



Glimpses from the General Chapter



November 6-24, 2023
Thủ Đức, Vietnam

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Glimpse 4 – Putting Together Our Committees, Reports, and Special Guest – Thursday, November 9, 2023

On Tuesday, November 7, another part of important work for the General Chapter occurred: naming the General Chapter Council to assist in the chapter's work. First, we voted for the Presiding Council of the General Chapter. By right of his office, the General Superior is the president: Father Eugênio BARBOSA MARTINS (*Brazil*). The General Council presents three moderators in advance for the chapter to approve. We approved the proposed Father Philip Benzy ROMICIAN (*India*), Father Anaclet BAMBALA (*Republic of Congo*), and Father Justin CHAWKAN (*Sri Lanka*). After this procedure of the chapter, the next is to have the delegates choose two more to represent them and join the Council. After three ballots, the chapter elected Father Maurits Gijsbrechts, delegate from North Europe-Mozambique and yours truly. Each night, the Chapter Council will meet to plan the next day of the chapter and use the existing agenda. It makes for a more extended day – since most of us are up at 4:30 AM and getting to our bedrooms at 9:30 PM.



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Americas Conference – Father Ghislain Cossette (Canada), Father Marcelo da Silva (Brazil), Carlos Rodriguez (Colombia) and Father Lane (USA)

There are other commissions where everyone meets with a group at night, essential pieces of our chapter and religious life. They are: “**Memory & Discernment**” (creating a narrative story of this chapter to share with the entire Congregation at the end of the chapter), **secretariat** of the chapter (taking the minutes and recording events), **liturgy** (with my role in this too), **study of the founder and Eymardian place, finances, formation** -initial for new members and ongoing for regular members, **juridical or canonical lessons** and

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internationality.

We listened to a 90-minute report (*spoken in French without a drink of water or breath!*) by Father **José Antonio Rivera Ruiz** (Spain), the Vicar General, on the report of the **General Council’s work** over the last six years. This was followed by meeting in 5 groups: three English-speaking groups and two French-speaking groups. In our groups, we reacted to the reports with our positive realities and challenges. We are grateful for the work of the Council and what they did for us, visiting most of the provinces during the 6-year mandate. After each report, we move into our French or English language small groups. Each group then reacted to the report: 3 English-speaking and 2 French-speaking, with me in group 1 and Father Norman Pelletier in group 2.



Our 2 Canadian Delegates: Father Ghislain Cossette and Father Jean Ratte



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Interestingly, for the English-speaking groups, English is the second or third language; I was the only person where English is my “first language.”



Eucharist led by the Province of Our Lady of Africa (Congo)

Wednesday morning began with us hearing a report from the **General Superior, Father Eugenio Barbosa Martins** (Brazil). It was a **20-page report**, sharing most of the realities our General has observed over the past six years. Father Eugenio touched on current issues, such as

- global “boiling” (*for the warming is over, and we are at this critical reality*),
- a post-pandemic world, the fruits of the last chapter at Mundelein (*Chicago*), Illinois,

USA, in 2017 building fraternal communities among ourselves, our Associates, and diocesan priests

- challenges have rocked the church and us with sexual abuse cases, aging religious, and the closing of our communities in some regions of the world
- religious vocations are lessening around the entire globe
- challenges with communication

Father Eugenio stressed that we are building praying communities and retreats and need to study the pope’s pastoral letter on liturgy,



The Communion Rite



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Desiderio desideravi, which encourages a theological and liturgical updating of our religious. Father General shared how we are building “servant communities,” working with migrants, immigrants, refugees, and concrete examples of ministry to the houseless in our world. We rejoice that we have this vigil year before the 40th anniversary of our *Rule of Life*. We will discuss these documents and the anniversary next week when we have a retreat day.

We are blessed with a new *Commentary on the Life Project* (the original name of the *Rule of Life for Associates of the Blessed Sacrament*), the USA translation of this document from our Generalate. Father Manuel Barbiero sent this out a few months ago (and I shared this with our Grapevine in a previous issue). The Aggregation is growing strong, and we rejoice in this gift to the Eymardian family and the church.



Most Reverend Joseph Nguyen Nang, Archbishop of Saigon City (center) with Father Joseph Ai, provincial of Vietnam and Father Eugenio Barbosa, Superior General

Internationality and growth of the Geographical Conferences (i.e., Asia-Oceania, Americas, Europe, Africa) are concepts and pushes for implementation in these past six years. We only need to look at our province to see how this has become a growing reality, and we have also had two meetings at the American Conference. Finally, Father Barbosa suggested that the next administration continue or develop since he is not eligible for reelection due to our statutes with a two-term, 12-year limit.

The Most Reverend Joseph Nguyen Nang, Archbishop of Saigon City, made a pastoral visit to address the 36th General Chapter on Wednesday, November 8. He noted how it was so important that our religious order followed the example of Pope Francis, coming to the peripheries of the world. He was so happy to welcome



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the first religious order to come to this archdiocese to have their General Chapter rather than in Rome, where most do.

He encouraged us to look forward despite the challenges that all religious orders face with diminishment in religious vocations. He has spoken to other religious orders and faced the realities of different ways of living the religious life. The archbishop encouraged us always to stay close to the center of our vocation – the Eucharist. A true point:



Second Year Novices and their director – Cooking, hospitality and making sure we have the essentials

We must still support the spiritual life of the young; in the past, we used to say, 'Take up the cross and follow Jesus.' Young people now ask, 'Why must I take up a cross?' It is a challenge to understand the sacrifices of life. Our role is to explain to the young the reality of the cross and share this important mystery of faith.

The archbishop really appreciates our theme and theme song for the chapter, expressing the Eucharistic mission for this is so needed and necessary for this archdiocese and the churches worldwide. Our presence in this archdiocese encourages people to live the Eucharistic mystery and is so appreciated.

Our afternoon group work devoted itself to taking time with many questions from the General's report and the following:



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1. What [picture] of the Congregation does the group identify [as a priority]?
2. What elements need to be improved [in the next General Administration]?
3. What are the three topics to be treated in priority in this General Chapter to realize the theme of this chapter: SSS Religious: together, faithful witnesses of the eucharistic mission?

Following these group reports, we heard the **Secretary-General and Procurator reports** presented by Father Joseph Binh. He has served in the secretary

position for ten years with a great staff, with first Father Justin Montoya (*until 2021*) and Mrs. Valerie Lemariey, who has worked in our curia for 30 years (*3 Generals and 6 General Secretaries*). The procurator is a person who collaborates our religious order with the Vatican curia. We heard of the communications, correspondence,



During a Break in the Meetings

canonical and legal issues, and the personnel realities that have been part of a process over the last years, especially when a person leaves the SSS Congregation. **Thursday morning, the feast of the holy Lateran Basilica in Rome**, we began with the Filipino province leading us in Eucharist and Morning Prayer. After an excellent buffet breakfast for the liturgical feast, we entered into the study of our Geographical conferences and the specific issues that face



Our photographer and organizer of the house and driver



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certain regions in the Congregation. It was interesting to hear that just as we are looking at the use and repurposing of our properties for their best value, our European central houses and Great Britain and Ireland provinces are taking time to see how we might use our facilities to extra income. They heard with delight how in New York we have our two religious' communities (*SSS and sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame*) occupying, ministering and utilizing our building together. The ministries that we have in our American conference, with so much outreach to those in need (*i.e., houseless, women with unplanned pregnancies, psychological counseling, etc.*), were of great interest to the chapter. Lastly, Father Darren Maslen exhorted his international experience with the novitiate and the incredible witness of our brothers, especially in New York City. Holding back tears, he shared the ministries of **Brothers Michael O'Leary, Thomas Mella, and Michael Perez**, and these stories need to be told and shared to inspire the **brother vocation** and increase our vocation as brothers in service to one another and the Church.



Chapter Secretary, Father Louis (*Senegal*) and Father Lane discuss the Vietnamese painting of Father Eymard

These touchstones have guided us so far; there is much more to come, and we are enjoying our time together, recognizing the blessings and gifts we have to offer one another and the Church.



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