

Pastoral Letter

to the Viatorian Community

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Dear Viatorians,

As the first year of our mandate comes to a close, I wish to share with you some of the reflections that my General Council confreres and I have made. Those reflections come from the road that we have traveled together, from the mandates confided to us by the 2012 General Chapter, from the challenges that we have established for ourselves, and from the various contacts that we have had with the different national communities. At the heart of our deep involvement with a new reality, we are moved by a fundamental motivation, which echoes the words of the Prophet Isaiah and which is also found as a revelation in the Book of the Apocalypse:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true" (Apocalypse 21:4-5).

Even in the midst of great uncertainty and of numerous obstacles, the God in whom we believe is always with us in a creative way and attends to the needs of his children. In our history, the many beautiful pages that have been written continue to be a source of pride for us. But, that is not sufficient! Viatorians, lift up your heads and look around: God continues to make all things new! Viatorians, learn to read those words wherever you may go and offer them to others as the precious treasure that hope has helped you to discover.

First Impressions

When a General Council is being formed, many elements must be taken into consideration and the time allotted for reflecting, consulting, inviting, and obtaining responses is rather short. As I told the chapter members after my election last summer, it is necessary that the General Council better reflect the current reality of our Community, which gave rise to the presence of two members coming from our foundations. Consequently, the average age of those forming the General Council was reduced, which, in itself, was not the primary objective. Nevertheless, that reality, which does indeed permit us to move forward, assures renewal on this level of leadership and responsibility.

If I am returning to the composition of the General Council at the very beginning of this letter, I am doing so in order to share with you my joy and happiness in working with those four confreres. Diversity is very much present among us; the formation of each councilor is an invaluable asset; the experience of past commitments makes it possible for each one to contribute his part; and, finally, a common passion binds us together. The following quotation from the Message to the Community from the members of the last General Chapter says it all perfectly:

We are proud today to reaffirm our faith in our common mission and our adherence to the rich Viatorian charism, which remains so pertinent in a Church, the People of God, and in a world that are undergoing profound changes.

One of the challenges facing our Community consists in dealing with the reality that is ours and, while maintaining great hope, to no longer act as if we had the same resources that we had in the past. That affirmation is true with respect to the personnel who are available for our mission, with respect to those called upon to perform the different services that we need, and very obviously with respect to financial questions. We are everywhere experiencing the effects of the generations of Viatorians who are absent from our ranks as a consequence of numerous departures and of the vocation shortage in the countries of the North. And that means that it is urgent for us to prepare religious to assume certain responsibilities. To do so, we must provide formation and facilitate what experience alone makes it possible to acquire. That is what we are facing as a General Council and what is being done elsewhere, especially in our vice-delegation and our foundations. Do we not find in our future, which invites us to be insightful and fearless, that which characterizes our Viatorian Community?

At the General Direction, we are also living a time of adjustment. Some long-time collaborators have left us or taken on other responsibilities. If we do not remain very much aware of the importance of preparing new kinds of collaboration, we will run the risk of overextending the limits of generosity of those who, for a good number of years, have been working with us on the mission of the General Council. Additionally, the concrete consequences of coming to Rome – a new country, a new culture, new life habits, learning the Italian language, an international context, and the daily use of our three usual languages [French, Spanish, English] – do not encourage the availability of candidates who are ready and willing to take up residence here. That is the reality to which we must accommodate ourselves.

Adaptations are also taking place with respect to communications. In a very real way, we have come to an important turning point that obliges us to re-think our manner of communicating with you. In the near future, the General Direction will have available a new Internet site, which will become the way in which communications are disseminated. The time when documents are printed in Rome and mailed to the fifteen countries where Viatorians live and work has come to an end. Slowly but surely, we will have to adapt ourselves to that new reality. That change, which has become necessary for various reasons, will make it possible not only to function more economically, but also, thanks to the secretarial services of the provinces, delegation, vice-delegation, and foundations, will help us to

communicate more efficiently. We should be ready to implement those changes beginning this coming autumn.

We are thus continuing with this time of adaptation by evaluating as accurately as possible the needs that we face. New and different divisions of our work mean that we are responding in different ways to the tasks confided to the General Council. I wish here to highlight the great spirit of generosity of my colleagues on the General Council and of the confreres who support our mission. Hope does indeed nourish the heart of people when the deep faith that is active in the world comes to illumine the faces of all those men and women who work ardently to overcome the challenges that life brings to them.

Associates ... Association ... Viatorian Community

On the occasion of the revision of our Constitution, at the 1978 General Chapter, it was affirmed that *our Congregation accepts as associates other persons who desire to participate in our mission, our spiritual life, and our community life (c. 5)*. Since that time, succeeding General Chapters have not only returned to that idea and clarified it in light of various lived experiences, but have also confirmed it as being an evolution that is faithful to our founding heritage. We must understand very well that the Viatorian Community, a concept born at the 1994 General Chapter, is not an idea that comes from Father Querbes. Nevertheless, the development of our Community, which includes different vocations that are inspired by the same charism and that are at the service of the same mission, lies precisely at the heart of what Vatican Council II asked of religious institutes: an *aggiornamento* inspired by a return to the roots.

The renewal and adaptation of the religious life entail both a continuing return to the roots of every Christian life as well as to that which originally inspired various institutes and, on the other hand, an adaptation of those elements to new conditions of existence (Perfectæ Caritatis, No. 2).

That re-reading of the founding spirit brought about, where we live and work, great enthusiasm, which, nourished by the winds of renewal emanating from the Council, produced for us an image of a rejuvenated Church. It is described by different traits: a rich diversity, the discovery of a new unity, and the shared responsibility of all the baptized.

And so we began speaking about “association,” a term that established a link with the group of religious. That expression, which is certainly useful but somewhat vague, while naming the group of lay people who joined the religious in this new adventure in the name of the Viatorian charism, still did not succeed in indicating a common project. Thus it was that the 1994 General Chapter established the concept of “Viatorian Community.” *With due consideration for their respective identities and their distinct vocations within the Viatorian Community, religious and associates henceforth become, within that Community, full-fledged heirs of the Founder’s charism and co-responsible for the Community’s development.* In that way, the Chapter recognized a grace that led to a “re-foundation” (1994 Chap. Q. 5). Since that time, it is no longer a question of welcoming associates into our ranks and integrating them into our way of doing things, teaching them our language and our history, but of displacing ourselves,

we as religious and they as committed lay persons in the Church. We are called upon to construct new structures together. Only that displacement, that “elsewhere,” facilitates the hoped-for interrelationship between our vocations and the co-responsibility needed for the good of our common mission. In a word, we evolved from an association made up of good collaborating women and men into an association inspired by the model of “new communities,” *because, in our eyes, association is an innovative way of being community in “the Church, the People of God”* (2012 Charter 2.3). A common name translates that transition: all of us are Viatorians.

Finally, the Charter, the reference text for the Viatorian Community, specifies two elements that are fundamental for the pursuit of our experiment: *the Viatorian Community is a genuine association of baptized persons who have received and recognized God’s vocational call to serve the world, in the Church, through the intermediary of the Viatorian charism* (Appendix 1 to the Charter). Secondly, it is through our common charism that religious, as consecrated persons, and lay persons, through their solemn commitment, commit themselves to the service of the Community (Appendix 1 to the Charter).

Why are we recalling these principal steps in our evolution since the 1978 General Chapter? Very simply because we have noticed that the evolution of the Viatorian Community has slowed down. In certain places, there is a notable lack of enthusiasm. In other places, there is a definite delay in establishing the Viatorian Community and those structures that make it possible for Viatorians, religious and associates alike, to remain in creative dialogue. Certain people among us even question the importance that the Community has acquired in our universe.

We must undertake a critical re-reading of our recent history. In that regard, the excellent presentation that Father Léonard Audet made at the 2011 General Assembly in Bogotá, which is still available on the General Direction’s Internet site, constitutes an invaluable reference point that can help us, in our respective milieux, to re-establish a consensus about the steps of our evolution since Vatican Council II. This time of gathering information, of engaging in dialogue, and of integrating what was recognized as being calls of the Spirit appears to us as being urgent at this point in the history of the Community. The proposed Viatorian Community is being called upon to take its second breath and all of us, whatever might be our point of view and/or the situation of the community to which we belong, are called upon to act in solidarity and to play an active role in recapturing our founding heritage.

We have also noted that the *Ratio Formationis*, which was produced in 2012 after extensive consultations with persons involved in formation, should be more widely used as a reference tool with a view to establishing initial and continuing formation programs that are adapted to our life-projects. While its content must be adjusted to each of our milieux and to various cultures, the *Ratio* does provide a good definition of the reference points that are essential if we wish to form committed Viatorians in the spirit of the Viatorian Community.

Religious and the Viatorian Community

Over the course of the visits that we have made and through our discussions with Viatorians in various countries, we have noticed a phenomenon of hesitation – nay, even uneasiness – on the part of the religious with respect to the Viatorian Community and the importance that it has taken on over these past years. While our recent history might explain that fact, we must still ask ourselves: Over the course of these past years, have we sufficiently insisted upon the importance of this new community context to facilitate a renewal of enthusiasm about the consecrated life and new ways of sustaining and regenerating it? Certain persons feel that they have been put aside and forgotten by an official discourse that puts great emphasis on Viatorians and the Viatorian Community. To hide that reality would be to delude ourselves.

I wish first of all to say to my confreres who are experiencing such a reality that we understand them very well. We welcome their reactions with respect and we want to better understand them. May those who are interiorly living in a state of uneasiness, whether they be younger or older, know that it is our responsibility to go into the depths of your uncomfortable state because that is part of the witness that we are called upon to offer to those persons to whom our mission directs us. Unity – and a unity that goes above and beyond the positions of this group and that group and that strives to be the result of mutual confidence – is the essential condition of the witness that people expect of us. That unity can be attained only through the patient progress of those men and women who dare to face reality and who, through their deep faith, strive to re-create that unity among the persons involved themselves and with the God who brings them together.

The social and ecclesial reality of the first generations of the men and women who discovered and committed themselves to this association movement that is now the Viatorian Community is no longer the same. The newer generations of religious have different characteristics imprinted with an evolving Church, changes in our societies, and the intergenerational shifts that leave a social imprint on the relationships between different age levels. The same can be said about Viatorian Associates. We can no longer count on a common core of historical memories, the fruit of progress made possible through the same points of reference, upon which we would be able to continue building together that new edifice that constitutes the Viatorian Community. In that regard, the General Council draws the attention of all the provinces, the delegation, the vice-delegation, and the foundations to the importance of:

- Providing formation into the Viatorian Community in the initial stages preparatory to the commitments of religious and of associates. On both sides, in the spirit of Appendix 2 to the recently corrected Charter of the Viatorian Community, every person must recognize that his or her vocation to the common charism constitutes a commitment to a sharing of the fruits of that charism.
- Establishing a specific mechanism for accompanying those religious who, in our milieu, are living in a state of uneasiness with respect to the existence of the Viatorian Community, its relationships with the Congregation, its necessary structures, and the interrelationships that are called for between religious and associates.

The last General Chapter, responding to a question about the situation of Viatorian Religious in the context of the Viatorian Community and the points of reference for the development of Viatorian consecrated life, made an unequivocal appeal:

The General Chapter very strongly encourages Viatorian Religious:

- to live the complementarity that exists between the vocations of Viatorian Religious and Viatorian Associates;
- to live their membership in the Viatorian Community as a favorable opportunity for enriching the essential part of their religious life, especially through their practice of the vows, their experience of God, their fraternal unity, their option for the poor, and their shared mission (2012 Chap. QQ. 11-13).

Only a deep faith and a mutual confidence in one another will make it possible for us to catch that second breath that will guarantee the pursuit of the proposed Viatorian Community as a place for the flourishing of the two vocations that compose it, as a fertile field for wonderful ecclesial collaboration, as the expression of a complementarity that is able to draw profit out of our rich diversity. Thus, we are called upon to serve the Church by humbly offering a model of interrelationships between vocations that is easily recognized in the model that was presented to us, fifty years ago, by the Second Vatican Council.

Looking to the Future

While this pastoral letter is an attempt to translate what the General Council members have learned after one year of service, it also wishes to share with you two elements that will mark the coming months and that will later involve us in our responses to what the 2012 General Chapter asked of us. As a first step, the two priorities and the link between them; then, finally, the consequences of a learning process to develop the bonds that express the importance of Viatorian internationality.

The publication of this year's last two issues of *Viator Web* highlighted our commitment to and involvement with social justice, as well as the renewal of our vocation program. Those two insistent calls of the General Chapter are presented under the form of priorities. While we might be overly familiar with that kind of language, that which is on the level of a priority ought to elicit a careful and immediate response. Far from pretending that nothing has been done since the last General Chapter, this present commentary is especially an attempt to support not only those communities that have undertaken an in-depth reflection on those two elements of our life-project, but also on the special accentuation suggested by the link between the two.

While that reflection certainly deserves better development in the final lines of a pastoral letter, please permit me to briefly urge you not to consider those elements as being separate. Does not a simultaneous reading of the two suggest to us that the renewal of our vocation programs, as the result of an attentive reading of the ecclesial and social contexts in which we live, will be appropriate and

effective insofar as the witness that we offer clearly indicates our option for the poor among us? The same can be said about the real efforts that we make to see to it that, in full human and Christian justice, each and every person will be an essential part of the future of all.

Let us go even further in our reflection: the poor of the Gospel are not only persons in need, people in search of justice, but they are (poverty is) also a theological place where God's face is revealed under its most exciting angle. Thus, God's will finds a forceful channel of expression. Our questions should lead us to think that our distance – if such is the case ... as judged by each community – from situations of poverty is the first expression of a middle-class life-style even before raising any questions about our level of life. Is not that proximity to the poor and to their struggle for greater justice one of the first conditions for developing a vocation program that is naturally inviting?


Along those same lines, the first priority that calls upon us to identify the new challenges of our world with a view to adapting our vocational approach cannot do otherwise than to lead us toward the different forms of isolation, exclusion, and marginalization that mark off the areas of growing poverty in our societies. But, in such a case, a well-adapted vocation program cannot avoid using the committed vocabulary of those women and men who live in such situations, cannot avoid employing a new and common language that gives full weight to those questions that know how to recognize the place from which they come, because they become real first of all wherever the God of the little ones makes known his presence.

I encourage you to run the risk of reading our two priorities in a way that will permit you to go even further into the bonds that must be established between them and the conclusions that such a reading suggests to us.

Finally, the coming year will give us an opportunity to make a second suggestion about responding to a united approach of the provinces and the delegation to the challenge of financing the vice-delegation and the foundations. In that matter, the question of creating an International Mission Development Office is directly involved.

The request of the General Chapter is non-equivocal and requires us to undergo a change in mentality: the aforementioned Office is not only desirable in terms of raising funds that will permit us to diversify our ways of financing our foundations and vice-delegation, but also in terms of setting up an organization that will be called upon to be *the privileged partner for economically accompanying the foundations and the vice-delegation as they implement their strategic plans (2012 Chap. 26.3)*. I invite you to re-read what the General Chapter said about that International Mission Development Office and to recognize the major shift in perspective that will be involved if we give a positive response to that request.

Point 3 of Response 26 of the Chapter stated clearly:

 *The General Chapter strongly encourages the General Council to officially establish the International Mission Development Office as an official economic organism of the*

Congregation that deals specifically with the question of financing and providing technical support for the foundations and the vice-delegation.

At the 2013 meeting of the Extraordinary General Council, we already analyzed some first steps that will permit us to respond to that chapter request. Together, we realized that it is wise to take all the time necessary to make an in-depth study of that question and to discover the various steps in a process that will permit us to move forward, with wisdom and determination, in this project. This question will be at the top of our agenda at the 2014 meeting of the Extraordinary General Council. So that the reflections of everyone might nourish the work that we will have to do, I urgently invite all members of our Community to make available the fruit of their research for the benefit of all.

Fraternal Greetings

I will conclude this letter by referring to a strong challenge that Pope John Paul II presented to consecrated men and women, in March of 1996, on the occasion of the publication of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*:

You have not only to remember and to recount a glorious history, but you have to construct a great history! Look to the future, when the Spirit will send you forth to do even greater things with you (No. 110).

How could he have said it better? What more could he have said? While he was certainly speaking to men and women religious, his words, as indicated in the title of the document, were addressed: *to all the faithful regarding the consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world*. Let us continue constructing that wonderful history! That is the promise that the Spirit of God makes to us by continuing to constantly raise up in our milieux the charism that is dear to our hearts and that we maintain in faithfulness to our founder, Father Louis Querbes. Let us continue constructing that wonderful history! That, therefore, is the miracle of the Spirit that, at the heart of our weaknesses, keeps us marching forward.

Our faithfulness is beautiful to behold and brings with it the promise of God's presence. And may that be the way that the future is welcomed!

Written in this month of June, 2013, which witnessed the presentation of the *Positio* [Position Paper] to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

Fraternally yours,



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