

Superior General's Address
at the
Opening of the Extraordinary General Chapter of 2019

Good morning, my confreres, brothers and priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross. I have convoked and called to order this extraordinary General Chapter, decreed by you at the 2016 Chapter. It will be nine days full of deliberation, and crucial decisions. These days have the potential of setting in motion not only a reorganization, but also a renewal of the consecrated life for our religious institute.

We acknowledge our unique history. We are now in the 200th year of the founding of the original brothers' society, by Father Jacques François Dujarié, to teach the faith in country schools. Fifteen years later, Father Basile Anthony Moreau was gathering a band of priests to serve as auxiliaries to rebuild the foundations of faith in rural France.

These two extraordinarily talented, insightful, dedicated and courageous men were priests of the same diocesan presbyterate of LeMans. Though more than a quarter century separated them in age and ordination, they had amazingly similar dreams and ideals, which began to coalesce when Fr. Dujarié asked Bishop Bouvier to invite Fr. Moreau to assume leadership of his Brothers of St. Joseph. In six short years between 1835 and 1841, Father Moreau accomplished the dream both he and Fr. Dujarié shared, but independent of each other. Fr. Moreau then planted the tree of three branches, the Congregation of Holy Cross.

- 1835 – Fr. Moreau established the Auxiliary Priests
- 1835 – Fr. Dujarié relinquished care of the Brothers of St. Joseph to Fr. Moreau
- 1836 – First Brothers of St. Joseph took Final Vows
- 1837 – Brothers of St. Joseph and Auxiliary priests united in the Association of Holy Cross by the Fundamental Act of Union
- 1840 – Fr. Moreau and four priests pronounce Final Vows
- 1841 – Fr. Moreau founded the Marianites of Holy Cross

We also know too well how the story of the Congregation unfolded. Much of it is a source of pride and thanksgiving to the One who inspired the vision in Fr. Moreau. We are forever mindful our great moments of border crossings, from 1840 – 1852 (to Algiers and westward and eastward), and again from 1943 – 1963 (to Africa and southward), followed then, by the consolidations and growth of our ministries. Only in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Congregation firmly rooted itself in the soil of Asia, Africa and Latin America by accepting local young men as religious priests and brothers of Holy Cross. Thus, we moved beyond the initial

missionary effort, which concentrated first on building up the local Church and its presbyterate. We have arrived at an age of recognizable accomplishments and stability. Thanks be to God and to those religious in whose footsteps we still stride.

Our development is not stagnant, however. It is moving and changing. We have passed through an age of almost miraculous expansion – in the growth of vocations and institutions, in the movement from west to east, to the stage of aging, declining and now hopeful rejuvenation. We recognize that our present state is not “stasis”. It is “in flux” and our visceral sense is we have not kept up or adapted well with the change.

As a religious community that began with immense promise and hope from the viewpoint of vision and dream, (at least as we look back at our origins), we cannot claim a straight trajectory of accomplishments. The history of our deficiencies is somewhat recognized, mostly by ample lore, if not as well documented. We know our past is punctuated at certain points by our glaring deficits – our money problems, the threats of separation, the challenges to authority, the resignation and virtual abandonment of our founder, and more recently, the large-scale departures from religious life, and today, the sexual abuse scandal that affects the Congregation as much as the rest of the Church. Even our blessings in the form of abundance – we might even call it our affluence – can be a temptation to greed and has the potential that we become, ourselves, victims of the next predicted threat to the trustworthiness of Church institutions and leaders, that is, financial malfeasance.

My brothers, I believe we are standing on a “look out point” facing the future. I believe the Lord is asking us to move forward resolutely and with confidence because he has imbued our Congregation with an immensely important charism – TRUST IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

All that I mentioned above, the good and the bad, and even all the peculiarities of our history serve as graces to shore up our trust and give us courage to act. Our achievements, our expansion, the vocations we receive as well as our failures, our disunity and our sins – despite it all we remain strong confident that God is looking over us and guiding us. We see God’s presence to us in our apostolic commitment and our zeal and in our willingness to bear our crosses with hope.

During my years in Colorado Springs, one of my favorite activities was speaking to the new novices preparing for reception into the novitiate. I would ask them to think about what could happen to them during their hours of prayer, reflection and meditation that has a privileged place in the year ahead. It would be their chance for a mountaintop experience, akin to the experience of Moses. If fully embraced, this year could abide with them forever, and provide motivation for their zeal. During the year of ample quiet and peaceful reflection, I encouraged them to ask a special blessing from the Father, a gift of *prophetic imagination*, a term I happily borrowed from Walter Brueggemann because it is so evocative. Imagine what God is calling you to be and to do for the Kingdom of God on earth. Set your sights high enough to allow God’s power to work steadily through you.

In 2010 I believe it was blessed imagination that set into motion the planning process. The Chapter said as much:

“We believe that God is inviting us to envision new structures of authority and responsibility so that the mission of Holy Cross might be engaged in a more effective and life-giving manner for the people among whom and with whom we are called to ‘form communities of the coming kingdom’. In our first days together, a fundamental intuition emerged among us: in light of demographic changes, we need a new vision of Congregational authority and responsibility.”

The General Chapter of 2016 repeated that call and asked us all to come back again this summer to approve and set in motion a plan to reorganize ourselves. Our twin goals are to (1) promote effectiveness in mission and ministry and, (2) to maximize the vitality and viability of the Congregation.

This takes *prophetic imagination*. According to Walter Brueggemann, “It is the task of prophetic imagination and ministry to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God.” Then he adds, “What a commission it is to express a future that none think imaginable!...It means to move back into the deepest memories of this community and activate those very symbols that have always been the basis for contradicting the ruling [royal] consciousness.” (*Brueggemann, Walter, The Prophetic Imagination, pp.59-60, 64*)

The principles for the plan, which the Council of the Congregation in January 2017 developed and accepted, and which guided our process, are seven in number. The first two are fundamental to our founding and development and essential for us to keep in mind as we gaze toward the future from our “look out point” today. I believe “The Vision Still Has Its Time”.

In my estimation, these two principles are the *sine qua non* bases of our reorganization:

- to return to the ideal of our founding charism: brothers and priests, living and working together in an indivisible brotherhood, and
- to move beyond the limitations of cultures and geographical boundaries.

Even these principles seem to mean different things to different members of the Congregation. How they activate our imaginations arise from the lens of our oral history or our personal lived experiences, both positive and negative, that give rise to hopes or fears, caution or trust, that are deeply felt. Anyone who looked at the proposals can tell we struggled with these realities and made compromises.

The strongest criticisms of the plan, as initially proposed, aimed directly at these two principles, perhaps understandably so. Our biggest challenges are not reorganization plans but to become truly what we say we should be – an “indivisible brotherhood” (C1, 6) and a community where “no culture of this world can be our abiding home” (C2, 17). We have settled into a certain

quasi-stability with a sense of assurance that homogeneity will serve as a bulwark against extinction. Besides, to welcome and acclimate to cultural differences has proven more irksome and demanding than we might have expected. Living to be our truest selves “demands the conversion of our habits, our character, our attitudes, our desires” (C6, 57).

I believe much renewal and transformation of our religious life will take place through the changes we will be willing to make...that is, through changes that come to “our habits, our character, our attitudes, our desires” that will be needed day by day because of the adaptations we embrace this week and begin to accomplish together in the next few years beginning the day after the Chapter adjourns.

Under all our planning, this is what is at stake. Many think and have said, (sometimes myself included) that we need religious renewal before the reorganization of the type we have proposed can be effective. We said three years ago that it was time for action; we believed it and we left the Chapter with the hope that action would ensue. For the 2016 Chapter, we had chosen the motto, maybe more of a spiritual “booster shot” for ourselves than we imagined, “Disciples with the Competence to See and the Courage to Act”. Blessed Basil Moreau, our Founder, a daringly resolute religious, who suffered much at the hands of his sons, never gave up hope. He attested that our greatest grace came in the most unlikely moments and in the midst of difficulties. His convictions about divine guidance and “Ave Crux, Spes Unica” were his inspiration. Those same convictions should ground us during these days. In Circular Letter 179, dated January 10, 1865, Blessed Basil expressed his abiding confidence in Providence in the midst of his most severe trials, which agonized him:

“...reverend Fathers and dear Brothers, I am not the least surprised by all these trials. Thanks be to God, they have only increased my confidence in Him who alone has founded and maintained this congregation and will expand it more and more, provided we do not lend a helping hand to the devil who would destroy it because he sees us snatching souls from him...Bear in mind and do not forget, reverend Fathers and dear Brothers, that just as divine Providence has willed its greatest works to begin in humility and abjection, it has also decreed that they should expand only at the price of difficulties and contradictions, crosses, contempt, calumny and detraction. Its purpose in so decreeing is that the first materials of these spiritual edifices may be tried as gold in the fire...Consequently, although the trials undergone by the Congregation of Holy Cross have been numerous and cruel, yet, far from breaking or uprooting this growing plant, they should, on the contrary, strengthen and fortify it, make it fruitful, and at the same time purify the virtue of those who do not allow themselves to lose heart, and increase their knowledge of God. 01Hence we must have the hope that we shall happily complete our course under the auspices of the church which has deigned to approve our undertaking and which has just accorded us, in the decrees with which you are already familiar, a new proof of its solicitude for us. Rejoice, then, instead of being worried or discouraged.

At this moment in our history, let us bid farewell to our fond past and believe God and His Spirit will lead us to what is the right thing to do. We have a challenge before us, no doubt. We must be bold, but not foolish. We must look forward to where we can go, not be concerned about where we have been or be hesitant before the task because we have not lived up to our ideals in the past. We must broaden in our vision, be united, congregational in our concern, and global in our perspective. The prevalent worldview today leans dramatically toward the nationalistic and provincial, and we must confess that our own worldview as a congregation tilts easily toward provincialism, coupled as it is with autonomy. What would Jesus do? His viewpoint seems clear, “Go out to all the world.” These days, as the highest authority in the Congregation, we must be unabashedly “Disciples with the competence to see and the courage to act.”

Considerations

I want to offer a word about two underlying considerations for our work and then I will speak briefly about the Chapter process. This has been a long and exhausting process to try to fulfill the Chapters request, to come up with a reorganization plan in eighteen months. We did our best to present a plan based on the Chapter’s organizing criteria:

- to promote effectiveness in mission and ministry;
- to maximize the vitality and viability of the Congregation, and
- to respect our data projections.

Effective in mission and ministry:

Our Constitutions in two sentences speak about how we are committed to our mission. (1) C 2, 11: **We live and work as priests and brothers together.** (2) C4, 33: **Our calling is to serve the Lord Jesus in mission not as independent individuals but in a brotherhood.** Since we emphasize the community aspect of our apostolic life, the plan’s design hoped to assure adequate ministerial opportunities in the future that would allow us, from time to time, to change our apostolic activities and/or venues for ministry. Granted we are not interchangeable players, yet an adequate variety of ministries and ministerial places provides greater opportunities for each of us to be called to new challenges, which can revitalize and reenergize our zeal and enthusiasm for ministry, helping us remain fresh and effective.

The vitality and viability of the Congregation:

To anticipate a plan for vitality and viability for the future made us depend heavily on interpreting our demographics and their projections, clearly less precise and exact predictions. As you know we especially used the data on the number of religious under the age of 75 (admittedly an arbitrary number). Retirement age is not a fixed number especially for religious, but, as we look forward at least fifteen years, it gives us some reference to help us picture what the full-time, active “work force” might look like. Granted, many will be doing very valuable

ministry well beyond that arbitrary age. When we consider the present rosters of our religious and not only faceless numbers, we can begin to realize that an infinite number of permutations of involved religious has not been and will not be our human reality. Besides, recognizing realities of religious life, such as the need for personnel in internal ministry, formation personnel and health issues religious will face, we obviously chose to opt for larger rather than smaller provinces. The purpose for considering these aspects of vitality and viability helps us to approach optimal staffing for effective ministry.

The plan originally proposed to the Congregation for discussion at the 2018 Chapters obviously took many members by surprise. Expectations from our past experience led many of us to anticipate that structural changes would be predicated on diminishment; newer provinces now anticipating growth would be unaffected. I confess that I have relied on the belief, coming from the last two general chapters:

- that broad structural change would refresh our vitality in mission (including a renewal of *mission ad extra*);
- that thinking of ourselves in a different way would elicit a renewed religious life and ministerial zeal among us; and
- that we would embrace the challenge to think and act more congregationally and internationally.

I still believe that if we are bold, brave and courageous enough (which translates in my thinking to Trust in Divine Providence, fearlessly embracing The Cross as our Only Hope, and having a deep-seated Zeal for the Apostolate), we will put in place a Plan for Reorganizing our Structures for a new day for the Congregation of Holy Cross.

The Chapter Process

Please permit me to say a few words about the process we have chosen to use in this Extraordinary Chapter. The 2016 Chapter authorized this Chapter “to approve the new structure and address any financial implication, and any necessary changes to the Constitutions or Statutes.” Overly and prematurely optimistic in its assessment, it had anticipated that the Superior General and his Council would have developed by now an implementation plan to accompany the structural plan. We still have to keep that optimism before us, but implementation plans will be our work for the next three years.

We foresee the chapter having two components. The first is to adopt a Plan for Reorganization of Governance Structure. This component will consist of a full and complete discussion and adoption of some **Plan for Congregational Restructuring**.

Early on, we said that once the Congregation adopts a plan, we would depend on the present entities, asked to come together, would begin to work out the details of how they would operate as new provinces. “Due diligence” is required for that to happen. At this Chapter, we want to

adopt a “skeleton” of new province structures. We will commission the leadership of the present entities, under the guidance of the General Administration, to develop their own way of organizing their management and governance and establishing the framework of the new province organization and administration. Our task is very limited: we should determine the contours of new provinces, determine the broad timeline as goals for when it should happen. Then we all should accompany those whom we ask to make it happen by working together carefully and diligently.

Since this is not a piecemeal project, but a congregational project of reorganization, as the highest authority in the Congregation, we think that the best process is,

- (1) to listen to each other as each one speaks as the Spirit directs him, (2) to discern together where the Spirit is leading us, as a congregation, and then
- (3) to enshrine the decision(s) in clear and unambiguous legislation.

We want all capitulants and observers to see yourselves, not as delegates from a particular province, vicariate or district, with some kind of status quo to defend, but as members of the Congregation, who together with each other, hear and speak as brothers and priests who have “nothing in mind but God and the good of the institute” (CIC, 626). For that to happen, I ask you to be particularly prayerful throughout these days – at our formal liturgies and Eucharist and in your personal prayer. When we conclude this first component of the Chapter, I hope we will be confident to say to our whole membership as the Council of Jerusalem did to the converts of Antioch, “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...” (Acts 15:28).

So, Stage I will be an open discussion in general session. (*cf Code, 7.3.1*). If we are ready to move to the parliamentary phase using what has been presented as the base document, we will move to Stage II in which we will vote on each part of the document, making amendments or changes as deemed necessary (*cf. Code, 7.3.3*). If we wish to edit extensively or revise substantially all or parts of it into a new plan, we will elect an *ad hoc* Committee to put our agreed thoughts into legislative form and then proceed to Stage II legislative action.

Stage III will take place on the last day of the Chapter (*cf. Code 7.3.4*).

After we have come to an agreement on the Reorganization Plan this Extraordinary Chapter will adopt for the Congregation of Holy Cross, we will proceed to discuss and decide the six issues presented in my letter of convocation. We will deal with as many of them as we can.

The General Council proposes a different model to be used in this second component of the Chapter. We will use a modified three-Stage approach: having free and open discussions among the capitulants followed by committee work, a legislative general assembly using parliamentary rules and, on the final day, ratifying all the legislation of the Chapter.

The modification will occur in Stage I. In order that all capitulants will have a chance to give voice to their discernment of the issue, we will divide into eight (8) small groups to discuss each

of the six issues, one at a time. The capitulants were randomly selected for the small groups. They will proceed to the designated breakout rooms reserved in the C Block. They will choose one of their members to keep the exchange flowing and a secretary who will take notes, prepare them for reporting to the assembly, and turn them over to the respective committee. Each committee will then draft legislation for debate and amendment in the parliamentary session of Stage II.

We hope this process assures that even those more reluctant to speak in a large group will have a chance to share their thoughts and opinions (we want to hear from everyone) in a setting more conducive to even the introverted and/or those less confident to speak out in large groups. Stage I for each agenda item will conclude when all small groups have provide the committee with the notes from their small groups and all the Committees, if they have not begun to meet, can begin work on the formulation of legislation.

There will be eight small groups of seven-to-eight people in each group. We hope this process will provide a positive experience of listening almost to everyone in the Chapter. It increases our awareness of the perspectives that come from the different life experiences of delegates and from the histories of jurisdictions and particular cultures that give shape to our common concerns.

It is my prayer and hope that all of us will enter into these discussions with an open mind and listening heart to what the Spirit might be saying to our Congregation today. May God bless us all. Thank you.