

*« New wine into fresh wineskins »  
So that Jesus Christ may be proclaimed  
to the men and women of our day*

Acts of the General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
Écully-Valpré, April 27 – May 17, 2017



## Preface

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The 33rd general chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption underscored the significant changes experienced by our Congregation and the world. Times have changed and we have a pressing duty not only to adapt as communities to our new reality, but also for each one of us personally, in the depths of our hearts, to demonstrate our openness to the Spirit who “makes all things new” (Rev 21:5).

There are two fundamental requirements that need to be put in place in order to implement the Chapter’s orientations. The first is fidelity to the spirit of the Gospel, such as it was lived by Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon. Once an apostle has put his hand to the plough, he must not turn back, all the while remaining faithful to history. If we are moving toward the Kingdom, it is God himself who has set us in motion. And this motion began with Emmanuel d’Alzon, was pursued by his sons and is being extended by us today. Fidelity is a force that has been placed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The more apostolic that the Assumption is, the more the Gospel penetrates the depth of each religious’ heart. No apostolic activity will bear fruit unless the worker himself be transformed by grace. Fidelity, therefore, is a call to never-ending conversion.

The second requirement goes hand in hand with the first. Changing times demand new responses. Emmanuel Mounier, a Christian philosopher, said that “the event is our interior master”. There can be no apostles without the desire to respond to the needs of the world as it is today. It is a question of contemplating the world, God’s work, in order to love it and transform it. “Paying attention to the event” means being able to respond to the new

needs of the world with innovative answers that prayer and discernment allow us to invent.

The Chapter Acts begin with an updated presentation of our charism. We often have a hard time articulating the essential elements of our spirituality and of our Congregation. We hem and haw. Why? I don't think the reason is lack of knowledge of the charism—even if a deeper appreciation of it remains a priority—I think rather that we're afraid of giving a definition that might too severely limit something meant to give life and movement. The charism has been particularly well studied since the aggiornamento requested by the Second Vatican Council. The Rule of Life presents it in a profound and lively fashion. The 1999 Chapter took a rather good approach to it. But the richness of the charism cannot be exhausted by texts. It is to be regularly examined afresh so as to be presented to the men and women of one's time. The effort for us to clarify and deepen it remains crucial.

So we said that we are “at the service of unity in a divided world”. Not long ago we spoke of ourselves as men of communion. We must take this definition up once again in order to develop it and implement it concretely in our lives, our communities, and our apostolic works. The world is divided and communion is difficult to bring about. The Assumption desires to contribute to reconciliation and peace by working for unity... unity in our hearts, unity in our communities, unity in the Church, unity in society.

Internationality and interculturality were also the object of extensive reflection during the Chapter. Division exists wherever human beings put their own personal interests before the common good. I believe that this notion of the “common good” needs

to be deepened so that each one of us might live it ever more intensely. And it begins above all with a strong prayer life.

The transformation that the Assumption is experiencing as a result of its development in Africa and Asia requires that we go further still in our openness to cultural diversity. Every culture and every language has its place at the Assumption. It is the Spirit of Pentecost that must be alive and not that of Babel.

The Assumption will contribute with all its might to this desire for unity. We reiterated how high a priority the cause of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue has been. But unity also means working with all goodwill for the defense of Creation. Our “common house” is suffering and we cannot remain indifferent to this distress.

The Chapter outlined the other priorities flowing from our commitment to unity. We recalled the urgency of an Assumptionist formation that prepares men to be apostles of the Kingdom, men of unity and reconciliation. We expressed our conviction that our involvement in education and teaching is a major priority. The Assumption must invest in schools at all levels in order to contribute to the formation of responsible men and women, capable of commitments in Church and society. But the Assumption must also pursue its effort to pass on the Lord’s call to come and work with him. It is essential that we promote vocations... priestly, religious, and lay. Unity also includes the lay-Religious Alliance. The presence of our lay friends at the Chapter contributed to reinforcing the conviction that nothing enduring can be accomplished without them. They are our partners in the proclamation of the

Kingdom. The road that we shall follow with them is that of friendship and respect for our different vocations. Lay-religious complementarity is a real resource for the Assumption.

If the 2011 Chapter spent a lot of time and effort working on community organization, that of 2017 was not to be outdone. We reinforced our desire for greater coresponsibility between provinces as well as the need for improved pooling of our resources, human and financial. The creation of Vicariates satisfied the desire that recent foundations be initiated into greater autonomy and more effective involvement in the life of the Congregation, especially at the level of the Plenary General Council. Coresponsibility, subsidiarity and the pooling of resources will not be possible unless everyone commits himself to living catholicity to the full. It means toppling the parochial concerns that confine and oppose diversity.

In conclusion, let me say that the Chapter's main goal was not the publication of beautiful texts. It took place to give new life to the Congregation... to its spiritual life with a renewal of our religious commitment, to its apostolic life with renewed apostolic zeal, to its community life that it might bear witness to the primacy of the Kingdom in us and around us. I pray that all of us, religious and lay, take ownership of the texts so that we might be led by the Spirit who "renews the face of the earth" (Ps 103:30).

Very Rev. Benoît GRIÈRE, A.A.  
*Superior general*

*New wine into fresh wineskins*

**Our charism**





## **The charism of the Assumption: at the service of unity in a divided world**

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*To share with all the experience that “He who unites us is stronger than that which separates us” (Rule of Life #8).*

1. According to Father d’Alzon the spirit of the Assumption is a spirit of unity (Ecrits Spirituels, pp. 699ff). The Chapters of 2005 and 2011 re-expressed the charism in terms of a trilogy: men of faith, men of communion, in solidarity with the poor. Today’s world is calling us to focus in depth on this theme of unity.
2. “Our divine Master prayed that his disciples be united with his sacred person, united in the Catholic Church, of which they were the first core, united among themselves, united in their apostolic works.” (Ecrits Spirituels, p. 701) This call to unity finds expression in who we are, in what we live, and in what we undertake. The relevance of our works and of our apostolic priorities can be verified in the light of this call: the Assumption seeks to serve unity in accordance with the words of our *Rule of Life*: “Faithful to the will of Fr. d’Alzon, our communities are at the service of truth, unity and charity” (Rule of Life #5).
3. Let us remember that the Assumption was born at a time of major political, economic and social upheaval, destabilizing people as well as institutions, including the Church. In this troubled climate, Father d’Alzon sensed that man more than ever needed God so that he might find his place in a

changing world. We are still convinced of this today. In the face of the changes we are experiencing, we do not succumb to resignation because, in faith, we know that our charism—a gift of God to the Church—makes it possible for us to accompany and serve men and women, especially the poorest among them, during their earthly pilgrimage. These new times are also an opportunity for us to make an inventory of our spiritual, intellectual, and apostolic heritage and to put our charism into practice in the face of the needs of the world and of the Church. These needs compel us to see if the ways we are incarnating the charism in our efforts to respond to these calls are relevant.

## **Our resources**

4. **Faith.** The Assumption pursues this project with the resources that God has given it and seeks to make the most of them. The first is our faith in God who desires our unity. The Trinitarian mystery provides elements allowing us to think about unity and diversity at once. This faith finds echo in the concrete exhortation: “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bear with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace...” (Eph 4:2-3).
5. **Joy.** On any number of occasions, Pope Francis has called those in consecrated life to be witnesses of joy, echoing the words of Jesus: “That my joy be in you and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). Father d’Alzon was sensitive to this joy: “Happy are those communities where brothers help their Superiors inject enthusiasm and life. There is a way of fostering joy; it passes from sons to fathers and back

again. Obedience becomes joyful and agreeable because the command itself is joyful and benevolent” (28<sup>th</sup> Meditation, *Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 550). This joy of living with the Lord is also lived out in our communities. Because we ourselves have had this experience, we can undertake the mission of bringing God’s consolation to all.

6. **Passion for the Reign of God.** Father d’Alzon speaks of the Kingdom of God as the “greatest of all causes” (*Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 693). Our entire life is guided by this cause whose servants we are. It gives to our religious life its missionary dimension: “By our vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, we wish to call attention to the ultimate meaning of human realities and to become servants of the Kingdom” (Rule of Life #25). This passion for the Kingdom of God leads us to commit ourselves to promote justice, peace and reconciliation, and to befriend those who are poor and lowly, and at the same time, in response to Christ’s call, to defend the rights of God and of man, wherever these are violated.
7. **Community life.** It is in community life, lived out in a family spirit, that we already experience unity, admittedly in a way that is never fully achieved. Our communities aim to be ‘schools of communion’. In community, we put all things in common, what we have and who we are, beginning with our experience of God which is “the very reason for your coming together” (*Rule of Augustine*, I, 2).
8. **Love of the Church and of the Blessed Virgin.** This love, which has its origin in our love for Jesus Christ, finds its expression in the different ways in which the Assumption

serves the people of God: her involvement in parishes, in shrines, in pilgrimages; in her vocation ministry meant to ensure the future of the Church, which has a need for ministers and those in the consecrated life... Our love of the Church is inseparable from that of our love of Mary, “the woman of faith, who lives and walks in faith” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #287). The mystery of the Assumption, whose name we bear, reveals that not all is corrupt. Despite sin, men and women are capable of doing good. This is reason for hope in our world.

9. **The Lay-Religious Alliance.** From the very beginning, lay people have been fully involved in the mission of the Assumption. With us they are responsible for making the charism bear fruit. They encourage us to deepen the charism of the Assumption and help us to discover its relevance for today by coming up with ways of responding to the challenges of our times. This Alliance has firm roots in our Assumptionist identity. We rejoice that wherever our desire for unity takes flesh, there religious are in alliance with their lay friends.

## **Where Unity takes flesh**

10. We believe that these resources are enlivened by the Holy Spirit, who entrusts them to us so that through them we can do our part in building the Kingdom. This work bears the stamp of God’s grace and our own human commitment; so it is cause for praise and joy. It is also a call to begin anew at the personal and community level, with ardor and generosity, so that Christ may, according to one of Fr’ d’Alzon’s fundamental intuitions, continue to become incarnate in

our lives. Neither place nor opportunity is lacking. Jesus Christ, “who makes all things new,” (Rev 21:5) provides both and will continue to do so.

**11. United communities.** They are the best witness we can bear. They also represent a promise that Christ made to his disciples. “How good and sweet it is when brothers live together in harmony” (Ps 133:1). Fraternal life needs time together to pray, to share, to celebrate, to meet, to relax...We live in international and intercultural communities. To become a real treasure, diversity requires a welcoming spirit, an understanding ear, respect for others, forgiveness... (see Rule of Life #8). Our communities seek to be hospitable and friendly. Lay people, especially those of the Alliance, should feel welcome there and supported in their commitment with the Assumption.

**12. An intense spiritual life.** “Christ is at the center of our life...” (Rule of Life #2):

“With hearts broken in a million pieces, it will be difficult to build an authentic social peace” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 229). Unity is first of all to be built up within us, and this comes about through fidelity to the evangelical counsels that presuppose a balanced life, a spiritual life as well as a regular sacramental life (Eucharist and Reconciliation), review of one’s life...

“We must give souls a hunger and a thirst for prayer” (Ecrits Spirituels, p. 445).

We remember our brothers who have lost their lives because of their faith and their service of the common good. Their witness is a challenge to us: “Would I be ready, if need

be, to shed my blood like the martyrs rather than renounce my faith in Christ and His Church?" (*Directory*, Part II, 1).

13. **Ecumenism.** In working for the unity of Christians, we offer our energy and our entire life "so that all may be one" (John 17:21).

We share the passion of our forebears for theological studies and the work of ecumenism.

Led by the Saint Peter/Saint Andrew Center in Bucharest, the Near Eastern Mission, our oldest mission, seeks to help the entire body of the Assumption to breathe with the two lungs of the faith.

The development of evangelical Protestantism invites us to discover this phenomenon and learn more about it through direct contact. It hasn't spread everywhere without tension. It should lead us to renew our missionary zeal and prayer for unity.

14. **Inter-religious dialogue** reveals our option to articulate our belief in the work for unity among men, through love, in opposition to fear of the other or violence:

- mainly with the other two great monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, in the West and in Africa and in the countries of our Near Eastern Mission (Turkey, Holy Land)
- with the Buddhist and Confucian traditions in the Far East (Vietnam, Korea) and with traditional pre-Christian beliefs (Africa, Madagascar).

This dialogue begins in daily life and eventually gets expressed in common initiatives. It also requires a commitment to specialized studies.

15. **Defending « our common home ».** Living and growing up on the earth, « our common home » (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 1): we love it and want to defend it whenever it is threatened. The encyclical *Laudato Si* underlines that “all is related.” The current crisis is at once economic, social and environmental. It demands world-wide responses. We want to make our contribution by:
- working for peace through justice and reconciliation, in war-torn countries where we are, especially in North Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo);
  - becoming aware of everything that is at stake in an integral ecology, which should lead to proposals for “environmental education”;
  - greater creativity in our search for simple and sober ways of living.
16. **Our pastoral work.** In running parishes, shrines, small Christian communities, pilgrimages... we are helping to build up the People of God:
- by gathering together people and groups, no matter their level of faith, practice, wealth, or origin...;
  - by contributing to the formation of evangelizing communities, capable of going out to the “peripheries”;
  - by building bridges that reach across borders (Inter-religious and inter-cultural “Youth Integration tours” in West Africa) and beyond generation gaps, and that address social fractures (pilgrimages to Lourdes for the vulnerable).
17. **Education is at the heart of our charism;** Father d’Alzon, himself a passionate educator, sends us:
- to support families, where education begins, through family ministry, through our publications, and through

our willingness to take their place at times as in our orphanages (Vietnam);

- to run educational institutions at the service of the integral development of young people so that they might give the best of themselves; among our many institutions, we cite three mobilizing works: the university in Worcester (USA), Emmanuel d’Alzon Institute of Higher Education in Butembo/ISEAB (DRC), and the network of bush schools in Madagascar.
- to help our students more generally be men and women with a capacity for reflection, for dialogue, for fostering unity in view of bringing together faith and reason, heart-soul-body, humanity and the whole of creation.

**18. Authentic communication unites.** It is an apostolic field worthy of our continued investment:

- For us, communication paves the way for a discussion of the major issues of the day; it helps people to discover who they are, to meet others, to establish relationships and to better understand one another.
- While human history clearly shows the ravages wrought by propaganda and rumor, we seek to run responsible media outlets: radio stations in Africa, Bayard, etc.
- New information and communication technologies open us up to the “digital continent,” where we are already present, but must redouble our imagination and offerings so as not to let this continent develop on its own.

**19. Solidarity with and service of the poor** give flesh to our commitment to unity; every Assumptionist seeks to find Christ here:



- In the face of poverty, source of divisions between peoples and within the same people, we have gotten involved in many places: with migrants and refugees (Athens, the river-boat *Je Sers* in Conflans...), with poor laborers in Saigon, with slum-dwellers in Manila, street people in Bogota...
- The fight against poverty is also seen in our commitment to development, to providing access to education, to protecting the environment, to promoting social rights (*Accompagner* in Brussels)...
- This solidarity is also lived out in our Congregation when we put all our resources in common, human, financial, and other. We are also mindful that a part of our resources comes from the generosity of people of modest means.

**20.** Assumptionist religious life is called to resemble the burning bush that led Moses to “make a detour to see this strange spectacle” (Ex 3:3). The fire is the fire of God, which an Assumptionist community feeds with the fodder of its faith, its joy, its virtues; we are happy to take the risk of pledging our lives so that this fire might spread wherever we are.



*Where do we want to work for unity?*



# Formation

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## Exposé of motives

21. With thanksgiving we take stock of what has been accomplished in the area of formation since the 2011 General Chapter: young people have arrived in significant numbers, consumed with the love of Christ and eager to serve the Kingdom.
22. The body of our small congregation is quite alive: the “young shoots” are charting a path for the future for everyone. In order to meet the demands of this growth, adjustments have been made: the constitution of international formation communities (General Chapter 2011, #33), the creation of an international formation commission, the ever-growing participation of Lay Alliance members in the formation of young religious, the implementation of the first apostolic assignments by the Superior general with the Plenary General Council.....so many fruits of the Spirit without sufficient time and experience yet to be evaluated.
23. Nevertheless, we can't remain still: “Come over to Macedonia » (Acts 16:9). We need architects of peace, servants of communion, well-formed apostles ready to respond to the challenges of the world and of the Church, in the spirit of the Assumption in the upcoming six years.
24. Also, so that we might in order to respond to the mission priorities of our Congregation, let us take a clear-sighted

look at the present, recall our past with gratitude, and embrace the future with hope.

## **Taking a clear-sighted look at the present**

### ***Vocations***

25. God loves and continues to bless the Assumption: drawn by our charism, young people are joining us in order to respond to Christ's call and to share with us in community the joy of the Gospel. In young Assumptionist territories, especially in Asia and West Africa, new formation communities have been opened. This all means having in place suitable structures to welcome and accompany them. Formators, often insufficient in number, receive candidates, some of whom are at times too old. We also lack a *modus operandi* for accompanying the formation of lay religious. It is with sadness that departures from the Congregation must be noted, even if several others have requested reintegration as well.

### ***The renewed call to become formators***

26. The Assumption has invested seriously in the formation of formators. Sessions for formators and novice-masters were held. Greater inter-provincial solidarity was put in place, both with regard to human and financial resources. The Assumption needs formators who are well-formed and available. We are grateful for the religious who have responded so generously to this mission.

### ***A novelty: the presence of lay collaborators***

27. Competent lay-people have become more and more involved in the formation of young religious, consistent with the wishes of Fr. d'Alzon: they support formation ministry both materially and financially. Acknowledging the benefits of their fraternal presence, young religious have become more and more enthusiastic. Such lay collaborators also participate in the prayer life of our formation communities that are not "little, self-enclosed islands."

### ***Ever-growing openness to internationality and interculturality***

28. Since the General Chapter of 2011, we have been experiencing a growing openness, witnessed in international encounters (World Youth Day, Taizé, the meeting of formators of the Assumption Family in Nairobi in July 2015, the meeting of young religious in formation in Latin America, summer missionary immersion programs organized by young people in Latin America, the Asian CAFI, meetings of young religious preparing for final vows, pastoral stages, etc.). Of course, the creation of international formation communities must be mentioned here.
29. For young people in formation these experiences represent a real « school of life ». Learning new languages, openness to the culture of another, to new styles of praying, to new views of the world and of provinces, to different styles of formation within the Assumption prepare "workers for the Kingdom."

30. Nevertheless, there are a number of questions that still deserve to be treated at some depth in order to ensure more effective accompaniment: the very high number of religious in formation with few formators who have had adequate training, relations of brothers with their provincials, infrastructure, and finances. On another point, for certain brothers the first apostolic assignments have contributed to strengthening the international and intercultural spirit of our Congregation. In the line of former bold missionaries, there exists among the young a real readiness to serve. But we need to make progress in the formation to internationality and interculturality.

### ***Coresponsibility in the formation process***

31. Young religious feel responsible for their own formation during periods of time that are often long and complicated (*Ratio Institutionis*, 24). Nevertheless, efforts must still be made to combine the different aspects of religious life more effectively (intellectual life, life of community prayer, and pastoral activities).
32. If our formation appears to be more intellectual than existential, then further measures must be taken, especially with regard to greater pastoral involvement and a growing awareness of the impact of the digital world, to ecology, to a sense of the common good, to matters related to our financial life, and to issues of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, etc.
- There has been a rediscovery of the role of spiritual direction at the Assumption in line with our charism. However,



it must also be said that some religious have become negligent in this regard.

### ***Assumptionist charism***

33. Formation communities have been developing opportunities to deepen our charism: D'Alzon days in Kinshasa, Assumptionist weekends in Europe, lessons on Assumptionist spirituality in Fianarantsoa, in the Philippines, in Buenos Aires, etc.

It should be noted, however, that unfortunately continued formation in our charism and in our spirituality remains a poor cousin in our Congregation. Communities have failed to look at this issue and understand why this is the case.

Some formation experiences within the Assumption Family have excited all of us; they help us to imagine new ways of proceeding, such as, for example, in some provinces, programs during postulancy and novitiate, and in some places during the post-novitiate period.

### ***Giving thanks for our fundamental convictions***

In the wake of the re-expression of our charism (cf #1-19), we consider to be necessary:

34. ***- A return to Christ***

Christ is the first Teacher and, in this regard, the first model for formation: « In a world where we share the pursuit and efforts of all men and women to become fully human, we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the perfect human being, and we find in God the deepest motivation for our life and action. ... » (Rule of Life #23).

35. **- A return to our founding principles**

The vigor of our formation process presupposes a deepening of our founding principles, Dalzonian and Augustinian. Continuous immersion, from initial formation right up to the time of specialized studies, from the very beginning of one's formation to the very end of one's life, cultivates fidelity to our charism. On this matter the reworked *Ratio Institutionis* suggests some guidelines for doing so.

36. **- A return to the fraternal life**

The quality of our life is a school of evangelization. Communities that are stronger and more fraternal offer a balanced life for everyone. They allow for a more personalized formation and a more accurate evaluation of young people, and provide greater resources for resisting the individualism and growing dispersion linked especially to the globalization all around us.

## **Embracing the future with confidence**

*The future of the Congregation depends on how seriously we take formation work*

37. ***Pooling our resources.***

We must work toward unity in formation work within our Congregation. « *We form but one body.... called to one hope* » (Eph 4:4). In the framework of pooling our overall resources, we need to proceed to make an inventory of what these resources are in the area of formation.

We propose the creation of an Assumptionist database to be placed at the disposition of the entire Congregation. It

would serve as a tool to bring together young people in formation as well as a tool for formators. Under the responsibility of the new Office of the Secretary General for Formation, a task force will rework what already exists in order to make it more accessible to young religious and to formators. Real interaction among them will thus be encouraged as well as a refocusing on our charism by the launching of a digital formation program.

**38. Strengthening the formation of formators**

In this regard we recommend:

- a session for novice-masters;
- a meeting of those in charge of international houses of formation;
- a session for recently ordained priests (*Ratio Institutionis*, 163-164);
- the re-introduction of a 'probation' program spearheaded by the Plenary General Council and intended to give religious an opportunity to reread their apostolic experiences;
- identifying religious fit to become formators and putting them on the appropriate paths by the time of the next General Chapter.

**39. We further propose:**

- offering a formation aimed at unity between peoples and an openness to other cultures;
- giving young people an opportunity to have experiences that will allow them to build bridges between peoples, churches, and religions: for example, by inviting the pastors of other churches to our formation houses to give

talks on a particular topic, getting involved in some apostolic activity of another faith tradition, etc. The experience of the Youth Network for African Integration in West Africa could serve as a source of inspiration.

- 40.** Create an Office of the Secretary General of Formation.  
We need a more integrated system of formation within the congregation. To achieve this, we propose the creation of an Office of the Secretary General of Formation.
- 41.** For guidance purposes only, here are some of the possible responsibilities of such an office:
- to accompany and encourage formators, in particular those who bear central responsibilities at the provincial level and those in charge of international formation houses;
  - to develop a plan of formation for formators and to oversee the constitution of solid formation teams, based on a regular dialogue with provincials and the Superior general;
  - to make proposals simplifying the discernment process at the different levels of formation, often perceived as too complex;
  - to prepare first apostolic assignments, including specialized studies, keeping in mind mobilizing works and Assumptionist priorities;
  - to undertake long-term studies regarding the creation of future formation houses, keeping in mind linguistic criteria (Spanish, English, French, etc.) and new territorial entities;
  - to organize, for formators, sessions regarding the implementation and understanding of the *Ratio Institutionis*;

- to undertake a systematic reflection on continued formation and to propose a plan to be implemented by the time of the next general chapter;
- to engage in a reflection on the formation of lay religious;
- to assist in the evaluation of formation plans.

## **Recommendations**

The Chapter recommends:

### **42.** *To those in charge of formation communities:*

- To foresee, within the formation program, moments of apostolic involvement, including opportunities with other churches and religions, wherever possible, and to engage in regular community reflection on these experiences;
- To organize community meetings on our charism and spirituality;
- To offer young people in formation opportunities to be exposed to matters concerning our financial life and to introduce them to the economic administration of our communities.

### **43.** *To Provincials:*

- to organize a period for religious to break away from their ordinary rhythm of life in order to reflect on the vowed life and fundamental Assumptionist realities before requesting final profession;
- to oversee the organization of formation sessions for young people of the Assumption Family;

- to emphasize interprovincial communication to help the formators of international formation houses to fulfill their mission;
  - to organize sessions for young priests (*Ratio Institutionis*, 163-164);
  - for religious who have already been involved for some time in apostolic activities, to organize a time of 'probation' allowing them to re-immense themselves in the fundamentals of Assumptionist religious life.
44. *To the Superior general with his PGC:*
- to identify religious fit to become formators and to putting them on the appropriate paths to do so;
  - to continue the formation of formators, especially by organizing:
    - a session for novice-masters;
    - a meeting for superiors of international formation communities every other year;
  - to strengthen formation teams, especially in international formation houses;
  - to undertake long-term studies regarding the creation of future formation houses and poles of formation within the Congregation, in order to assure better accompaniment of our young religious.

## **Ordinance**

45. The Chapter instructs the Superior general in consultation with his PGC to create an Office of the Secretary General of Formation. The Superior General in consultation with his PGC will determine the powers and the members of this Office. It will be overseen by a Secretary general (cf #37-38).

## Internationality and interculturality

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*Emphasize formation to internationality and to interculturality*

*“The Spirit of Pentecost who, uniting in a single people persons of different languages and nations, conferred faith in the same Lord on all and called men to the same hope (Erga Migrantes caritas christi, 103; Stephen Fumio Cardinal Hamao, president, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People; May 3, 2004)*

46. The Assumption, as a result of the rapid changes it has been experiencing, is aware of the need of forming religious to interculturality. It is not simply a question of adapting to globalization and the intermingling of peoples or even of a single missionary activity. The Congregation must become ever more aware of its missionary vocation (Rule of Life #20).

These issues go to the heart of its very identity: “Are we an authentically missionary congregation or more simple a congregation having missions?” a question we often hear.

47. There is question here of passing from the fact that we have become in reality intercultural to a clear choice of being intercultural, so that each of us can be more fully aware of the historical reality in which we find ourselves and so that the Congregation may make the choices necessary for its future.

48. At the Assumption we have begun to undertake some small steps in providing formation on this matter. Henceforth we need to do more. In six years the face of the Congregation will have changed dramatically. If the internationalization of our communities has become a given almost universally, their interculturality has not. Putting in place a real pedagogy of the intercultural is essential. It can't be boiled down to saying Mass in different languages or enjoying exotic cuisines at our table.
49. It is impossible, therefore, to treat here all the questions connected with interculturality and internationality for our Congregation. Only the "new wine" of the implications in the area of formation in this regard will be addressed.

## **Observations**

50. Throughout its history, the Assumption has enjoyed a missionary dynamism. From the beginning, Fr. d'Alzon responded to the appeals of the Church that brought the Congregation to the ends of the earth.... to Australia, to the Near and Far East, and even to China. The Assumption was also able to initiate some wonderful ministries like the Apostolate of the Sea to care for sailors. In many places, it welcomes migrants and refugees today, because it desires to go « wherever God is threatened in man and man is threatened as image of God » (Rule of Life #4). Our communities have also become more international and more intercultural. Our current experience is profoundly marked by all these changes.



51. Until recently, interculturality was essentially examined through the prism of inculturation. It was a question of adapting to local cultural traditions. It was necessary to cultivate a proper understanding of religious life in the European, Africa, Asian, or American worlds. This effort is not outdated, but from now on needs to be expanded.
52. A good number of our communities today are marked by internationality and interculturality. We are transformed by such a reality. Often-times it can try us as well. But “He who unites us is stronger than that which separates us. We must constantly transcend our divisions and limitations so that we can learn to accept and forgive each other” (Rule of Life #8). People, especially in conflict zones, are deeply longing for the witness of a successful intercultural and international religious life (cf. John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, 51), as encouraged at the 2011 General Chapter.
53. We have noticed just how important it is to introduce brothers to the cultures of the countries where they are sent; their integration, as well as their apostolic involvement, depends on it (cf. *Ratio*, 115).

## **Convictions**

54. Our common life is made up of mutual welcome, exchange, and sharing: « If we put kindness and respect for persons before differences of opinion and distinctions based on background, age, mentality or health, our diversity becomes richness» (Rule of Life #8). Our internationality and our interculturality introduce profound changes in the way we look at the world, in the way we understand the Gospel, and

even in the way we respond to the calls of God. From now on, they will also be essential elements in the coming of the Kingdom of God in us and around us.

55. Mission implies “getting outside of oneself”: it is a question of living with brothers, by standing up for them, in the name of Jesus Christ. It is both gift and duty. Mission calls us to a permanent conversion.
56. In a divided world, internationality and interculturality are signs of the Kingdom. They provide a service for the Church and fall within the great causes of God and man.

## **Proposals**

Certain specific actions in this regard are to be undertaken:

57. ***At the personal level***
- pique curiosity with regard to local, socio-cultural and ecclesial realities;
  - have exchanges in community on one’s background, one’s story, the life of one’s country, in order to get to know one another better.
58. ***At the community level***
- from the very beginning of the formation process, encourage an openness to the international dimension of the Congregation and seek to promote a sense of belonging to the Assumption. In this way we can more effectively give expression to our family spirit;

- At the local level, actively participate in workshops/sessions on this topic of internationality and inculturality and make of it a matter for community reflection.

**59. *At the provincial level***

- be sure to provide a clear description of the mission being entrusted to a brother in order to facilitate his apostolic involvement;
- facilitate the transfers of religious from one province to another. A standardized form should be drawn up and should distinguish transfers geared toward studies or toward apostolic work;
- be sure to communicate important elements for the follow-up of transferred religious and make a concerted effort to stay in regular contact with them. It is necessary especially that a brother sent abroad be in possession of all the documents, ecclesial, academic, and civil necessary for the acquisition of visas, the pursuit of his studies, and ordination, if the case be (passport with adequate duration foreseen, transcripts and other academic documents, Church documents needed for ordination, medical certificates and documents, etc.);
- foresee, in view of a successful commissioning of religious and of a fitting welcome in their land of adoption, the putting in place of coherent formation programs, especially for international formation houses. Such programs should cover the history of a people as well as anthropological, psychological, historical, sociological, cultural and theological aspects of interculturality;
- make provision, during their initial formation, for religious to learn a second language of the Congregation

(English, French, Spanish). Each province should develop a workable program to achieve this goal.

- 60.** *For provinces or vicariates* that have a considerable number of missionary religious, appoint a religious from their province of origin to maintain contact with them, without in any way interfering with local authorities responsible for them.
- 61.** *In provinces or vicariates of mission;*
- encourage, for missionaries, workshops and opportunities for exchange and evaluation of their experiences;
  - support the putting in place of sessions of CAFI at the provincial, continental or international level, focused on interculturality: such sessions could deal with issues like conflict management, reflection on returning missionaries' experiences, etc.
- 62.** *At the general level:*
- organize a session on a re-examination of missionaries' experiences, in view of highlighting the qualities necessary for such a mission and the useful preparation measures assuring a successful missionary experience.

## Youth and vocations

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« *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him* » (Jn 6:44).

« *Have the courage to swim against the tide. Have the courage to be truly happy*»  
(Pope Francis, Message for the World Youth Day 2014).

« *Wherever there is life, fervour and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise* » (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 107).

63. Our religious consecration at the Assumption, inspired by love of Christ and all that he loved the most, the Virgin Mary and the Church, impels us to make him known and loved by the proclamation of the Gospel. There exists a very particular joy in working with young people, being at their side and coming to discover what gives real meaning to their lives. That is why each community is called to place special emphasis on entering into contact with young people today, on nourishing warm relationships with them and taking care to help them along their way.

### Observations

64. There is a distinction between youth ministry and vocation ministry, although the latter is linked to the former.

65. The 2011 General Chapter (#104-127), following on the 2005 General Chapter, expressed its deepest concern regarding the crisis of vocation ministry. Have we really made much progress since then? In the provinces of Africa and Madagascar, as in the new territories of West Africa and Vietnam, where young people still enjoy a culture of Christian faith, vocation ministry is in place and vocational discernment is moving forward. In the other territories of the Congregation, marked by secularization, youth and vocation ministry suffer from a lack of a concerted effort, investment, and means.
66. Our territories are quite different and so are the youth. We cannot try to use the same criteria and the same methods with all of them. Even where youth appear to be similar, it cannot be presumed that vocation ministry will meet with the same success (DRC, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania).
67. In Western countries or in countries influenced by Western society, the behavior of youth and their lifestyle are rather inconsistent with the requirements of religious life (long-term commitment, fidelity, obedience...). Nevertheless, they are looking for reference points/touchstones in everyday contexts that can be quite challenging: secularization, excessive religiosity, ideological radicalization, etc. This context causes them to pose questions. A certain number of young people do consider a vocation to religious life and/or priesthood. Today those who enter have allowed themselves to be drawn by explicit forms of religious life.

68. The digital world is underestimated at the Assumption. Yet many contacts with young people take place through digital means today (Internet, websites, social networks...).

## **Convictions**

69. We believe that Assumptionist apostolic community maintains a power to attract when our life bears faithful witness to the Gospel, displayed in the brotherhood among us, the quality of our prayer and our missionary zeal. The internationality of our communities is also a powerful sign of our search for intercultural communion (cf #54).
70. Activities that feature outreach to the neediest remain a privileged terrain for the emergence of vocations.
71. Where secularization has penetrated modern society, where social and cultural references seem to be disappearing, what our religious life and apostolic activities offer must be clear, easy to-read, and compelling.
72. Every community involved in youth ministry must learn how to adapt itself to the young, to their 'language,' and to their dreams. This requires that we listen, we accompany, we engage in dialogue and sharing, in a way that is persistent and sustained over the long haul.
73. Where we are involved apostolically, especially in parishes and in educational settings, youth and vocation ministry must be undertaken. Whenever possible, they should be organized in conjunction with family ministry because the

family, in effect, remains the privileged place where an attachment to Christ and his Church may mature.

74. At the Assumption, youth ministry, vocation ministry, and education are intimately linked. They contribute to the holistic growth of the young in the service of the Kingdom.
75. Assumptionist volunteer programs are intended to offer young people an opportunity for generous involvement and an international experience.
76. The transmission of the faith to youth demands that we work simultaneously in two complementary directions: toward fostering a Christian milieu favorable to growth and formation (youth movements, accompaniment) and then toward proposing to them activities and events that capture their attention, raise questions, and lead to conversion.
77. The « digital continent » is a reality that we can no longer ignore. It requires, therefore, a serious mobilization on our part and an effort that is dynamic, coherent, and persevering.

## **Proposals**

78. The General Chapter of 2011 already asked each Province to establish a pastoral plan for youth ministry and vocation ministry (cf. General Chapter 2011, #126). We reiterate this demand. We must reflect on this matter and then implement a plan. This process should focus on the following points:
  - Youth ministry



- Vocation ministry
- Volunteer program, with special attention paid to what is being done in the Assumption Family
- Communication and indispensable use of digital means
- Involvement of lay people.
- Once established, this plan should be evaluated regularly, especially with regard to its effective implementation and the pedagogy used.

**79.** Today, youth operate more and more in the following way: an event brings them together and then they form communities that offer a possibility to accompany them (e.g. Pâques des Jeunes /Kinshasa, Easter Conferences/Tanzania, festival of faith/Europe, World Youth Day, Youth Pilgrimages in Latin America, the Integration of Young People for Peace in West Africa... ).

- At both the provincial and local level, we should regularly encourage these bonding events. Strategies, both collective and individual, to accompany such events, should be put in place.
- We should pay particular attention to those programs that reach out to the poor, on the one hand, and, on the other, to family ministry. They are both places that give rise to religious and/or lay vocations in the footsteps of Christ.
- We also need to think about ways of reaching out to youth who remains on the fringes of our societies.

- The Chapter asks each province to set up, according to local needs, one or several vocation groups and that their supervision be assured over the long haul by cultivating a vocational culture.
  - Religious are involved more and more in parishes. Even if it is clear that every parish must pay attention to the young, the Chapter asks that, in provinces where it is feasible, one parish run by a community take as its first priority youth and vocation ministry. Such a parish would undertake special initiatives (accompanying youth in the faith, celebrations adapted to them, etc.); having gained experience in this domain, it could then share it with others.
- 80.** The Chapter asks that the religious of provinces and vicariates responsible for youth and vocation ministry begin networking. They should coordinate a joint reflection of activities to be put in place, especially on the occasion of the upcoming synod on the young scheduled for 2018. They should join together to work on the digital continent (e.g. creation of a platform for exchanging experiences, a virtual forum, etc.).
- 81.** « Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son » (Jn 14:13). The Chapter invites all communities to persevere in prayer for religious and lay vocations to the Assumption.

# Education

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*Educators at the service of truth, charity, and unity*

*« Do not be disheartened in the face of the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of man who always retains the Creator's hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate. Educators...pass on knowledge and values with their words; but their words will have an incisive effect on children and young people if they are accompanied by their witness, their consistent way of life. Without consistency it is impossible to educate! »*

(Pope Francis to the Students and Professors of Jesuit Schools in Italy and Albania, June 7, 2013).

## **Education: at the heart of our charism**

- 82.** Teaching and education were the great pastoral activities undertaken by Fr. d'Alzon. He fought intensely for the freedom of Catholic education. Our religious family must not forget that it was born in the college of Nimes and it was there that it received its name and vocation.

83. In the list of goals he gave to his fledgling congregation, Fr. d'Alzon gave priority to «*teaching understood in the most absolute sense of the word, that is to say, colleges, seminaries, and higher education* » (Ecrits Spirituels, p. 96). No level of teaching was omitted in his view, since it was a question of teaching in the broadest sense of the word.
84. Today, like yesterday, education continues to play an important role in the mission of the Assumptionists in various provinces of the Congregation. In July 2016, an international Congress on education at the Assumption was held at *Assumption College*, in the USA. This event gave religious and lay people together an opportunity to identify the fundamental elements of the educational vision of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon in order to translate them into guidelines to orient their various educational institutions today.
85. Overall, the educational program of the Assumption is based on the educational vision of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, inspired by the Gospel, by his passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God and by his desire to respond to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual challenges of his day.
86. As Pope Francis reminds us, «*education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere* (*Laudato si'*, #213). As a result, our guidelines in the matter of education concern both our involvement in educational institutions and, more broadly, in other places where our charism as educators is undertaken in the service of truth, unity, and charity.

## **Our mission in educational institutions**

87. The mission of education is carried out in numerous educational institutions throughout the Congregation where the ambition is the same: following in the footsteps of Emmanuel d'Alzon and adapted to the needs of our day, to form men and women who are free, responsible, bold, full of imagination, and capable of developing their potential, finding their place in society and contributing their part to the work of creation.
88. An Assumptionist education is interested in every dimension of human beings and at every stage of their lives. It seeks to accompany young people at every phase of their development.
89. An Assumptionist education seeks to form young people and students so that they may be capable of discernment, that there may emerge in them ideas that are good, true, and just, and that they may become able to enter into dialogue with the world today.
90. The Assumptionist educational vision desires to make of a school « *a true community* » (Pope Francis), a school that fosters « *a family spirit* » especially marked by trust, openness, generosity, simplicity, and truth in relationships.
91. Assumptionist institutions offer an education that promotes justice and peace as well as responsible citizenship. Young people are made aware of what is at stake in the political world of our times and are trained in a critical and responsible use of the media, especially the Internet.

92. In Assumptionist institutions, religious and laypeople, hand in hand with students' families, unite their forces and collaborate closely in the service of the same mission, loving the young, giving them good example, all the while encouraging in them a sense of accomplishment, a capacity for dialogue, and the search for truth and charity.
93. Education at the Assumption goes beyond educational institutions. *"From the very beginning, our apostolate has taken on various forms, in particular: teaching 'understood in the broadest sense of the word'" (Rule of Life #18).* « The desire to contribute to the renewal of the world through education, however, is also borne in large part by our works and communities, beyond involvement in schools. » (Fr. Benoît Grière, remarks at the International Congress on Education at the Assumption, July 17-27, 2016).
94. At the Assumption, educational settings are varied: in addition to schools, one must add parishes (catechesis, family ministry, involvement with Church movements, etc.), mass media (Bayard Press and its branches throughout the world). One might also mention the Centre culturel saint Augustin in Sokodé, the Cercle culturel Yira Mirembe in Butembo, the orphanage in Saigon, the interreligious marches and the African Integration Trips of West Africa, youth residences, etc.
95. So, several provinces of the Congregation have varied experiences in the domain of education. These bear witness to the importance of this ministry as an essential dimension of the Assumptionist charism.

## **Educators at the service on unity in a divided world**

96. There exists a collective need for humanity to seek peace by the development and reconciliation of human societies, enriched by their diversity and by a better understanding of one another. By nurturing this spirit and seeking to develop it in the intercultural communities of our religious life, we work at communicating it in our educational settings.
97. The digital revolution has turned human relations upside down, between men and the real, between men and the ways of gaining knowledge, etc. With a passion for the mass media and the world of communication, our religious family must work to make of the world of mass media a place of encounter, dialogue, communion and unity.
98. Our world is shaped and conditioned by barriers and separation between human beings, characterized by notions of « enclosure », « compound », « wall », « camp », « circle », « border ». These lead to « differentiation », « classification », « ranking », « exclusion », « expulsion », etc. Our mission as educators should be one of « *bridge-building* » and of « *creating bonds* ».
99. Our world is marked by racist tendencies, by exclusion and by all sorts of extremism. In this context, an Assumptionist education must encourage serious reflection on the fundamental causes of these problems. It must invite men and women to recognize the inherent dignity of every person created in the image and likeness of God, by cultivating an ability to live together, by respect, and by mutual encounter.

- 100.** We must work in favor of a dialogue of cultures where each race, each nation, each civilization, at once receiving and giving, offers to each man and each woman the opportunity to grow and blossom as a person.
- 101.** For Fr. d'Alzon, « through the great and wonderful work of education (...), we communicate the power of life by the Father, understanding through the Son and love through the Holy Spirit » (Fiftieth Conference to the Religious of the Assumption, March 6, 1871). The goal of our religious family shall be to communicate life through joy. As a result, it will be able to « contribute to discovering a sense of the meaning of life and bring to birth new hopes for today and tomorrow » (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instrumentum laboris*, 2014).

### **Going further .....**

- 102.** « The wealth of a Congregation's charism can be found in its capacity to do new things, in its ability to take root in the here and now. What allows one to undertake new challenges is the dynamism of a founding spirit ». (Fr. Benoît Grière, remarks at the International Congress on Education at the Assumption, July 17-27, 2016).



### ***At the general level***

- 103.** In view of reappropriating our charism so that we might be both active heirs and creative founders, it is recommended that in the upcoming six years the Superior general:
- send out a letter on education to the entire Congregation to share with educators the reflections of the universal Church on education coming from the Congregation for Catholic Education;
  - encourage the creation of an « International Education Commission » (I.C.E.) under the direction of an assistant general;
  - renew our involvement in education through reflection and collaboration with the Oblates of the Assumption and the Religious of the Assumption.

### ***At the provincial level***

- 104.** Each province should adopt the text produced by the Congress on Education at the Assumption (2016) held in Worcester as a reference document to guide and animate our institutions. They should also have recourse to the booklet « *To educate and to teach in the spirit of the Assumption* » for all those involved in our educational institutions. Finally, they should:
- encourage and prepare young brothers for the mission of teaching and education;
  - create an « Education Commission » and encourage continental meetings;
  - give a special character to education at the Assumption by putting in place a network ('tutelle') or formation

program for directors, administrative staff, and teachers.

105. In the new foundations, in Asia as well as in Africa, where education responds to the demands of human, economic, political, and ethical development, we are called to make of education an apostolic priority and encouraged to create new educational sites.

### ***At the level of our educational institutions***

106. Strengthen the effective presence of religious in our educational institutions. The presence and activity of religious constitute in fact a witness of living faith, of collaboration and of unity for our collaborators and the students who attend our institutions.
107. In the general context marked by « spiritual poverty », a lack of interest in general culture, and cultural and religious pluralism among students, it is important to form young people to a responsible use of technology and the means of communication, aiming at excellence at all levels (intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, etc.).
108. Form people for dialogue by proposing to the young and to adults « a view regarding the Other and others that is open, peaceful and enticing » (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instrumentum laboris*, 2014), especially in our multi-religious and intercultural societies. In our schools, this dialogue must exist between our educators, between educator and student, between students.

109. Encourage the creation of twinning opportunities and reciprocal visits between Assumptionist educational institutions.
110. Create opportunities and networks aimed at fostering collaboration between Assumptionist educational institutions. Foresee, in the same framework, links between educational institutions and Bayard Press, to help the young people of our institutions benefit from the vast educational program of Bayard.
111. Integrate into the Assumptionist educational program training modules on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.
112. Respond to ecological challenges of our time and of the calls of *Laudato si'* by forming young people in environmental ecology and getting them to make a serious commitment to care for our “common home », the Earth.

## Lay-Religious Alliance

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- 113.** With the laity we experience the Kingdom of God in us and around us. This Kingdom is vast, such that no one would be able to claim it for himself alone.

We can identify different groups of such laity: those laypeople formally engaged on the « Way of Life »; those who participate in the activities of the Alliance; and those who, more broadly, work alongside of us in our works and in our communities. Let us reiterate how much we appreciate their presence and just how grateful we are for all that they undertake with us.

With each one of them we want to move forward so that Jesus Christ may be proclaimed to the men and women of our day.

### Observations

- 114.** The General Chapter of 2011 defined a lay Assumptionist as « one who commits himself/herself to living his/her baptismal vocation, and the mission that flows from it, within the Assumption, within the Church and within society » (General Chapter 2011, #143).
- 115.** The PGC approved the « Way of Life » for all lay members of the Alliance in June, 2014. They undertake their belonging to the family of the Assumption with great generosity.

They already have a long tradition in the family of the Assumption. From the very beginning Fr. d'Alzon encouraged a mission that would be shared with the laity.

Our founder desired to give our religious family a spirit of freedom and of mutual respect for each one's specific vocation; he was concerned as well that all should respect the proper sphere of each one.

- 116.** The wealth of the Assumptionist charism as experienced by lay members of the Alliance forms part of the patrimony of our religious family.

They consider themselves to be members of one family. They help us to discover aspects of the charism hitherto unexplored.

Lay members demonstrate that they belong to the Assumption through personal prayer, the witness of their lives, and their attachment to a community of religious. A few of them live out this charism far from any Assumptionist community.

## **Convictions**

- 117.** The Alliance is an expression of one's baptismal vocation. Through it we experience the Kingdom of God in us and around us.

The "Way of Life" is what unites lay members of the Alliance.

We help one another out in a profound and simple way, allowing God to be the Father of all as he configures us as his children, one with Jesus Christ; whatever our vocation or type of involvement, « We are all equal in dignity, different

in our roles and complementary in our mission » (Prov. Chap., Andean Province, 2011).

## **Proposals**

### ***At the level of formation***

- 118.** – Promote in a clear way training for lay leaders of the Alliance
- Include in the formation of religious a program on the Alliance that informs them of the “Way of Life” and the Formation Plan.

### ***At the local level***

- 119.** – Encourage the community dimension of the Alliance in order to reinforce the spiritual life and the mission;
- when appointing or transferring religious of a community, take care to ensure that lay members of the Alliance be adequately accompanied;
  - encourage lay members of the Alliance to set up an account per group to cover organizational fees;
  - offer the spiritual direction of a religious to lay members who are interested;
  - examine the possibility of inviting lay members to local chapters for matters that concern them;
  - take care to invite other laymen and laywomen to certain activities of the Alliance.

### ***At the provincial level***

- 120.**
- encourage the presence of lay members of the Alliance in various commissions, where they exist: Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation ; vocation ministry; formation of young Assumptionists; postulation for the cause of Fr. d'Alzon's beatification;
  - encourage and direct relations with the lay members of different congregations of the Assumption Family;
  - send a letter of mission to laypeople entrusted with an important mission;
  - foresee the possibility of lay members of the Alliance participating in new foundations.

### ***At the general level***

- 121.**
- Move forward in the elaboration of a common commitment formula for lay members of the Alliance to be undertaken by the International Lay-Religious Alliance;
  - create a common, distinctive sign for lay members who make a commitment to follow the "Way of Life";
  - encourage cultural diversity among the members of the International Commission;
  - ask the Superior general to propose an annual reflection theme (either using the annual letter of the Superior general or preparing a special document);
  - ask provinces to send in news of the Alliance for « AA-Info » and for the official website of the Congregation;
  - encourage provincial, continental, and intercontinental meetings of the Alliance.

## **Our goods – Our resources – Their management**

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*« It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong. »*

*(Laudato Si', 224)*

*« The economic dimension is intimately connected to the person and to the mission.*

*Through the economy very important choices are made for life; in such choices the role of a Gospel witness should have its role to play, with attention paid to the needs of one's brothers and sisters. »*

(cf. The circular letter of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the management of goods in Institutes, August 2, 2014, p.5)

### **Observations**

**122.** For a number of years, religious have desired a style of life that would more visibly reflect the Gospel's call to a life of poverty where God would be their only treasure (Rule of Life #26).

But the challenges remain daunting.

In recent years, real progress has been made in the oversight of our economic life and in the accounts of our communities and our works: preparation and approval of budgets, setting up of accounts (at the level of communities and of provincial administrations), consolidation of accounts at



the provincial and general levels. These achievements, often recent, need to be refined and consolidated.

- 123.** When individuals enter religious life, their needs are taken care of, a reality that can lead to a certain shirking of responsibility. Some religious expect that all of their material needs will be met by the Congregation without asking themselves too much how they might contribute to increasing the resources of their community, their territory, their province, and their Congregation.
- 124.** The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life reminds us that all modern tools for managing accounts and budgets must be put in place by our communities and our works; complete transparency must be exercised at all times.
- 125.** Many religious suffer from an insufficient budgetary and financial culture. Many brothers generously accept to assume the task of treasurer without the minimal amount of training necessary.
- 126.** Since 2011, the creation of the Plenary General Council (PGC) has led to major advances in a greater awareness among religious of the fact that we are members of one body in the Congregation.

## Convictions

127. « A witness to the Father's love and in solidarity with all human beings, the Assumptionist seeks to be a man of faith and a man of his time » (Rule of Life #2). Our Assumptionist charism leads us to want to understand better today's world where economic factors have taken on a major importance.
128. The inadequacy of our economic resources impels us to acknowledge God more resolutely as our first treasure. It is on Him first that we rely to support us and guide us in our work of serving the Kingdom.
129. Since the financial resources of the Congregation are limited, even though it is necessary to pursue the implementation of our pastoral goals, it is critical that we define and prioritize our needs better so that we might optimize the allocation of our means. For this, we must foresee a more effective pooling of our material means.
130. Every community actively involved in ministry seeks not only to be economically autonomous, but also to contribute to the expenses of the Province. Every Province seeks not only to be autonomous but also to contribute to the expenses of the Congregation. We will thus be able to generate sufficient resources to fund not only formation, the care of elderly brothers, and administration costs, but also the development of our works.

- 131.** We are not going to grow our resources from one sole revenue source that would meet all our needs. Only in developing, little by little, and doggedly, all of the revenue sources that already exist in every province will we attain financial self-sustainability and be better able to fund our pastoral goals.
- 132.** All the following elements are pieces of the puzzle:
- Salaried employment, remuneration for pastoral ministry, retirement pensions;
  - Mass intentions, development of local networks of benefactors, the search for bequests, growth of the work of the Office of Development and Solidarity (BDS), and assistance from charitable foundations and organisms;
  - Optimizing the management of our portfolios;
  - Optimizing the utilization of our properties by renting out those that are not currently being used for pastoral activities;
  - Developing food self-sufficiency (gardens and the raising of fish and small animals), good management of our small self-sustainability projects (cafeterias, sale of candles or religious articles, etc.)

Reducing our expenses and maintaining better track of medical reimbursements are likewise means of working toward an improvement of our financial situation.

- 133.** Wherever he may be, according to his capacity, each religious is responsible for playing his part in achieving this goal.

If we can make sure that each parish contributes economically in a fair and balanced way to the life of its pastors and

to the Congregation, the Assumption will shore up one of the revenue sources capable of providing it with the financial stability necessary for its development.

## **Recommendations**

- 134.** The Chapter requests that each Provincial Council, with the help of the Provincial Treasurer, draw up a forecast plan outlining building needs of the Province over the next five years: land or building purchases, construction, major renovation. This plan should include an evaluation of needed financial resources as well as proposed financing methods (local resources, bank loans, appeal to the BDS, appeal to the pooling of Congregational resources).
- 135.** The Chapter requests that the Finance Council of the Congregation (CEC) study these plans, validate their technical components, and consolidate these medium-term provincial plans into one sole Congregation medium-term plan that will be submitted to the PGC for arbitration. This plan will be updated at least every three years.
- 136.** The Chapter requests that the CEC study the question of retirement pensions for brothers living in countries where such benefits are not ensured by the State. It will have to examine solutions put in place by other congregations. A proposal will be submitted to the PGC by June 2021.
- 137.** The Chapter requests that each Provincial Treasurer undertake a study of health insurance coverage by country for the religious of his province: what currently exists, regulatory

requirements, proposals for local solutions, prospects of change. The CEC will take up the results of these studies.

- 138.** Because it is important that we improve the economic culture and the ability of each religious to understand basic bookkeeping techniques, the Chapter requests that the CEC put the finishing touches on the draft of a financial formation plan elaborated by the general treasurers of the Assumption Family and subsequently have it approved by the PGC.
- 139.** The Chapter requests that the CEC examine how we oversee the economic life of our parishes and then recommend to the PGC measures in order that this oversight might conform to the principles articulated by the Church and to bookkeeping principles and in order that our parishes might contribute in a fair and balanced way to the economic life of communities and of the Congregation. Such oversight must respect diocesan guidelines as well as the principles of *Mutuae Relationes*.
- 140.** In order to respond to the urgent demands made by the Holy See, the Chapter requests that the CEC come up with a list of what might be considered the fixed assets ('stable patrimony') of the Congregation and submit it to the PGC for finalization and validation. Defining the fixed assets/'stable patrimony' of the Congregation is an item to be approved at the next general chapter.

## **Ordinances**

### ***Finance Council of the Congregation (CEC)***

- 141.** The Chapter reaffirms the existence of the CEC as it was set up by the 2011 General Chapter. Among other things, it entrusts to this Council the task of reinforcing, under the direction of the PGC, the unity of the Assumptionist body in economic matters. The Chapter recommends that this Council meet at least once a year, several days of which would be spent with the members of the PGC.
- 142.** The Chapter transfers requests from the Council of Consultants to the CEC the responsibility for studying interprovincial solidarity before being reviewed by the PGC. The Council of Consultants will continue to advise the General Treasurer on the management of portfolios.

### ***Assessments***

- 143.** Beginning in 2018, provincial assessments for the General Fund are as follows:
- Rate 1: \$550 US
  - Rate 2: \$280 US
  - Rate 3: \$155 US
- Category #1: perpetually professed religious from the countries of Europe, of the Near Eastern Mission, the USA, Canada, Korea, and New Zealand.
- Category #2: perpetually professed religious from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, Vietnam, Philippines.

Category #3: the temporary professed of the entire Congregation and the perpetually professed from all other countries.

If need be, it is up to the PGC to adjust these rates in the future.

***Preservation of the assets/patrimony of the Congregation and ceiling amounts***

**144.** The Chapter recalls that all financial transactions, whether for movable or immovable property, such as the purchase or sale of property assets, the act of borrowing or loaning, the construction or major renovation of property, or the mortgaging of real property must be formally approved beforehand by the Provincial with the consent of his councils. In order to respect Canon Law (canons #638, #1256, #1257, #1292), the Congregation must request authorization from the Holy See for the alienation of assets that exceed the ceiling amount established by each episcopal conference.

**145.** In the case of the alienation of property, the ceiling limit above which a province must seek the authorization of the Superior general will be:

- for the Provinces of Europe and North America-Philippines: \$800,000 US;
- for the Andean Province and the Province of Brazil: \$400,000 US;
- for the Provinces of Africa and Madagascar: \$120,000 US.

This rule applies to provinces and to their real estate organizations.

- 146.** The PGC will update these amounts between two general chapters on the recommendation of the CEC. Whatever ceiling amount may be in play, each province will inform the Superior general with his Ordinary General Council (OGC), as soon as possible, of all transactions, whether the purchase or the sale of real estate assets.

### ***Travel expenses***

- 147.** On the occasion of PGC meetings, of meetings of the councils of the General Treasurer, of sessions organized by the general government, and meetings of the General Chapter, religious who are convoked will contribute \$470 US per person to an equalization fund for travel expenses.
- 148.** In conclusion: « God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. *Praise be to him!* » (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 245)



## Community organization

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*« All the parts of the body, though many, are one body. »  
(1 Cor 12:12)*

*« The community organization of the Congregation  
aims to bring about our unity in view of our mission in  
the Church. » (Rule of Life #57)*

- 149.** Our Congregation continues to grow. Major changes are occurring, notably in the form of a significant demographic and geographic shift. Our structures of leadership and governance are no longer suited to this new reality. We need to move on resolutely, step by step, with humility and boldness.
- 150.** The new community organization seeks to reinforce the body-family that we form. It is a school of unity and autonomy, of subsidiarity and co-responsibility, and of the formation of leaders.
- 151.** More flexible government structures will favor a leadership that is more hands-on and local as well as communities that are more vibrant apostolically. In the various territories where we serve they will likewise foster the inculturation of the charism in response to the demands of the Church and the world.

- 152.** They will allow us to take greater account of human resources and of formation needs, and to have a more accurate grasp of financial realities. They will also make it easier to handle various issues that need to be treated.
- 153.** The new organization will allow for a fairer representation of Assumptionist realities within the PGC, will rebalance provinces, and will encourage continental collaboration.
- 154.** This new community organization will require openness of heart and conversion on everyone's part.
- 155.** Our *Rule of Life* speaks of Provinces, Vice-Provinces, and Regions.  
The Chapter is proposing the creation of Vicariates. They will be the fresh wineskins for a leadership and accompaniment that will be more hands-on and local, for greater subsidiarity and coresponsibility, in a structure that is more flexible than that of Regions (Rule of Life #83-#85). They will allow for new apostolic dynamism.
- 156.** The creation of Vicariates rests on the following principles to be noted in the Capitular Rules:
- The Provincial, with the consent of the Council of the Province, can regroup communities into a Vicariate, under the authority of a Vicar (see Rule of Life #83). A Vicariate is made up of at least three communities. The decision to establish a Vicariate falls to the Superior general after consultation with the PGC (see Capitular Rule 2011, #195).  
For elections to the Provincial Chapter, it constitutes at least one electoral college.

- The Vicariate forms an integral part of the Province; the latter will grant it sufficient autonomy to organize its life and pursue its own apostolic objectives effectively (see Rule of Life #84).
- The Vicar is appointed for a three-year term, renewable, by the Provincial with the consent of his Council, after consultation with the religious of the Vicariate. He is not a Major Superior. With a letter of mission the Provincial with his Council delegates to him the powers he needs (see Rule of Life #85).
- The Vicar is an *ex officio* member of the Council of the Province. He is also an *ex officio* member of the Provincial Chapter (Rule of Life #87). He is invited to attend the meetings of the PGC once a year (see Capitular Rules 2011, #198).
- The statutes of the Vicariate are proposed by the Provincial with the consent of the Council of the Province and validated by the Superior general after consultation of the Plenary General Council (see Capitular Rules 2011, #195 b).

**157.** As indicated here, the Vicar, therefore, receives responsibilities that are delegated, as allowed by law, and that will be adapted as the life and the needs of the Vicariate demand (examples of possible delegated responsibilities: oversight of communities, acceptance of postulants and novices, preparation of appointments, preparation of community budgets, etc.). He also attends one session of the PGC per year.

## **Decrees and recommendations**

### ***Creation of the Vice-Province of East Africa***

- 158.** The Chapter decrees the creation of the Vice-Province of East Africa attached to the Province of Africa and made up of the communities of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.
- 159.** This decree takes full effect at the latest on December 31, 2019. At that time, this Vice-Province will be equipped with the statutes necessary for its operation.
- 160.** The implementation Chapter of the Province of Africa will determine the successive stages of the process in order that this time-line may be met.

### ***Creation of the Vicariate of West Africa***

- 161.** The Chapter decrees the creation of the Vicariate of West Africa attached to the Province of Europe and made up of the communities of Togo and of Burkina Faso.
- 162.** This decree takes full effect at the latest on December 31, 2019. At that time, this Vicariate will be equipped with the statutes necessary for its operation.
- 163.** The implementation Chapter of the Province of Europe will determine the successive stages of the process in order that this time-line may be met.

### ***Creation of the Vicariate of Kinshasa***

- 164.** The Chapter decrees the creation of the Vicariate of Kinshasa attached to the Province of Africa and made up of the current communities of the Region of Kinshasa.
- 165.** This decree takes full effect at the latest on December 31, 2019. At that time, this Vicariate will be equipped with the statutes necessary for its operation.
- 166.** The implementation Chapter of the Province of Africa will determine the successive stages of the process in order that this time-line may be met.

### ***Creation of the Vicariate of Asia-Oceania***

- 167.** The Chapter decrees the creation of the Vicariate of Asia-Oceania attached to the Province of Europe and made up of the communities of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.
- 168.** This decree takes full effect at the latest on December 31, 2019. At that time, this Vicariate will be equipped with the statutes necessary for its operation.
- 169.** The Chapter requests that the implementation Chapter of the Province of Europe (July 9-16, 2017) – to which the religious and the communities of the Philippines will be attached after consultation of the religious - determine a process that will ensure that this time-line may be met, and that the Inter-Asian Coordination Committee (established by the 2011 General Chapter) assure its implementation.

- 170.** So that the religious of the Philippines may fully participate in the creation of the Vicariate of Asia-Oceania, the Chapter decides that the religious and the communities of the Philippines be attached to the Province of Europe at the conclusion of the consultation of the religious that will be initiated by the Superior general and completed by September 30, 2017. If approved, this attachment and financial integration will take effect on January 1, 2018.

### ***Recommendation for North America***

- 171.** The Chapter requests that the Ordinary General Council and the Plenary General Council put in place a task force to accompany the Province of North America to foresee its future and that of the two mobilizing works it supports, Bayard and Assumption College.
- 172.** This task force will focus on links to be maintained and developed with the entire Congregation and particularly with its English-speaking territories.
- 173.** It will update the PGC regularly of the progress of its work and will render an account of its work at the next Provincial Chapter scheduled for 2020 in view of concrete decisions to be taken.

### ***Recommendation for Europe***

- 174.** The Chapter requests that the Province of Europe pay special attention to its European reality by defining apostolic priorities. Vocation ministry must be a major priority.

## ***Recommendations for the Near Eastern Mission***

- 175.** In order to deal with the isolation of communities and the fragmentation of apostolates, the Chapter requests that oversight of the Near Eastern Mission be bolstered by consistent and regular community visits and by the organization of annual meetings of the Mission. This is why it wishes to see put in place a delegate of the Provincial of Europe. And it encourages collaboration and the mutual exchange of information between the general government and the Province of Europe in matters concerning this Mission.
- 176.** So that the Near Eastern Mission may continue its work and so that replacements may be formed, the Chapter desires that each Province form at least one religious in ecumenism, if possible in the area of the Christian East (history, Church Fathers, theology, spirituality, liturgy...) and discern which of these might one day serve in this Mission.
- 177.** The Chapter, attentive to the request of the Holy See to our Congregation to « do what is possible, and even what is impossible » (Cardinal Parolin) in order to continue serving the Bulgarian Catholic Church of Byzantine rite, calls on the entire Assumptionist body to rally its forces so as to shore up, even to renew, the community in Plovdiv, including religious of the Roman rite and religious who could get involved in new apostolates. It requests that the mission of this community be defined more clearly. It is question here once again of updating our charism as men of communion.
- 178.** Here is the new face of the Congregation:
- Province of Europe: Europe and the Near Eastern Mission

- Vicariate of Asia-Oceania (Vietnam, Korea, New-Zealand and the Philippines),
- Vicariate of West Africa (Togo and Burkina Faso),
- Province of Africa
  - Vicariate of Kinshasa,
- Vice-province of East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda),
- Province of Madagascar
- Andean Province
- Province of Brazil
- Province of North America (USA, Canada and Mexico).

***In order to pursue the reflection***

**179.** Since the new community organization aims at strengthening the body-family that the Congregation forms, since it is meant to be a school of unity, subsidiarity, and coresponsibility, and since it aims at offering a pooling of means and an enrichment of local experiences, the Chapter recommends the creation of vicariates, as permitted by law. These vicariates may be adapted as the life and the needs of a specific territory demand.

Given the progress already made in the area of unification witnessed in the governance of the Congregation (PGC) and given the progress made at this chapter with regard to the pooling of human and financial means, the Chapter encourages the Superior general, with his councils, to see, in view of the next general chapter, if the suppression of the status of Provinces might not favor greater development of the Congregation.



## Statutes

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- 180.** The Statutes Committee examined the changes to be made to the *Rule of Life* and the Capitular Rules (2011) in the light of the return to the former practice regarding the General Treasurer. The Committee proposes a similar change with regard to the Provincial Treasurer. It proposes as well to introduce into the Capitular Rules items relative to Vicariates. Finally, that being said, it proposes to maintain as such the Capitular Rules issued at the 2011 General Chapter.

### *The General Treasurer*

- 181.** After the vote requested by the Chapter, it is agreed that on this matter we return to the situation that existed before the 2011 General Chapter. Numbers #120, #121 and #130 of the Rule of Life which deal with it do not change. However, #131 becomes:

<i>Current text</i>	<i>Modified text</i>
<p>The General Treasurer is automatically an Assistant General. He gives regular account of his responsibilities and presents the accounting books to the General Council for approval accompanied, if need be, with supporting documents.</p>	<p>The General Treasurer attends the meetings of the Ordinary General Council. If he is not an Assistant, he has deliberative voice only in those matters that have a financial impact. He gives regular account of his responsibilities and presents the accounting books to the General Council for approval accompanied, if need be, with supporting documents.</p>

- 182.** Likewise in the Capitular Rules, #194 specifies the presence of the General Treasurer at meetings of the PGC:

*Capitular Rule #194*

The Ordinary General Council and all the Major Superiors form the PGC.

The General Treasurer attends PGC meetings. If he is not an Assistant, he only has deliberative voice for matters having a financial impact.

- 183.** Provincial Treasurer:  
The same should be done for the Provincial Treasurer by reverting to what existed before the 2011 General Chapter.
- 184.** Rule of Life #79: “The Provincial Superior exercises ordinary authority in the Province. In this responsibility, he is assisted by his ordinary Council, the Provincial Treasurer and the Council of the Province”.
- 185.** Rule of Life #87: “The Provincial Chapter includes *ex officio* members: the Provincial, and Vice-provincial, the Provincial Assistants, the Provincial Treasurer, the religious responsible for formation,...”
- 186.** Rule of Life #92: “The Provincial Chapter elects, in accordance with the norms established in the Capitular Rules, a certain number of religious who, together with the Ordinary Council and the Provincial Treasurer, constitute the Plenary Council of the Province.”

- 187.** Rule of Life #97: “The Provincial, with the consent of the Plenary Council, appoints the Treasurer and Secretary of the Province.”
- 188.** Rule of Life #101: “The Provincial Treasurer shall administer and manage directly all of the commonly owned assets of the Province and, where applicable, the property and contents of the Provincial House, under the responsibility of the Provincial Superior with the assistance of his Council, and in accordance with the norms of the Congregation and of the Province. He is appointed for three years renewable. He is at the service of the local Treasurers and oversees their financial administration. He attends the meetings of the Provincial Council. He may be an Assistant to the Provincial but not the first Assistant. If he is not an Assistant, he votes only on matters which have economic implications. On a regular basis, he reports on his management to this Council...”

### ***The Vicariate***

- 189.** What is the difference between a Vicariate and a Region?  
At first glance, it appears that these two structures are the same. The only difference is that the Vicar is invited to attend the meetings of the PGC. But this difference is extremely important. It means that the Vicar is asked to develop a sense of the Assumptionist body and to take part in discerning the needs of the Congregation and the responses to be given. This gives him additional responsibility and encourages him to exercise greater coresponsibility both with the Provincial on whom he depends and with all the members of the PGC.

The structure of Region should be maintained so as to give a Provincial the possibility of creating a Region as leadership needs demand, without having to foresee that the Regional Superior participate in PGC meetings.

### ***Capitular rules***

**190.** The Provincial, with the consent of the Plenary Council, may regroup communities into a vicariate, under the authority of a Vicar (Rule of Life #83). The Vicariate is made up of a minimum of three communities. The authority to erect a vicariate rests with the Superior general after consultation of the PGC (Cap. Rule #195).

With regard to elections to the Provincial Chapter, a vicariate constitutes at least one electoral college.

**191.** The Vicariate is an integral part of the Province; the latter grants it sufficient autonomy to organize its life and pursue its apostolic objectives effectively (Rule of Life #84).

**192.** The Vicar is appointed for a three-year term, renewable, by the Provincial with the consent of his Council, after consultation with the religious of the Vicariate. He is not a Major Superior. With a letter of mission the Provincial with his Council delegates to him the powers he needs (see Rule of Life #85).

The Vicar is an *ex officio* member of the Council of the Province. He is also an *ex officio* member of the Provincial Chapter (Rule of Life #87). He is invited to attend the meetings of the PGC once a year (see Capitular Rules 2011, #198).

193. The statutes of the Vicariate are proposed by the Provincial with the consent of the Council of the Province and validated by the Superior general after consultation of the Plenary General Council (see Capitular Rules 2011, #195 b).
194. It is recommended that the Chapter maintain the Capitular Rules adopted by the PGC in December 2012 with the modifications and additions proposed above.

***Powers delegated to the Superior general for the final editing of the texts of the General Chapter and their interpretation.***

195. This General Chapter delegates to the Superior general with the consent of his Ordinary Council, the following powers:
- the creation of a committee to harmonize the texts;
  - in case of questions or debate on the meaning or implementation of the texts adopted by the Chapter, the power to interpret them;
  - the power to rework the texts in their form and expression while respecting ideas, in order to improve their presentation to communities and their publication;
  - the care of reconciling all of the articles of the *Rule of Life* with the modifications approved by the Chapter.
  - the care of submitting to the Holy See for approval all of the modifications made to the *Rule of Life* and of integrating into it whatever requests the Holy See may recommend.



## **Animation texts**

*In addition to the official texts (Acts) of the Chapter, the annex which follows presents a series of documents meant to give new life and energy to the Congregation over the next six years.*





## Mobilizing works

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1) The initiative of the 2011 General Chapter to confer the label « Mobilizing works » on seven apostolic activities of the Congregation (Bayard, Accompagner, Adveniat, Assumption College, Saint-Peter/Saint-Andrew Center, the network of bush schools in Madagascar, and ISEAB of Butembo) was widely welcomed by the delegates of the 2017 General Chapter.

This « label » offered the opportunity to Provinces to arouse interest in works that they did not know well; in this way they were able to become aware of their strategic importance for the entire Congregation. This was also the case for lay-people involved in these works. This label allowed the entire body of the Congregation to take stock of works for which it bears collective responsibility and for which the continued support of all is solicited. A double awareness takes place for those who work in a mobilizing work with regard to other such works and to their own which takes on a special importance in their own eyes.

It has also allowed us to mobilize young people in formation as they consider their future ministry. First apostolic appointments by the Superior general have contributed to this effort as well.

Finally, it has allowed certain works to emerge from their isolation. This was the case for ISEAB which, as a result, became a priority of the Office of Development and Solidarity.

2) To be sure, questions remain. These underline risks to be avoided:

- the feeling that conferring such a « VIP » label might establish a kind of exclusivity with regard to other works now considered as less strategic;
- the impression that the conferral of this label might be linked to weaknesses of a work that we want to keep at all cost;
- the danger that conferring this label might have a paralyzing effect on the Assumptionist body as a whole by being mobilized for works not necessarily destined to last (“sacred cow” syndrome);
- a kind of watering down of the weight of this label in the case where we would confer it on other apostolic activities and were unable to remove older ones for fear of discrediting them.

On this topic, it was noted the contrast between the very significant investment of religious in parish ministry and the relatively minor investment in many of the mobilizing works and the interest they arouse.

We are a modest-sized congregation. If we really want to make an effective contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel, we must concentrate our efforts on certain works where we have an expertise, works which make a mark on our charism after having been marked themselves by it.

3) All this being said, several factors plead in favor of maintaining this initiative:

- these are activities that authentically embody the charism and bring it visibility.

These works broaden our vision by supporting intuitions inspired by the charism at the service of the entire body:

for example, in the case of ISEAB, it might be a specialization in conflict management; for Accompanier, it might be a sensitivity to the world of migrants...

- By mobilizing our forces for one work, we are in fact mobilizing forces in view of one of the major apostolic axes of the Congregation according to the trilogie « men of faith », « men of communion » and in solidarity with the poor ».
- Moreover, the mobilizing work can thus serve as a spur for everything that is being done throughout the Congregation in the field of this work, like education, communications.....and it was underlined that there is the opportunity to create synergies between works in order to foster ever greater vitality. The mobilizing work might thus be seen as a model offering a wider vision of how to embody the intuition.

4) To do this, two urgent matters must be underlined:

- that of the formation of human resources (religious, lay) in view of an even greater involvement, all the more important since such involvement requires solid qualifications,
- that of informing others of the activities of these works so that they may be better known.

5) Finally, we might want to think about making a distinction between the 'traditional' mobilizing works that have marked the charism throughout its history (Bayard, Assumption College, Near Eastern Mission as embodied in the Saint-Peter/Saint-Andrew Center...) and more recent works that one might qualify as « prophetic » in the sense that they give a new accent to the charism and contribute to its reformulation.

## Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

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We are invited to deepen our commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). The General Chapter wishes to go one step further in this direction.

The Gospel is at the center of our actions in favor of JPIC. The Beatitudes call us compellingly to create a JPIC culture within our Congregation. We need to rely on witnesses and models in order to respond well to this call. Religious life, by virtue of its discernment of the signs of time and its openness to mission, makes prophets of us all.

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* helps us to broaden our horizons. The earth is our common home in which we want to promote human development and an integral ecology. As we deepen our reflection on this matter, we become more aware that everything is connected: the human being and the earth.

God makes this appeal to us: "*I have set before you life and death... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live*" (Dt. 30:19). We want to opt for life, fight against indifference, corruption, inequality, exploitation of people, violence, injustice. We denounce intolerable conditions and the structures of evil.

Our JPIC actions cannot be carried out unless we engage in a reflection that tries to get to the bottom of things. We want to be attentive to what is happening in our world and get involved as responsible citizens. Our reflection is nourished by the social teaching of the Church. Our ministry in education and in the media offer us an opportunity to spread this JPIC option more widely.

We are in a world marked by internationality and interculturality. For us this is not a threat, but a richness. We want to build bridges that allow for a sincere dialogue between individuals of different religions and cultures. In this way we contribute to preserving cultural bio-diversity.

In the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation of conflict and violence has persisted for many years. The Congregation has been affected in its very body with the kidnapping of Frs. Jean-Pierre, Edmond and Anselme as well as the murder of Fr. Vincent Machozi. Sensitive to this situation and in solidarity with the local population, we remain committed to establishing a culture of peace and non-violence.

Wherever we're located, we are in direct contact with "existential peripheries". Faithful to our charism, we wish to be more in touch with the poor and the little ones. We seek to put ourselves at the service of migrants, displaced people, orphans and those who suffer.

The demands of the Gospel invite us to dare to take a real step back in our lives and look at everything that is inconsistent with our reflection on JPIC matters. This stepping back starts with a personal conversion that leads us to a change of heart. Wherever we are, whatever we do, we are called to get involved, beginning with the smallest of gestures.

We are convinced that the Assumptionist community is the first place we called to live out this JPIC dimension. Communities are called to make such decisions in freedom, truth and frankness. The ultimate goal is to achieve greater coherence between our reflection and the daily life of our communities. Our life of prayer is

nourished and comes to the aid of our commitments. Our General Chapter recognizes the importance of the JPIC dimension in the formation of young religious introduce into the new version of the *Ratio Institutionis*. We encourage specialized training in conflict management.

The Congregation wishes to pursue its mission by its ongoing involvement in the International JPIC Secretariate along with other members of the Assumption Family<sup>1</sup>, recognizing that networking is essential to meet the major challenges of our time. We encourage all possible forms of synergy between communities, works and people involved in JPIC within the Congregation and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup>[www.jpic-assumpta.org/](http://www.jpic-assumpta.org/)

## New foundations

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- *New foundations* refers to communities in new countries and new territories (including the digital world...).

- *Refoundations* refers to communities, apostolates, and works that benefit from a new mission and new personnel.

- *Consolidations* refers to existing communities/works to be merged (so as to avoid the feeling of being « gap-fillers » or « spare tires »).

The Congregation must be attentive to the appeals made by the Spirit and the Church who are calling upon us and awaiting our generous response.

As we decide to make new foundations, we must take into account at the same time needed refoundations and the consolidation of current ministries and activities. We have to manage the tension between old and new foundations, between prophecy (the breath of the Spirit) and prudence; in so doing we have to take a hard look at reality.

We must remain creative and enterprising. We will continue to develop the missionary spirit and pride of our Congregation.

Before any new foundation or refoundation, we must insist on a community discernment based on the needs and the appeals of the Church, of society, and especially of the Spirit: « Do not stifle the Spirit »! and a discernment of the « signs of the times ».

Mindful of the needs and priorities of the Congregation (defined by the Chapter), of the « mobilizing works », a medium-term plan will be elaborated and approved by the corresponding bodies. They will be mindful of these criteria: giving flesh to the charism, the ability to be autonomous and financially self-sustainable over time, and how visible and clear the expression of the charism is. A foundation must not be based solely on a search for vocations.

A serious feasibility study will be required in all cases. A foundation must respond to the aforementioned criteria, along with demographical information, the economic and political situation of the region where the community and work would be located, and what religious would be able to contribute and receive...

The study will explain the real reasons for the foundation/re-foundation, with a clearly-defined common vision and mission.

We should particularly make sure to form and prepare missionaries, founders and leaders, with an eye to their motivation, to the ongoing support of these foundations and refoundations, and to the necessary funding and investment.

Regular evaluations should be made to provincial and general authorities.

We should also be mindful to involve lay members and sisters of the Assumption Family, to seek out the experience of other congregations, and to reread the history of foundations with our own « frontiersmen--pioneers » who have an experience in foundations and interculturality.



The Chapter seeks to reinforce struggling foundations and to create Assumptionist enterprises in the new foundations.

# The Near Eastern Mission

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## Its grandeur and its weaknesses

1. One can speak about the Christian East in two ways, undoubtedly complementary:

- the overall historical legacy that it represents: this, one of the first mission territories of the Assumption, was the birthplace of Christianity, characterized by a two thousand-year-old spiritual and multifaceted legacy that is largely unknown in the rest of the Christian world;

- the current historical reality and the challenges it presents in many specific regions: there is lots at stake for the Church and the world in this region, blood-stained by wars and scarred by Islamic radicalism, and marked by a massive exodus of these ancient Christian faith traditions, the immense need for material and spiritual support, and the explosion of thousands of migrants in the West...

2. The Mission of the Assumption in the Near East, with its rich history of rubbing elbows with Orthodoxy day in and day out for 155 years, a symbol of a fruitful ecumenical commitment that extends well beyond our Congregation, also has numerous weaknesses: declining personnel, the tenuous stability and uneven motivation of religious too little involved in the ecumenical arena, a community life that is not solid enough...

Still, it's not lacking in assets: high expectations of local Churches, flagship works (Jerusalem, Bucharest...), a source of vocations even today, etc.

3. This twofold observation underlines the need to restore a solid foundation to our Near Eastern Mission today, both in terms of an overall vision that can give it solid footing from now on and of the means to reinforce it. Otherwise, the weaknesses of this noble tradition of our Congregation will inevitably cause it to collapse, one domino after the other.

### **At the heart of the Assumption charism**

4. By defining the charism of the Assumption for the present time as « the service of unity in a divided world » (cf #1-20), this 33<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter paved the way to reformulate the overarching meaning of our Near Eastern Mission in a part of our world where fissures abound, whether religious, cultural or political. Some of them are age-old (divisions of the Churches of the East and the West, massive presence of Islam); others are of more recent vintage (exodus of Christians, migrations for political or economic reasons).

5. From the beginnings of its history, our Congregation was called to these lands of division to be bearers of reconciliation. The present time has not ceased to extend this appeal to us. It is a question as much of remaining faithful to our first commitment (working for greater mutual understanding, even to bringing divided Christians together) as of serving the cause of unity in the face of new breakdowns that are wounding both societies and persons. So, the Near Eastern Mission remains a priority of the Assumption.

6. This service of unity expected of the Near Eastern Mission unfolds both where our communities are located and beyond:

- on site, by cultivating relations with other Christians and other confessions and the believers of other religions, by creating

spaces for dialogue and encounter, by helping local Churches to overcome their fears and setting aside their self-sufficiency, and by providing expatriate or immigrant populations the pastoral and humanitarian service they need, etc.;

- within the Assumptionist body, by raising the awareness of and forming communities and works regarding the cause of the unity of the Church and of the Christian East, particularly through the help of the St. Peter-St. Andrew Center of Bucharest and the community of Plovdiv. Each religious, each community throughout the world must, as much as possible, adopt the treasures of the Christian East. There is question here of nourishing this work with prayer and reflection and of meeting Christians of different rites, etc., lest one end up breathing with only one “lung” of our faith!

So, no matter the place or modalities of one’s ministry, every religious of our Congregation should feel implicated in one way or another by the Christian East and by the Assumptionists’ own Near Eastern Mission.

### **An appeal to mutual mobilization**

7. Confirmed as a privileged apostolic field for the entire Congregation, and thus reinforced in its vocation to help the Congregation and beyond that the whole Church to « breathe with both lungs » (St. John-Paul II), the Near Eastern Mission needs to enjoy in return the right of being supported by the entire Assumption in what might be seen as an “exchange of gifts”. Each in its turn must enrich the other.

The Chapter recognizes here the efforts furnished by the Province of Africa in sending several brothers to the Near Eastern Mission.

8. « The Near Eastern Mission will remain alive as long as we have brothers and sisters willing to serve there », wrote Fr. Benoit Grière to the Congregation for the 150th anniversary of the Mission (letter entitled “The Passion for Unity,” 2012). The General Chapter wishes to see our collaboration with the Oblates of the Assumption revived and has decided to send a copy of the present document to their upcoming General Chapter with the hope of being apprized in return of what their current policy is with regard to the Near Eastern Mission for which they were founded by Fr. d’Alzon and Mother Marie Correnson.

9. All of our communities in the Near East are in close contact with lay-people, but without always encouraging them to get close to the Congregation and to share our spirituality. The Chapter wishes to see the development of the Lay-Religious in the East, with the support of lay members already involved in other countries of the world.

# Parishes

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## **Assumption's involvement in parish ministry**

Recognizing the importance of the number of religious involved in parish ministry and the number of Assumptionist parishes, the General Chapter encouraged provincial chapters to reexamine and evaluate Assumption's involvement in parish ministry, especially in the light of the guidelines laid out in the booklet, "Assumptionists in parishes."

The PGC also expressed the hope that the following points would be addressed with particular attention:

- youth ministry, the awakening and the accompaniment of vocations;
- the identity, the visibility and the charism of the Assumption in the life of the parish;
- the set-up of the organization and the life of the parish both to preserve the specificity of our religious life and of our community life and to live out the demands of the Rule of Life, of our vocation, and of our prayer life;
- the formation, preparation and accompaniment of Assumptionists involved in parish ministry;
- verification that the parish budget adequately foresees the upkeep of the community, that is itself in turn called to exercise solidarity with the entire Congregation.

## **A significant reality today**

A lot of religious are involved in parish ministry. This has to do, in part, with our history. Arriving in a new place, missionaries

often began by creating or assuming responsibility for parishes. We would do well to write up this history.

The involvement in parish ministry demonstrates that we are « men of the Church », collaborators of the bishops. We recall that Fr. d'Alzon himself was vicar general of his diocese almost his entire life.

Nevertheless, parish ministry should not be a default choice, for lack of alternatives. Nor should our involvement in parishes dispense us from being creative in the service of the Gospel.

### **Relations rich and varied**

The parish offers the opportunity to meet people of different social strata and have them meet one another. Rich and poor alike can be found here.

It's also in parishes where one finds the poor of God. Here brothers live as men of faith, men of communion, in solidarity with the poor. A parish is also a site to meet young people and launch vocation ministry programs.

Parishes are places of insertion, mission, and vocation. In a parish, one is pastor and educator. The three dimensions of our charism, doctrinal, social, and ecumenical, are on full display.

All of this makes of parishes ideal training grounds for young religious.

## **The laity**

The parish is the natural site for collaboration with the laity. It is the privileged location for the formation of a responsible laity and the inculturation of the Word of God.

In some countries the parish has been the springboard for the Lay-Religious Alliance. This reality should spur on every Assumptionist parish to propose the Alliance to its faithful.

## **Our distinctiveness as Assumptionists**

We are convinced that our charism can be placed at the service of parish ministry. We need to do a better job in making it known in the parishes under our responsibility.

There arises the question of Assumptionist identity within a parish. How are we distinct from diocesan clergy?

The parish should be a place where our charism is expressed and clearly on display. Being able to do so should be a criterion for assuming responsibility for a parish: are we able to put the major elements of our charism into practice?

Bishops make appeal to us that we bring a certain diversity to their dioceses. This should encourage us to give life to what is distinctive about us and not necessarily to do what everyone else is doing.



## **Relations with the diocese**

In order to avoid any nasty surprises or misunderstandings, relations with bishops must be transparent. Contracts into which we enter with dioceses must be clear. It needs to be specified what belongs to the responsibility of the Congregation and what to the diocese. It is essential to be aware of the document, *Mutuae relations*, that can be extremely useful in this regard.

The situations in which our parishes find themselves are quite different within the Congregation and relations with dioceses reflect this diversity. In any event, the distinctiveness which our charism can bring to the local Church must be clearly accepted by the bishop who welcomes us to his diocese.

In a number of places we are in parishes where no one else wants to go. We go to the peripheries where the poor still hunger and thirst for the Word of God. But it is here as well that conditions of life are often precarious and financial self-sustainability difficult.

## **Difficulties and tensions**

Running a parish does not happen without tensions. Often we come across religious living in a parish as diocesan clergy rather than as religious living in community.

One of the greatest difficulties for brothers involved in a parish is being able to harmonize the demands of parish ministry and those of community life. Involvement in parish activities can serve as an alibi for abandoning community life and falling into a certain activism. How is one to protect himself from this?

There also arises the question of knowing whether the parish is run by a few brothers or by the entire community: how can we better assume responsibility for the parish together and demonstrate that our charism is fed by our community life? Would not an Assumptionist residence set apart from the parish make it easier to express our identity? The question of financial transparency and the separation of accounts between community and parish also arises in certain cases.

# Postulation

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## General reflections

*In order to promote the cause of beatification of Fr. d'Alzon*

We ourselves need to be convinced that holiness is an essential objective for all Christians; we need to take it seriously as our own objective. Then only can we believe in Fr. d'Alzon's holiness and consider it important for the Church to proclaim this publicly. One of the indications of d'Alzon's holiness is that three of his disciples, having taken up his way, have been proclaimed blessed by the Church.

What is the importance of working for Fr. d'Alzon's beatification? Some are not convinced that it is important. They think that this concern is too old-fashioned, that it costs too much, that we already know that he is a saint, so why add the effort required for official beatification.

Others think this effort is very worthwhile: it is a public validation of our charism as a way of holiness; it would make of Fr. d'Alzon a public witness of holiness, and today it is clear that we need witnesses more than words. Finally, Fr. d'Alzon is a saint unlike any other, a kind of holiness with a new face. We need to communicate that to the world.

*The importance of lay friends in the work of postulation*

Almost everyone has noted that our lay friends seem more convinced of this effort than many religious, and that they express

tis by very concrete initiatives. The Assumption in Buenos Aires has launched a number of concrete means to promote the cause of Fr. d'Alzon. Perhaps they could give us all some good advice. Very active groups also exist in Ecuador and Colombia. The lay people in Goma are equally involved. In Buenos Aires alone, there are over 200 cases of people who report having received "favors" or healing thanks to the intercession of Fr. d'Alzon. Interestingly, the largest number of "cases" have occurred in Latin America. Why?

*How much interest do we Assumptionists have in the postulation?*

Among many, this does not seem to be much of a concern. Why? One reason perhaps: we do not seem to share the simplicity of lay-people who pray for healing through the intercession of Fr. d'Alzon. We probably consider this a kind of piety not to be encouraged. Maybe we need to rediscover the power of popular piety (see the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of Pope Francis). We need to dare entrusting our greatest needs to Fr. d'Alzon.

For their part, it should be said that the Oblates are very enthusiastic about the cause and have gotten quite involved.

*The role of the Postulator and local agents*

Fr. Julio Navarro has done a great job with his collaborators; they need to be encouraged and supported. We propose that Fr. General appoint a religious with as much enthusiasm to work at his side. We wonder if the Provincial postulation teams might not be reinforced; in some places they work well, but continuity needs to be assured. One brother from the Province of Africa noted that they needed more agents there.

There are a number of cases of graces/healings, but are they given enough follow-through? Also, should the Postulator be responsible for so many other causes (Pernet, Staub, Picard, the 3 martyrs...)?

*The diocese of Nîmes*

We need to be providing greater support here and working more closely with parish priests as well as others in the local Church. We should foresee forming individuals, e.g. capable of guiding visitors in the footsteps of Fr. d'Alzon.

*Making Fr. d'Alzon better known*

We need to find ways to make d'Alzon better known: his life, his spiritual and apostolic intuitions, etc. This is true, of course, for our young brothers in formation. But we would do well to make him known to the people we accompany, especially the sick. And we need to make him known in a language that people can understand.

*Here are some suggestions:*

- choose an event (21 November) that can be a special occasion for making him better known;
- organize events in Nîmes;
- make of d'Alzon's tomb an accessible place of pilgrimage; we should enhance the "Memorial Site" in Nîmes
- work on translations of works on Fr. d'Alzon;
- undertake a new edition of the *Ecrits spirituels*, with perhaps just simple selections; in any case, translate d'Alzon's Latin quotations in the ES;

- foresee a publication of the ES with some Fr. of d'Alzon's more accessible texts;
- encourage religious doing higher studies to write theses on d'Alzonian subjects;
- have recourse to professional help in this effort (historians, artists, professional communicators);
- encourage the establishment of a chair at ISEAB in Fr. d'Alzon's honor;
- the elaboration of a formation module on Fr. d'Alzon;
- prepare summer sessions on Fr. d'Alzon for religious.

### *Communications*

We've said it before: we are excessively modest with regard to the postulation. We asked ourselves: do we consider d'Alzon too modest a figure to be worth the effort of getting him to be declared a saint? We are in the business of communications, but we find it hard to make d'Alzon known. We would like to insist on the importance of *AA Infos* and "Signs of God." Even more information on the "cases" of healings/favors could be published.

### *The prayer of beatification*

It is often recited, but perhaps too often recited mechanically. Could we decide on one version of the prayer for everyone?

Perhaps within a Province, we could establish a calendar, with one community after another praying for a week at a time

We would also do well to pray to St. Marie Eugénie so that she might intervene in favor of his cause (and return the favor of Fr. d'Alzon's promise in her regard).

Perhaps the miracle to be prayed for is an increase in vocations. But would this “count” in the eyes of the Congregation for Saints in Rome?





**Messages  
from the General Chapter**



## **Message to the religious and to our lay friends**

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Dear Brothers and Sisters

Gathered in General Chapter at Écully-Valpré (France) from April 27 to May 17, 2017, delegates from the six Assumptionist provinces of the Congregation are pleased to be able to share with you what the Holy Spirit has enabled us to discern with regard to convictions and directions for the upcoming six years. The theme of this Chapter, « New wine into fresh wineskins: so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to the men and women of our day, » inspired us to reread once again a spiritual experience whose origin is found in Christ and that has taken flesh in diverse provincial realities. Reflecting on these led us to understand that in a divided world our charism impels us to work for unity, beginning with that of hearts and minds. So it is that we felt invited to place ourselves at the service of unity in a divided world in order to share with everyone the experience that “He who unites us is stronger than that which divides us » (Rule of Life #8). This unity is already realized in God; it stems from Hope. It is up to us to find ways that lead to it.

To do so we aim to muster all our resources with you, our lay brothers and sisters who have formally committed themselves on the “Way of Life”, you who participate in the Alliance, and all of you who far and wide are involved in our works and communities. You all contribute to enriching the charism. With each and every one of them, we wish to move forward so that Jesus Christ may be proclaimed to the men and women of our day.

Together we share a love for the Church. This love is inseparable from that of Mary, « the woman of faith, who lives and advances

in faith » (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #287). The mystery of the Assumption whose name we bear indicates that not all has been corrupted: in spite of sin, men and women are capable of doing good. This is cause for hope for today's world.

Community life lived in a family spirit allows us already now to experience a unity that is never complete. Our intercultural communities seek to be « schools of communion ». And concrete implications abound: « With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace » (Eph 4:2-3). It is a real call to conversion.

In the light of this criterion of unity we studied the ongoing relevance of our apostolic activities. So it was that the Chapter reaffirmed the list of mobilizing works and the priority of our involvement in education and teaching, in youth and vocation ministry, in social outreach and solidarity with the neediest, and, particularly, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. We are also called to foster within ourselves an apostolic and missionary dynamism with a heart open to new works and foundations at the Spirit's invitation to leave our everyday points of reference in order to tackle the new challenges to be found at the geographical and existential peripheries of our people.

The theme of the Chapter also led the delegates to reflect on the needed reforms to our structures of animating and governing the Congregation with a view to greater fidelity to the Spirit of the Assumption. We engaged in these discussions keeping in mind that reform is never an end in itself, but it is « a means to bear a stronger Christian testimony; to favor a more effective evangelization; to promote a more fruitful ecumenical spirit; to encourage a more

constructive dialogue with all.... » (Pope Francis, at the Extraordinary Consistory on reforming the Roman Curia, February 12, 2017). This reflection will continue until the next chapter. Because « realities are more important than ideas », life before words, we are called to accept living a « dynamic of the provisional » (Brother Roger of Taizé) and to recognize that our community organization must continue to evolve.

Our superior general, Very Rev. Benoît Grière, accepted a new term to lead the Congregation along this way. He is not left to his own devices. The Chapter also elected four religious to assist him in this effort: Rev. Marcelo Marciel (Chile), elected vicar general, and Br. Didier Remiot (France), general treasurer, as well as Rev. Thierry Kambale Kahongya (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and José Miguel Diaz Ayllón (Mexico). They have both the active support and full confidence of the entire Assumptionist body.

The religious life we share at the Assumption is meant to be like that burning bush that led Moses to decide, « I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight » (Ex 3:3). The fire is the fire of God that the Assumptionist community and the laypeople who are involved with it fuel with the fodder of their faith, their joy, and their virtues. We willingly take the risk of allowing our lives to enkindle this fire in our societies.

In the joy of the Risen Lord,

Rev. Benoit Grière, A.A., Superior general,  
and the members of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter  
of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
Valpré, May 17, 2017



## Message to our Senior Brothers

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*« Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. » (Phil 4:4-5)*

Dear Brothers,

The beauty of this passage from the Letter to the Philippians can be found in its capacity to convey joy to those who have followed Christ. We cite it in order to express as well our joy as the 33rd General Chapter comes to a happy close. It gives us great pleasure to turn to you to express our gratitude. You have graciously contributed to our work in diverse and much appreciated ways: your rich and insightful pre-capitular reflections, your constant prayer, and some bold proposals.

The theme, « New wine into fresh wineskins: so that Jesus Christ may be proclaimed to the men and women of our day », presents us with the challenge of daily conversion, as the Rule of Life demands. This Chapter reminds us that the new wine is Christ, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The wineskins, called to renewal, refer to each Assumptionist and to the community structures that we put in place so that Christ may speak effectively to today's world. This renewal is the fruit of a solid understanding of our charism, inherited from our founder, Fr. d'Alzon: to work for unity, within our religious family, within the Church, and within the entire human family, by means of diverse apostolic activities.

You have borne and continue to bear these concerns to our day. This Chapter calls us to be faithful along the road you have

journeyed by your fidelity to Christ and to our founder, Fr. d'Alzon, by the dynamism of your love of the Church, the Blessed Mother, and the great causes to the man. We thank you for all this.

You continue to be concerned about your younger brothers. The proposal that some of you made to have the Congregation find ways to accompany the elderly and the handicapped, especially in missions which many of you helped to establish, was welcomed by the Chapter as a « fresh wineskin » capable of bearing witness to our fraternal communion. You were considerate enough to think of brothers younger than yourselves who will soon have the same needs as you. For this we are grateful.

We are fortunate to count among our numbers brothers who have been blessed with a long life, even some centenarians. They are a cause for joy for us. The commitment of you all within our communities and in our apostolic works challenges and energizes us.

We know that we can count on your prayers, your friendship, your counsel, and your love. For our part, we are committed to praying for you and being there to sustain you in your moments of difficulty, whether in sickness, infirmity, or solitude. We pray that you can bear these serenely and in faith in Jesus Christ who is the reason for our coming together in the Assumption.

Rev. Benoit Grière, A.A., Superior general,  
and the members of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter  
of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
Valpré, May 17, 2017



## **Message to our sisters in the Assumption Family**

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As the 33<sup>rd</sup> general chapter comes to a close, we would like to send greetings to all the sisters of the Assumption Family. You yourselves are in the midst of general chapter preparations or the jubilee celebration of your foundresses; we want to assure you of our closeness and friendship at this time.

There were so many of you who expressed your closeness to us during this moment of discernment, whether in prayer or thought. Many thanks for this fraternal support that was certainly of great assistance to us in our decision-making process.

The theme chosen, « New wine into fresh wineskins: so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to the men and women of our day, » led the Chapter to reflect on the needed reforms to our structures of animating and governing the Congregation with a view to greater fidelity to the Spirit of the Assumption. We engaged in these discussions keeping in mind that reform is never an end in itself, but it is « a means to bear a stronger Christian testimony; to favor a more effective evangelization; to promote a more fruitful ecumenical spirit; to encourage a more constructive dialogue with all.... » (Pope Francis, at the Extraordinary Consistory on reforming the Roman Curia, February 12, 2017). This reflection will continue until the next chapter. Because « realities are more important than ideas » (EG #231), we are called to accept living a « dynamic of the provisional » (Brother Roger of Taizé) and to recognize that our community organization must continue to evolve.

Examining our diverse provincial realities led us to understand that in a divided world our charism impels us to work for unity, beginning with that of hearts and minds. In the light of this criterion of unity we studied the ongoing relevance of our apostolic activities. So it was that the Chapter reaffirmed the list of its mobilizing works and the priority of our involvement in education and teaching, in youth and vocation ministry, in social outreach and solidarity with the neediest, and, particularly, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Being called in the service of unity necessarily leads us to pursue efforts of greater communion first of all within the wider Assumption Family. We have common concerns, especially in the areas of education, social outreach, and vocation ministry. In many places sisters and brothers work side by side. Communities meet and celebrate together. At both the general and provincial level, those in charge of our congregations pursue their efforts of a better knowledge of our respective charisms. The Chapter delegates appreciate this ongoing collaboration. Certainly there is still progress to be made. That is why the Chapter encourages that fraternal relations be pursued and further developed at every level wherever members of the Family of our five congregations find themselves in close proximity. The unity of our small family is, to be sure, a gift from God, that we are invited to welcome and strengthen. In faith we believe that the Spirit will help us in this effort.

Rev. Benoit Grière, A.A., Superior general,  
and the members of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter  
of the Augustinians of the Assumption  
Valpré, May 17, 2017

## Analytical and Alphabetical Index of Proper Names and Themes

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*The roman numerals (I – IV) refer to the Superior General's introduction. The numbers of the articles of the Acts contained in the first part (pages 3 to 71) and the pagination of the second part (pages 73 to 107) refer to the animation texts and the messages.*

*The numbers in **bold** type indicate the more important passages on the subject.*

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*(Index produced by Fr. Bernard Le Léanec)*



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