

Message from the XXth General Assembly
July 8-19, 2013—Rome
*A Prophetic Multicultural Communion for the Renewal of the Church
and the Reconciliation of the World*

We, the members of the Twentieth General Assembly, have gathered for two weeks as a discerning community of faithful Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Immersed throughout these days in deep dialogue and prayer, united in the Bond of Charity, we have opened our hearts to the voice of God—rising from within our own souls, but most clearly emerging in the voices of our brothers. We each brought to our discernment our personal commitment to truth and love, but more importantly, we sought to bring the voices of those whom we came to Rome to represent—all the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

We are also conscious of the unique time in which we find ourselves. The Congregation is in the midst of preparing for the Bicentennial of our founding. This is a time of special blessing for us, the Church, and the world. As the Assembly began its work, we recognized that any decisions arrived at would need to be rooted in our rich history and spur us on to incarnate the vision of St. Gaspar by renewing the Church and transforming the world.

Preparation for this General Assembly was initiated by the Moderator General, Rev. Francesco Bartoloni and the General Council, was advanced by the decisions and work of the unit Directors at the 2012 Meeting of Major Superiors (MMS), and continued through a process that sought the engagement of all the members of the Congregation. This unique method of preparation created an Assembly at which we first discerned and then adopted a bold and faithful Vision of our future. Embracing that Vision, we then elected a leadership team we believe capable of animating the entire Congregation—members and our lay associates—to realize the Vision as it permeates every fiber of our lives: through our relationship with God (spirituality), through our relationship with the one another (community), and through our relationship with the world (mission). This “Twentieth General Assembly Message” is the first act of this holy activity of animation, and it is for this reason that we send it to you.

At the 2012 MMS Rev. Bartoloni and the General Council proposed a unique approach to our Electoral Assembly; we would engage in this spiritual activity through a process that is based on the secular organizational theory of Appreciative Inquiry. Rooted in an appreciation for the good that already exists within an organization and using an unconditionally positive approach to planning, leadership, and the realization of change, this methodology proposes a process that assists the organization in becoming its best self.

Rev. Bill Nordenbrock modified this secular theory through the inclusion of religious values and language and made it more suitable for use by faith communities, thus creating a process of Appreciative Discernment. Prior to this General Assembly, many unit Directors and delegates already were familiar with Appreciative Discernment through its use in their units. Consequently, the MMS readily adopted the proposal to allow it to become the framework to guide the work of this Assembly.

A second decision by the MMS was that we wanted to frame the entire General Assembly in the context of prayer. We intended to create a “safe place” for honest communication, a sacred space where people would feel safe to express their “truth” because they knew that they will be listened to with respect. This atmosphere was critical to the election process for leadership within the Congregation. We wanted an election process where honest dialogue with the “candidates” and about the “candidates” could occur. We wanted to bring all of the private conversations that normally happen during an election process into the light of day and to allow those conversations to inform the communal discernment process. It was only in this way that our discernment could become more than the sum of our individual discernments and truly witness a communal spiritual activity.

In fact, our Assembly has been a prayerful time. Daily we gathered for Lauds and the celebration of Eucharist. These times of prayer became an expression of the blessed diversity of our Congregation as the prayer was prepared and led by the delegates from all the units. The shared preaching and witnessing to the Word of God greatly enhanced our discernment and rooted our dialogue.

Additional rituals were also used. On the first day we consecrated the Assembly hall and marked it to be holy ground where we would engage in spiritual activity. Water was carried to Rome from every unit of the Congregation and was commingled in the opening ritual. To maintain the sacredness of the space, we began each session with a prayer and sprinkling with the blessed water, reminding us that we were gathered on holy ground to listen to the voice of God and not merely for discussion and election.

The Appreciative Discernment process began at the MMS. There the theme of the Assembly was determined: **We are a Prophetic Multicultural Communion for the Renewal of the Church and the Reconciliation of the World.** This choice of focus for our discernment expressed, in general terms, a vision of faithfulness for the Congregation. The work of the discernment process was to expand upon that theme.

Appreciative Discernment begins by discovering where God is already present and blessing the Congregation. As an exercise in practical theology, we began to explore and come to a fresh understanding of our charism by discovering the lived experiences of charism. We wanted to

have the broadest possible participation in this aspect of the discernment process. For that reason, in the time between the September 2012 MMS and the General Assembly, unit directors agreed to solicit the stories of lived charism from the members of their units. The elected delegates were asked to be true representatives of the members of their unit and to include that input in the work of the Assembly.

In the General Assembly, the Discovery phase of the process began on the second day of our gathering. We engaged in a type of “Emmaus conversation” with one another as we partnered with another missionary and spent several hours sharing both our vocational stories, as well as our hopes and dreams for the Congregation. These encounters were shared in small groups, widening the discovery of the charisms existing amongst the delegates to this Assembly. The following day we began the Dream phase of the process through dialogue in small groups and in plenary session and arrived at the following Vision of our faithful future:

VISION STATEMENT

The Blood of Christ, poured out for all and drawing all near, is the source and summit of our life and mission. This Blood impels us to affirm the dignity of life as we embrace a wounded humanity and creation.

Rooted in the Spirituality of the Precious Blood and the Ministry of the Word, our mission is to be a prophetic witness for the renewal of the Church and the transformation of world. As a courageous community of missionary disciples, the Cry of the Blood calls us to the edges of society to be ambassadors of Christ for reconciliation and hope as we minister with the People of God.

Living the Bond of Charity, our life reflects a multicultural communion of incorporated members and lay associates. Faithful to the missionary charism of Saint Gaspar, our mission houses are sacred spaces of hospitality and renewal for mission.

Every missionary embraces the responsibility of shared leadership for the well-being of the community. Our chosen leaders are servants who animate us to share our gifts for the realization of our vision and the fulfillment of the Reign of God.

It is the fervent hope and prayer of the General Assembly that we can realize this Vision through the shared commitment and collaboration of all members and lay associates. We have charged our new Moderator General and his Council, along with the leadership in each of the units, with the responsibility of keeping this Vision before us all. It is our desire that this Vision be a beacon that calls us into a future of ever deepening faithfulness.

Upon its completion, we immediately began to employ and implement this Vision. The statement on leadership contained in the Vision guided and informed the dialogue during our discernment for the selection of the new Moderator General and Council.

The Vision was used in a practical way after the elections. In the Design phase of the process, we worked in small groups to write a Provocative Proposition for each of the three pillars of the community. Provocative Propositions are narratives that expand our understanding of the Vision by answering the question: What would our fulfillment of the Vision look like? This movement in the process allowed the Vision, which is meant to inspire us, to be expressed in more practical and concrete terms. The Assembly affirmed these statements by consensus:

Provocative Proposition for living Precious Blood Spirituality

The Blood of Christ flows through all of creation, and is most clearly expressed in our solidarity at the table of Eucharist. Grounded in the biblical foundations of this spirituality, we articulate the language of Cup, Cross, and Covenant and incarnate this in our prayer, preaching, ministry, and a life that is poured out.

Embracing our own woundedness, missionaries are a committed presence in the midst of a suffering world and enter into healing relationships with those who cry out for reconciliation and liberation.

Provocative Proposition for living our Mission

Energized by the vision of the Second Vatican Council and Catholic Social Teaching, we beckon all the baptized to unite with us in living the universal call to holiness and mission. In creative fidelity to our founder, St. Gaspar, we offer the Spirituality of the Precious Blood for the renewal of the Church, especially the clergy and other ministers.

We are prophetic missionaries who are a reconciling presence in the midst of conflict and division. In our ministry of the Word, we have greatest respect for the peoples to whom we are sent and their cultures.

Provocative Proposition for living our Community Life

Like the open heart of Christ, our communities are sacred spaces of deep dialogue where we share our joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams in an atmosphere of trust, respect and love.

Our communities are grounded in the covenant relationship with Christ and one another. In this bond of charity we are sensitive to and enriched by our cultural diversity. We

give witness through the authenticity of our lives and a simple lifestyle. We are a reconciled community in order to be missionaries of reconciliation.

As Christ, who opened his arms on the Cross, drew all peoples to Himself, we, incorporated members and lay associates, form an open communion where all are welcome.

In the Assembly we then took these Provocative Propositions, these descriptive narratives, and discerned specific action steps that could be taken to enhance our faithful journey towards the realization of the Vision. Through the initial work in the small groups and then refined in a plenary session of the General Assembly, the following action steps were accepted by a consensus decision of the Assembly:

Action Steps to help us to incarnate our Spirituality

From the time of St. Gaspar, the Congregation has been blessed with a deeply rich spirituality. This spirituality has been further developed over the past thirty years as missionaries have struggled to integrate the spirituality into a variety of contexts. We have reached back into the scriptures for a strong foundation and we have identified the powerful symbols of Cup, Cross, and Covenant as being particularly important for us. The provocative proposition developed during the General Assembly calls us to further incarnate this spirituality into our preaching, ministry, and our very lives.

As part of this message, the Assembly reminds the Congregation of these important points:

- The sharing and dissemination of materials concerning Precious Blood Spirituality is essential to the integration of the spirituality into our lives. This sharing should take place both within a unit and between units. The General Curia should continue to facilitate this dissemination as needed.
- The Congregation has already developed different resources for the further development and articulation of Precious Blood Spirituality. These include printed material, the International Spirituality Center in Salzburg, Merlini Center of Spirituality in Perú, the Center for the Study of the Blood of Christ in Italy, and the North American web-based spirituality center. It is vital that the Congregation promote and make better use of these resources in the future.

The Assembly also calls on the General Curia for specific action:

- We recognize that the gift of our charism should be central in the lives of our candidates. In order to ensure that our candidates are exceptionally formed in our spirituality, the next formators' workshop should be dedicated primarily to assisting our formators in becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in this aspect of the formation process.

Action Steps to realize our vision for Mission

From the earliest years of St. Gaspar's life he was dedicated to helping build the Reign of God. From his work with the poor in Rome of his childhood to his preaching on the Precious Blood at San Nicola in Carcere, St. Gaspar lived a life of mission. This mission has been entrusted to us for the 21st century. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, we see in both Gaspar and the Council the call to work for both the renewal of the Church and transformation of the world.

As part of this message, the Assembly reminds the Congregation of these important points:

- As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council we should offer opportunities for formation pertaining to the Council and Catholic Social Teaching to members in all units.
- We are also preparing for the Bicentennial of the foundation of the Congregation. Units should take this time to further develop their knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of the life and vision of St. Gaspar.
- The Second Vatican Council calls the Church to recognize and respond to the signs of the times. We ask the Congregation to do the same by further integrating our use of technology and social media into the life of the units. The advances in technology will allow us to truly be the "1,000" tongues proclaiming the Precious Blood for which St. Gaspar prayed.
- The Congregation has a decentralized governmental structure, yet there is a need for coordination in the mission. We call on the General Curia to appoint a liaison to help units share in their work for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.

The Assembly challenges the new General Curia to:

- Explore ways, along with the Provincial leadership teams from the Cincinnati and Kansas City Provinces, in which the Chicago based Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation can be a resource for other units. We recommend the expanded use of "Listening Circles" as a specific practice of reconciliation.
- Develop a process to more fully prepare units for the experience of sharing personnel. Both the units that send and the units that receive missionaries need to be prepared for the unique challenges of being a multicultural community. The missionaries themselves should also receive appropriate preparation before embarking to a new culture and upon the return to one's home unit.

The Assembly challenges each of the units to:

- Develop and begin to implement a plan for reaching out and offering spiritual, human, and ministerial renewal to the local clergy and the local church within their given context. A progress report is expected at the 2014 MMS.
- Initiate or expand a ministry with those on the edge, the marginalized. Units are not required to begin new ventures in new places, but should work in their specific contexts. A progress report is expected at the 2014 MMS.

Action Steps to realize our vision for Community Life

As a Society of Apostolic Life, we occupy a fairly unique place within the wider tapestry of religious life. We are not canonically bound by the evangelical vows, yet we are called to live them out. Gaspar desired that we would be bound together by a bond of charity, *in vinculo caritatis*. Our community life is an integral component of and cannot be separated from our call to mission. In fact, all three pillars, spirituality, community life, and mission must remain integrated. To be faithful to our call from Christ, all three require our attention. At the same time, the Assembly recognizes that this community life must be made concrete in a variety of localized circumstances.

As part of this message, the Assembly reminds the Congregation of these important points:

- Our Normative Texts and various Statutes of the units provide us with a treasury of resources outlining healthy community life. Common prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, house congresses, common table and recreation, and even District gatherings are essential components of our community life. Each unit is reminded that it is their responsibility to see that these norms are followed.
- Communication is also a critical component of community life. Newsletters, websites, and publications help maintain the connections between members and between units. Yet, in our busy and hectic world, often our efforts at staying connected fall short. The Assembly calls on units to designate someone to tend to the lines of communication within units, between units, and with the General Curia. Along with communication, to the best of their ability, units should seek to translate material for the use of the wider community.
- We are a community of missionaries. It is appropriate that periodically we celebrate within the units our commitment to the Congregation and our on-going commitment to the mission. Units will find it beneficial to develop community rituals to recognize this commitment.

The Assembly challenges the General Curia to:

- Similar to the work done over the decades with spirituality and mission, the Assembly calls on General Curia to lead the worldwide Congregation in a substantial exploration of what specifically comprises an authentic living of community life in a CPPS context. One of St. Gaspar's unique contributions to the Church was his notion of mission houses. The General Curia is called on to engage the entire Congregation in further developing this form of community life and mission.

The Assembly challenges each of the units to:

- Engage in a series of significant guided conversations about what it means to live authentically and what it means to live a simple lifestyle.
- Develop and/or deepen our commitment to working towards the fullest participation possible of lay associates in our communal life, spirituality, and apostolic work.

Action Steps to realize our vision of Leadership

A significant portion of the Assembly's time was spent discerning what the Congregation needs in its leadership. Our Normative Texts are clear that all members are called to exercise and share leadership within the Congregation. Our chosen leaders, at all levels, see in Christ a model of servant leadership.

As part of this message, the Assembly reminds the Congregation of these important points:

- Leadership is best exercised when every member shows a responsible initiative in promoting the welfare of the Congregation. Chosen leaders, however, have specific responsibilities within the units. This work of leadership is best exercised collaboratively.
- Leaders, especially directors, should ensure the ongoing formation of all members, but with special attention to the newly incorporated, recently ordained, aged, and infirm members. Directors should identify and promote resources for the ongoing health and wellness of members.
- Directors of units should have leadership as their primary ministry. Directors need to know the patrimony of the Congregation, exercise good interpersonal skills, live in community, recognize the gifts of members, and be men of prayer in order to effectively serve the Congregation.

Conclusion

The XX General Assembly began by invoking the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that the Spirit has been present in our deliberations, in our prayer, and in our presence with one another. The Spirit has empowered each of us and called us to be faithful to the Vision. Yet, the Spirit is not confined by the walls of our Assembly hall. All members and lay associates of the Congregation

are blessed by the Spirit. From this blessing, a responsibility follows. We have a responsibility, at all levels of the Congregation, to embrace this Vision and see that it is incarnated in the life of the community.

Our chosen leaders have a particular duty to ensure that the Vision we have discerned is realized in the units. This will be a challenging task. At times our articulation of the vision and our living of the Vision may not meet our hopes and expectations. But still remaining faithful to our call, we will strive to embody the Vision. Unit leaders will need to work effectively with the new General Curia to animate the Congregation so that the Vision comes to fruition.

The new General leadership team has a wealth of wisdom, talent, and energy. Their responsibility will be to see that the Vision is not lost in the normal routine of Congregational leadership. They are charged with animating the entire Congregation, from those in initial formation to those in prayerful retirement, to be faithful to our call from God.

As we prepare for the observance of our 200th anniversary, we have discerned a Vision that is an expression of creative fidelity to the dream of St. Gaspar and the best of our cherished history and traditions. Rooted in that faithfulness, we have found the courage to answer a challenging call to be a **Prophetic Multicultural Communion for the Renewal of the Church and Reconciliation for the World**. We place our Congregation and all our hopes and dreams for the future into the open heart of God.