encouragement! DEO GRACIAS, that we have Mary as our Patron Saint under this title!

Bro. Johan Muijtjen * (The article was discussed during the 35th General Chapter 2018)