



From Chapter to Life

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
JUL / AUG 2019

Over the past year we have held all the Local and Demarcational Chapters of the Order. The “**chapters time**” ended in May of this year 2019. Throughout these months, the General Congregation is meeting with the new Congregations elected in the Chapters, in order to share with them the plans and projects of the quadrennium; in short, the reception of their own chapter processes.

It is on this subject that I want to write to you, because I am convinced that the **reception of a Provincial Chapter** is not a matter of a few days, but a whole process, which deserves a lot of attention. And more in this case, in which we begin now the process of preparation of the 48th General Chapter. I Just want to underline some dynamisms that I think we should consider when working to receive our Provincial Chapter.

In the book of Acts of the Apostles there is a beautiful narration of an extraordinary event of community discernment: The question posed by the community of Antioch in relation to what was really important and what was not in the experience of Christian faith. Antioch (represented by Paul and Barnabas) consults the Apostles in Jerusalem, and they reflect in depth and write a document in response to the community’s concerns and questions. Then they make a meaningful decision: they elect two people from among them (Judas and Si-

las) to carry the letter, accompanying Paul and Barnabas.¹

And Judas and Silas summon the Assembly at Antioch and read the letter, which is “welcomed with joy because it gave them much consolation².” The letter sent by the Church of Jerusalem was received as a “word of encouragement.” But the matter doesn’t end there. We are told that Judas and Silas “consoled and comforted the brothers by conversing with them for long³.”

This narration of the book of Acts of the Apostles can help us a lot to understand where is the key of the challenge that arises around the reception of a Provincial (or General) Chapter in the bosom of a Demarcation and of the group of people who live their faith and their mission from a certain charisma.

I invite you to read carefully this chapter of the book of Acts. In it appears a *community “in discernment”*, with contradictory positions on important subjects; *A clear desire for light and clarity*; *an effort to seek answers, in the light of the Gospel*; *serious work, putting the necessary means, for the answer to come and be welcomed*; *a final experience of joy and consolation*.

Something like this would have to happen among us when we celebrate our Chapters: We prepare them with our best will, we try to constitute opportunities of the Spirit for the Province, and we do *everything we can* to welcome its decisions and prepare its fruits.

Do we do everything we can? This is the great question I would like to answer in this simple writing, offering some *control points* related to the reception of a Chapter: **from Chapter to Life**.

1-Being aware of what we are looking for when celebrate a Chapter. For that, I would like to cite a well-known reflection by Pope Francis, pronounced in front of all the Synod Fathers gathered in Rome to reflect on the Family. It is

1.- Acts of the Apostles, 15, 1-35

2.- Acts 15, 31

3.- Acts 15, 32

enough to change the word “Synod” with the word “Chapter”. This is what the Holy Father would tell us: “*The Chapter assemblies do not serve to discuss brilliant and original ideas, or to see who is the smartest... They serve to cultivate and save the Lord’s Vineyard better, to cooperate in his dream, his project of love for his people. We can thwart God’s dream if we do not let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us that wisdom that goes beyond science, to work generously with true freedom and humble creativity. That is why I ask you to speak plainly and listen with humility*”⁴.

This is therefore my first affirmation: the task of preparing, celebrating and welcoming the chapter is a *spiritual task*, deeply anchored in our sincere desire to follow the Lord and to proclaim the Gospel, and absolutely connected to the mission we have received. This is the topic we are talking about: *what God expects from us*. And in front of a “theme” like this, every answer and every effort is always small.

Therefore, never forget that the reception of a Chapter requires, first of all, a lot of prayer, an intense supplication to the Lord to enlighten us with his Spirit and strengthen us in our searches. And it needs work: if we do not work to make it fruitful – as it depends on us-, we are wasting our own work and, more importantly, the hopes of many brothers and the sincere and generous prayer of the people who expect something from us.

2-Promoting a reception process. The reception of a Chapter has the same dynamism -on a small scale- that a Synod or a encyclical in the whole of the Church. It’s slow and you have to work it. All our Demarcations have a great challenge: to receive – or not-their own Chapter. Because it may happen that we do not accept it, or that we do so superficially. If this were the case, we’d be missing a chance.

Working for the reception of the Chapter is not only about encouraging reading the documents

4.- FRANCIS: Homily at the Holy Mass opening of the extraordinary Synod on the Family, October 5, 2014.

or encouraging training plans so that those are better known and studied. For the reception of the Chapter is necessary a *global dynamism*, which implies positive and operational attitudes. It involves bringing the decisions and Chapter options to the whole of the religious and lay people of the Province, helping the young people to know them and discovering the potentials and demands that they enclose, promoting concrete initiatives and bets that make possible what the Chapter approved. If *nothing new happens* after a Chapter, it is because nothing new was said or because we have not been able to welcome the novelties that we approved.

3-The documents, the decisions, the lived event and the Delegates. A Chapter has many dynamisms that must be considered at the time of its reception and start-up. But I would like to highlight these four:

The documents that were approved (planning, bylaws, proposals, writings), all of them important. They are the fruit of the work of the delegates and all those who have collaborated in them. They deserve to be read and worked.

The decisions taken, all of them important to the Province, some of them certainly significant, and some others that we do not even imagine the importance they will have in the future. We have the experience of having been able to make important decisions because a Chapter, years ago, approved options that at the time no one valued in its full potential.

The “chapter event”, the experience of fraternity that is lived in the Chapter, even the experience of work for the communion -sometimes difficult- that can be given at times. The days of the Chapter are a spiritual and demarcational experience worth discerning and transmitting. A Chapter is much more than the documents that are approved.

The delegates. They’re the “envoys” of the Chapter. Not only the superiors, but all: to transmit what was lived is part of the responsibility of the delegates. Their work does not end with the signing of the minutes; on the contrary, it continues

and with great demand and dedication. Let us think of Judas and Silas, at Antioch, who “*continued to converse with the brethren, giving them comfort and consolation.*”

Welcoming the Chapter means that we *expect something good from it*, meaning that we want to know clearly and objectively the agreed options, the decisions taken. Welcoming the chapter means giving it the opportunity to produce fruits and fruits in abundance. Receiving doesn’t mean just “knowing” or “asking.” Above all, it means receiving it in such a way that we may make it possible for us to fructify in life and mission.

4-What dynamisms do we have to put in place to welcome the chapter? Of all those that we can promote, I propose four:

The first one is called “**having information**”. It is important that we read the documents, that we know what is the meaning of the various propositions that were approved or rejected, that the major superiors report on the essentials and the reading that the government teams make of the chapter thinking of the Congregation and of the Demarcation. We need to facilitate, to ask and to work this information. This is the only way to avoid remaining on the superficial or the most striking. Only in this way can we overcome that temptation that sometimes appears to want to know only the anecdotes or precisely what you must know to keep discretely. The information is fundamental and must be clear and faithful.

The second is called “**personal and communitarian reflection**”. To knowledge follows the reflection, the dialogue, the deepening in those aspects that can be more relevant for the Province or for our own community. We are invited to *discern, clarify, internalize, answer questions*, to try to read the documents as a *source of renewal* of our reality, to work the texts to *enrich our planning* or our *training meetings*. All of this is important. I could give many examples of decisions taken by a Chapter that have not been well understood, in an objective way, by many religious. You must not assume that things are well understood.

The third dynamism has to do with “**our op-**

tions". After discernment (personal, communitarian, demarcational...), we must come to make decisions, pass new steps, enrich our planning; in short, we must try to get that what was approved by the chapter will offer fruits of new life.

The fourth we can call it "**participation**". The Chapter does not affect only the religious, but the Piarist Fraternities and so many people who are part of the Piarist project. Many Chapters have already counted on the presence of the Fraternities or lay stewards of the Piarist mission. "Participation" means that the work of informing, reflecting and deciding far exceeds the scope of our own religious community.

5-From what background option should we receive the Chapter? I think that something that can help us to welcome and understand our Chapters is to receive them from a *Central Attitude*, from a conviction that situates us clearly at the present moment of the Province. No doubt there is more than one background option to interpret a Chapter, but I dare to propose one that is very concrete: we receive the Chapter in the key "*Provincial construction*." This attitude commits us to understand ourselves as responsible people engaged in the construction of a Province more alive, more missionary, more faithful and more capable of new answers. This engages us all.

6-Let us purify our risks and seize our opportunities. At the reception of the Chapter, we all have *risks and opportunities*. The first must be overcome, the second used. Among the first, I quote some: the temptation of *indifference* (this is not with me, it has nothing to do with my daily life and my needs), *vulgarization* (more papers, as always), *Simplification* (of the chapters, what interests are the elections, the rest is left on the shelves), the *localism* (let's see what we can get from this Chapter for our house, instead of thinking to what we are called, as a community, by this Chapter), *ignorance* (not even take the trouble to read, because I know everything and I have other things more important to do). It is important to be aware that we all have risks in the reception, because normally things are received according to the container, and that is not easy to avoid.

We also have opportunities. It's good that we know how to use them. As simple suggestions, I point up some: *enriching our consciousness of Province*, trying to understand what worries and occupies us; *accepting a small vital uninstal movement* thinking about what I can collaborate to be possible the great common challenges we have as a province; organizing a good *Training Plan* in the community, working on some of the Chapter documents or having a community retreat centered on what the decisions of the Chapters can mean to us.

7-The recipients who receive. We should now focus not on the Chapter texts, but on the recipients. I think our Chapters should be embraced in the *various areas* in which we live as religious. Fundamentally three: *The Province, the community and local presence, and each one of us*. In the area of the Province, the responsible persons and teams, as well as the councils of rectors and secretariats, must make their reading of the fundamental aspects of the Chapter that can affect us most, and try to draw their conclusions. At the local level, it is the community, the teams responsible for the work and the teams of presence who must do their work. And personally, each of us must also make the effort to read and reflect, trying to get clues to help us in our vocational experience. The three areas are complementary, all three are indispensable.

But there are more areas that we can think of. I quote some: to summon the *young religious* to share their dreams and questions before the Chapter; to design a positive communication plan of the chapter work for the *elderly*; to convene the whole of the *Fraternities and collaborators*, to study together the Chapter decisions, etc. Everything we do in this respect, especially with the young religious, will provoke a demanding reception of the chapter. The religious are able to draw from a Chapter fruits that the delegates were not able to see. The Holy Spirit acts as and when He wants.

I want to finish this fraternal letter highlighting something that I think is essential. It is good that we prepare all the dynamisms, and all the activities so that a Chapter is known and welcomed. But

we can never forget that God knows his ways, and that He always places us before our reality and challenges in the most unexpected way. This is the great truth of our faith: God is always greater.

To Him, in trusting prayer, we present our Chapters, that they may be received in listening attitude to his Word and in fidelity to his will, so that we may bear fruit, and fruits that remain.

Receive a fraternal salutation.

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Father General