

Rome, July 9th, 2022

Memory of St. Agustin Zhao Rong and companions (China)

Towards the XVIII General Chapter. Some guidelines for its preparation.

To all confreres

Dear Confreres,

on June 11th, the Superior General announced the XVIII General Chapter (GCh) which will be held in Bukavu (DRC) in July 2023. Such event is going to lead our Institute to the beginning of a new journey. It is a path enriched by everyone's commitment and by the numerous graces the Lord continues bestowing on us, so that we may be, in the Church and for the Church, a credible sign of her missionary task of *first proclamation*.

“What we are experiencing is not simply an epoch of changes, but an epochal change. We find ourselves living at a time when change is no longer linear, but epochal. It entails decisions that rapidly transform our ways of living, of relating to one another, of communicating and thinking, of how different generations relate to one another and how we understand and experience faith and science. ...” (Pope Francis, December 21st, 2021)

When facing this epoch and the great challenges in the field of mission *ad gentes*, as Xaverians we experience all our inadequacy and uncertainty. Yet this is a time for listening and thinking together, for daring, repositioning and going out. Each one of us faces the temptation to pull back or give in to pessimism. We are constantly urged to look for new, humble and concrete answers to the serious questions arising from the many changes that befall us. However, only through a shift in mindset, that is, an interior conversion, we may expect to keep being meaningful.

The theme of the Chapter, **Loving Our Xaverian Vocation** is in keeping with the main objective of the *Xaverian jubilee* that was celebrated last year. It reminds us that one hope is the goal of our calling by God (see Ephesians 4:4). It refers to the ‘greatness’ of our vocation and, therefore, of our personal identity as missionaries. For us, this theme is constantly relevant. It engages us directly, wherever we may be and whatever the task we are carrying out. Only by authentically (and affectively) accepting our vocation and daring to verify the way we are missionaries *ad gentes*, *ad extra* and *ad vitam* today can we really be true to our vocation in a significant way.

The upcoming GCh is a commitment of all Xaverians. Since the chapter is an ecclesial and family event, it is crucial that all confreres feel involved in its preparation and celebration, without passing the buck on to the confreres that are delegates. Truly, the preparation for the Chapter should not be limited to the election of the delegates (*juridical preparation*).

As anticipated in the announcement letter of June 11th, 2022, in accordance with the guidelines contained in *Directory of the General Chapter* (DGC 5), the GD has appointed a preparatory committee chaired by Fr. Eugenio Pulcini and Fr. Fabien Kalehezo, and composed by these

confreres: Adriano Cunha, Robert Kowa, Juan Olvera, Leonardus Harno, Paolo Tovo, Pascal Atumissi, Alessandro Brai, Carlos Collantes and Faustino Turco.

The preparatory committee has already met on-line four times to define – along with the GD – and set in motion a *plan of action* encompassing stages, modalities and concrete activities with the aim to mobilise the Xaverian family's involvement in the journey towards the XVIII GCh. It is necessary that each Circumscription and each one of us feel part of this journey of preparation in spirit of synodality.

- 1) The *background*, or general horizon within which we move and which will lead us till the XVIII GCh, is as follows:
 - **Where we come from.** The journey travelled by the Congregation over the last decades (*historical overview*). Which path are we currently walking? Which are the objectives we are trying to pursue? It is necessary to retrieve some foundations and leading principles.
 - **Where we are now.** What is happening? Looking at our reality and its diverse activities.
 - **Where we are heading to.** What kind of horizon are we envisioning (*proposal phase*)? Which paths should the Institute take at present and in the future? With reference to the zones and areas of missionary work, the personnel, the structures, the Government,...: which are the priorities, criteria, choices and strategies? What kind of changes? The importance of promptness and flexibility in decisions and their implementation (see also *Cosuma Intercapitolare 2021. Atti e conclusioni*).

The Committee is preparing some **thematic materials** which are meant to help personal and community reflection on aspects of our Xaverian life and the mission *ad gentes* in light of this three-fold dimension (*where we come from; where we are now; where we are heading to*). The materials will be sent to everyone and will include directions on how to study them personally and directions on community sharing. We ask that the “results” of community sharing be sent to the Committee (at the same time, everyone should feel free to send personal “answers”).

- 2) *Loving Our Xaverian Vocation*: how is this experience finding realisation in the missionary action of the Xaverians today? We want to facilitate sharing (*through a narrative style...*) of *missionary experiences* – their variety, richness and difficulties – which are occurring in the Circumscriptions and that express love for our vocation. It is important and useful that the beauty of our charism in *daily life* be *described*.

2.a: We are going to ask each Circumscription at least one contribution illustrating the ‘specific’ missionary field (or one of the fields) that characterises its Xaverian presence. For instance: inter-religious dialogue, formation, *indigenous* peoples, mass media (*radio, social media, websites, magazines, ...*), *first* proclamation and catechumenate, justice and peace, mission and culture, safeguard of creation, missionary parish, *slums* of metropolises, mission awareness and vocation ministry, *new* openings, older confreres and service to the sick, academic field, ‘general’ services (secretariats, archives, ...), etc.

We will try to ensure that all activities/missionary fields belonging to Xaverian life are *narrated*. This work will be coordinated with the Preparatory Committee. Moreover, since some Circumscriptions are involved in several fields, they can present additional reports *to*

tell about their different activities. What matters is sharing as much as possible with everyone.

2.b: Following the same method employed during the jubilee for the *Testament Letter*, we are going to invite some confreres of different age and provenance to present a reflection about what they expect from the next GCh. Some questions may help, e.g.: what do you ask of the XVIII GCh? what do you expect from the next GCh? In your view, which important and urgent – that cannot be delayed – choices must be taken in order to determine the future direction of our missionary Family? And what does the current situation of the Congregation asks of you? In view of the upcoming Chapter, what are you committed to?

A first list of collaborators will be selected by the GD, and will include lay Xaverians and Xaverian sisters as well. Subsequently, all those who will want to share their reflections will be able to do so.

2.c: Some of the confreres with an experience in the academic field and with a *working* experience will be invited to share some *reflections (studies and researches)* in order to help analyse and deepen understanding of missionary and non-missionary issues and topics which are relevant to us. The list of themes can be very long... We will directly consult them because, apart from our requests, they too may suggest topics particularly important for the missionary activity of our Family. In this connection, the *Continental Study Centres*, possibly out of their own initiative, can provide a qualified help.

There can be many ways to realise all these goals, such as through articles, on-line conferences, panel discussions on specific themes, periodical offering of digital material, etc. It will be the Committee's task to organise contacts and activities with these confreres.

- 3) Review – Updating of the *General Directories*. This is another *area* in the work of preparation. The necessity to update part of our *Directories*, those which regulate the organisation and management of our Institute, becomes apparent when considering the present situation, the changes that are occurring and when taking into account *the Church's magisterium, as well as the Xaverian one*. Informal groups will be created specifically for each of the *General Directories*. These groups will be intercultural and include confreres that are *familiar* with the issues. The groups will be coordinated by the General Direction itself and will present the results of their work at the GCh. These are the *General Directories* which are expected to be reviewed and upgraded: **General Directory of Missionary-Vocation Animation**; **General Directory of Temporal Good**; and **Directory of the General Chapter**. The opportunity to prepare a new directory about the dimension of **Mission and Culture** is under evaluation.

We remind that, at the behest of the XVII GCh, one commission coordinated by Fr. Javier Peguero has been working for some time – in collaboration with the Xaverian laity of the countries where we are present – on a definitive proposal for a document titled **Elements Defining the Xaverian Laity** that will be presented at the XVIII GCh. Finally, the Preparatory Committee, with the GD, is going to take it upon itself to conduct a preliminary revision of the **Ratio Missionis Xaveriana** by involving other confreres.

The outcome of the work done by these groups will be presented at the assembly of the XVIII GCh for approval or further amendments.

- 4) In addition to the **theme**, in the recent weeks a **logo** of the upcoming GCh has been prepared. It will be introduced in the coming days. The **Biblical icon** which has been selected is the following one: “Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges; can you not see it?” (Isaiah 43: 19). In view of the three main stages (*where we come from; where we are now; where we are heading to*), it seems to us that this scripture passage is an invitation to trust and hope. The **prayer for the XVIII GCh** is the same prayer of the *Xaverian jubilee year* for the centenary of the *Testament Letter*. It has already been translated into all our languages and will be soon published with a new format.

Dear confreres, we are sending you this letter to inform everyone about what we are planning to carry out, but especially to rekindle interest for and the possibility to collaborate in the preparation of the XVIII GCh. In fact, we are all called to express our views about the various aspects on which the next GCh will focus in accordance with the deepest aspiration of each one, and in that Family spirit that is our peculiar trait.

Let us keep united in the memory of the Lord, confident that “constant prayer together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus” (Acts 1: 14) can obtain for the XVIII General Chapter the gift of the Holy Spirit, enthusiasm and the energy of a new Pentecost.

On behalf of the General Direction

Fr Eugenio Pulcini SX and Fr. Fabien Kalehezo SX.