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Facing a New Century with a Passion for God

Adveniat Regnum Tuum

Augustinians of the Assumption

1850-2000

The General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption

Rome, 2–21 May 1999

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The Message of Pope John Paul II

To Reverend Father Richard Lamoureux, a.a.

Superior General of the Augustinians of the Assumption

On the occasion of the thirtieth General Chapter of the Augustinians of the Assumption at Rome, I am pleased to send you my heartfelt greetings and join my prayer and thanksgiving to your own.

Your assembly coincides with the opening of the celebrations of the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of your Congregation by the Venerable Emmanuel d'Alzon. These events are a privileged occasions which give new vitality to the intuitions of your founder so that, wherever the members of the Institute are sent, they will work ever more generously for the spreading of the Kingdom of God. Ever since your origins, your motto, *Adveniat regnum tuum*, has led the Augustinians of the Assumption to embark on new missionary ventures.

I wish to encourage you, therefore, as you reflect together on the orientations that you intend to promote. At a time when you begin a new stage in the life of your communities place special emphasis on the transmission and deepening of the faith, and on your commitment in favour of the poor and the excluded (marginalised). I hope that your work for ecumenism, particularly in the Christian Orient and in Central and Eastern Europe, will give to all your apostolates a perspective founded on charity and fraternal dialogue as expounded in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*.

I cordially invite the Congregation to continue to foster the evangelical basis of its apostolic life, in keeping with the spiritual patrimony bequeathed to it by Saint Augustine. It will be able to count on the pastoral experience of its one hundred and fifty years of existence in opening itself to the orientations proposed in my apostolic exhortation (*Vita Consecrata*).

Being "men facing a new century with a passion for God" you will restore a prophetic dimension to your communities which, inspired by your charism, will serve the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church. By returning to your origins, you will be able to live the harmony that exists between the proclamation of the Gospel and fraternal life with new courage, and be animated by a growing spiritual and apostolic dynamism.

Invoking the protection of the Virgin Mary and the intercession of Saint Augustine, I pray that God will bestow an abundance of his graces on you who have been given the responsibility of

guiding the Institute during the next few years with the members of your Council. And, with my whole heart, I confer on you my Apostolic Benediction, which I extend to all the Augustinians of the Assumption and to everyone associated with them.

The Vatican, 17th May 1999.

Introduction by the Superior General

More written words! You have in your hands, the edition of yet more texts, the documents of our most recent General Chapter. The Capitulants often said: life rather than words, the heart rather than the pen, conversion instead of written formulas.

When I think about words, I cannot help thinking about the words and the Word of Scripture. Nehemiah was a man in love with Jerusalem. When he returned from Babylon and saw the ruined walls of the city, his energy and ambition led him to organize a rebuilding project (see the Book of Nehemiah). But soon Israel's enemies sought to undermine the effort, and the Israelites themselves, blessed with less zeal and passion than their leader, began to complain about all of the work. It was a familiar pattern in the history of the Hebrew people.

What did Nehemiah do? He gathered the Israelites together, and they listened to Ezra read the sacred words, the Law, that provided the chosen people with an identity and a purpose (Nehemiah 8). We can learn from their experience. If in turn we want to "rebuild", we too will have to remember, to reflect, to exercise our imagination. And the words of our Chapter documents will help us do this. Like the Word, they can be a presence that instructs, inspires, challenges, and sustains.

The fact is, human beings cannot escape the written word; some would say it is what makes us human. But a word is different depending on how it's read.

We can read such documents like so many ink smudges on a page or images on a television screen: passively registering signs in some superficial region of our consciousness and just as quickly forgetting them when we lay the book down. Reading is an art; it requires an effort. An effort to be aware that the words on the page are the expression of a person's experience, his joys and insights and struggles, and a willingness to allow ourselves to be challenged by the experience of another. But reading also requires an effort to translate those words into the "language" of one's own life and experience: we need to give flesh, our flesh, to the words; we need to put our questions to the text. Then, and only then, do these words have the power to touch and to transform.

Of course, a word is different too by how it is written. Too many words can obfuscate and hypnotize, rather than clarify and energize. The Capitulants made an effort to be dynamic, direct, and brief in their expression, the better to engage the reader. Our Chapter documents were written like many contemporary computer programs: they are meant to be "interactive." They are not finished products in themselves; rather they explicitly ask for our response. They invite us to reflect, to discuss, to seek the opinions of others, especially lay people around us. And only then are we meant to articulate a more definitive understanding and set in motion a more appropriate course of action.

Perhaps you did not await this booklet of Chapter documents with bated breath. Do not feel that you have to read it all at once. Pick and choose what strikes you as particularly important to you today. I think you will find that the Chapter members touched upon topics that address some of our deepest concerns and desires. To the extent that you are in touch with these desires, I am confident that the words of these documents will be a life-giving presence for each of us and for our communities. In any case, that is my prayer.

Richard E. Lamoureux, a.a.

Superior General

21st June 1999

I. Re-expressing Our Assumptionist Charism

RE-EXPRESSING OUR ASSUMPTIONIST CHARISM

Re-expresion...

1 The General Chapter has responded to the request made by many of you for a re-expression of our charism. This request echoes the strong desire for spiritual renewal in each one of us and for our “little Congregation”. We understand our spirit so poorly that it is often reduced to a few clichés. As a result, we only live a part of our rich heritage.

2 The General Chapter believes that a new understanding of our charism can only succeed by involving the whole of the Assumption as it lives its life faithfully from day to day. Life rather than words. The heart rather than the pen. Conversion instead of written formulas. Only with a life open to the Spirit and converted to the Gospel will we discover this new language. When the grain is ripe, comes the time of the harvest.

3 The General Chapter also asked the Superior General and his Council to make the re-expression of our Assumptionist charism the major theme in the animation of the Congregation for the next six years. Each year, a short working document will encourage communities and religious to question what motivates them to follow in the footsteps of Fr. d’Alzon and his successors. The aim is to produce by 2005 a verifiable portrait in the form of a synthesised text for the use of Religious and those laity in close association with us.

4 This reflection on our life will take into account our inspirational resources: The Rule of Saint Augustine, our Rule of Life, “The passion for the Kingdom of God in Today’s world” voted by the General Chapter of 1993, and “The Passion for God in the Face of a New Century” prepared for the General Chapter of 1999.

5 The following text is a launch pad to help each of us begin this journey together. It outlines what a charism is for a Congregation and offers the first step in a personal examination of our Assumptionist charism. The success of this endeavour depends on the personal investment you are prepared to make.

... the Charism...

A Gift

6 For the Apostle Paul, a charism is a gift of the Spirit made to an individual for the good of the Church – a free gift, never merited, never programmed. Vatican II used the expression to define religious life: the charism of religious life is a gift of God to the Church (and not to an Institute). It takes flesh in a founder and is passed on to his religious family.

The Spirit gives himself without ever taking anything back. It is the infidelity of man that causes the charism to disappear. A charism is as fundamental to religious life as baptism is to Christian life. What we still need to receive, to grasp better and to live, is the gift of the Spirit.

A Person

7 The charism of a Congregation is the gift of the Spirit that permeates the spiritual and apostolic intuition of a man or a woman and their first companions, within a precise context. This is called “the charism of the Founder”. He sees into the heart of reality, is conscious of a need and an expectation, and recognises the urgency of them. He wishes to respond. He takes initiatives. His life is his first message. He risks his whole existence to be faithful to the Spirit

and to live the Gospel. His charism manifests itself in his way of being and living in the faith. He mediates the Spirit and becomes the father of a Congregation.

A Way

8 The Founder offers a way of living the Gospel. His path is original. It is an interpretation for both the Church and society. The disciples of the Founder follow this path. The history of a Congregation shows how this charism has been lived down through time. The fidelity of the Congregation to the initial inspiration cannot be guaranteed from the outside. The path followed must be regularly verified by walking along it.

9 In the course of our history, we experience the truth, richness, and spiritual fruits of the charism that we attempt to make our own. The Spirit always accompanies his gift. The “once for all time” of the charism is also a “now”. It is available at each moment of history offering new harmonies to the changing events of the day, to the encounter with new cultures, and to our spiritual and apostolic experiences. It has a potential that is inexhaustible and it is untiring in its witness to the great apostolic figures in our history.

A Call

10 The charism of a Founder today comes to us with its own history and inspires what Vita Consecrata calls “a creative fidelity” “in response to the ‘signs of the times’ that characterise our world today” (“Vita Consecrata” 37). Rather than devote ourselves to an archaeological restoration, we seek to adapt the original impulse, shaped by its historical context, to our situation today. Its heritage will only continue to prosper in so far as it is able to make new discoveries of the Mystery of God and hopes of man that nourish a project. Past and present must be dynamically similar, though concrete expressions might be noticeably different.

11 In an evolving world, one condition for being faithful to the original inspiration is to reinterpret it. This is expressed in a belief that is found throughout its tradition: do what the Founder would do if he were in this situation today. A new situation invites a new response from the charism and this requires a new formulation. The call of a charism, which comes to us in our present situation, links the call of Christ with that of the Spirit.

12 Finally, the gift of the Spirit makes each religious a founder of his Congregation because a disciple inherits the testimony of his master.

... of the Assumption

13 To help take the first step in reflecting on our Assumptionist charism we wish simply to underline three elements which seem to us to constitute the backbone and impulse of what we are called to live:

a. The Cause of God and of Man

b. In Apostolic Community

c. For love of the Church

a. The Cause of God and of Man

14 This is the way we express the fundamental theme of the Reign and of the Kingdom of God today. The heart of our charism seeks to make the Reign of God a reality. God's great project for the whole of humanity is manifested in Jesus Christ. "The spirit of the Founder forces us to embrace the great causes of God and of man, to go wherever God is threatened in man and man is threatened as image of God" (RL.4).

15 This new energy and life (*nouveau souffle*) we seek presupposes "a conversion to the Kingdom". It presupposes that we become workers for the Kingdom with a passion for God and for man like that of Christ. Before being and working in a school, a parish, or a newspaper... we are sent to that place where both man and God are under threat, where they seek each other and encounter each other in a Covenant that is forever being renewed. And the God that we

confess is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom we welcome in faith, hope and love.

16 It is in Jesus Christ that the cause of God is identified with the cause of man. We are the obedient servants of Jesus Christ. Christ and his love lie at the genesis of our vocation and mission. It is our attachment to Christ that forges our common passion for God and for man. Furthermore, Christ and his love are also the terminus ad quern of our vocation and mission since it is in him that God and humanity find unity. In so far as we are a gathering of brothers seeking to reconcile all things in Christ, the Assumptionist community proclaims the Kingdom and, through grace, gives it a particular image.

b. In apostolic community

17 Our community is apostolic and our apostolate is communitarian. Such is the challenge that the Assumption wishes to present, in fidelity to Saint Augustine. We are not just any group of individuals. We belong to God and we belong to each other: We are not our own masters. Our mission is a mission received, entrusted to us by the community. The fact that we live a Christian life together, despite our differences and our failings, is a sign to every Christian and to everyone that community life is possible.

18 In a world where culture, politics, and the economy favour a hostile individualism, we draw on all the riches received from our insertion in the Body of Christ in which the Assumptionist community is a living cell. Is religious life just an opportunity for us to achieve personal autonomy and to search for personal security and happiness?

19 The apostolic community inspires us to share our life with each other, a life nourished and grounded in the Eucharist.

20 “Without a practical structure, apostolic community is more theoretical than real. Its apostolic prayer, its community chapter, and its conversation about the apostolate stimulate its whole being. These elements are indispensable for its existence” (Complement to the «Ratio Institutionis»). We would even say that conversation in community about the apostolate is the crucible of the apostolic community. We are called to hold in wonder the work that God accomplishes in us and through us.

c. For love of the Church

21 To love the Church out of love for Christ is a constitutive element of the Assumption. True, our understanding of the Church has changed since the XIXth century. The Catholic community sees itself less as a fortress under siege than as the sacrament of salvation, a mystery of communion between God and man, a people of God eager to do good. However, the Pauline image of the Body of Christ provides a link between yesterday and today. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, remains the icon of sanctity that we are called to emulate. But the Church is still confronted with a world that claims autonomy over all transcendence and even denies God any place.

22 The Assumptionist response, in the name of the Church, is one of instinctive fidelity, selfless generosity and missionary daring. The Assumptionist steers a middle course: attentive to the great teachings of the faith and avoiding all meanness of spirit. It is not just by its works that the Assumption has its place in the Church. It takes its place there voluntarily, seeking to prepare the way for those who have not heard the Gospel.

23 In its mission as Church, the Assumption seeks to offer a service of truth, unity and charity. This presupposes that all its activity has a doctrinal, social and ecumenical character. These three elements are not juxtaposed: they are the triple requirement for all Assumptionist apostolate.

Two practical means:

a. Centres of spirituality

24 Several Provinces have organised projects (Centres of spirituality, sessions, formation programmes, etc.) to encourage a deepening and a better appropriation of our charism. This is often carried out in conjunction with the laity. For example: Los laicos asuncionistas in Mexico, the d'Alzon-Milleret Center at Worcester, l'Espace d'Alzon at Francois I^{er} in Paris, el Centro de espiritualidade Augustiniana e Asuncionista, of Pinhal in Brazil, etc.

These initiatives are admirable and promise a great deal for the future, but they are only a beginning.

If we truly desire to strengthen our links with the laity, it is necessary to find ways of forming them in our spirit or, even better, to invite them to reflect on our spirit with us.

| Orientation

25 The General Chapter requests that the Provincials concerned with existing Centres of Spirituality or those being planned support and encourage them, and that all Provincials find similar concrete means to promote a deepening of the charism in collaboration with the laity.

b. Internet

26 The Internet is one of the modern means of communication useful for spreading the spirit of the Assumption on a global scale. The use of e-mail allows instant communication, which is economical and easy, both inside and outside the Congregation, (e.g. "Info AA", the Letters of Father General, communication with Provincials, with the laity, etc.)

| Recommendations

27 The General Chapter would like:

- a. every Provincial administration to be adequately equipped to send and receive e-mail;
- b. every community (especially formation communities, retirement communities, and those

communities a long way from the Centre of the Province) to be equipped, as far as possible, with this new means of communication;

c. the e-mail addresses of the Provincials and the communities to be included in the "Repartition des Religieux".

28 The General Chapter requests that:

a. the General Council create a Commission to study the formation of a "General" web-site. It will present a report to the Council of the Congregation in the year 2000;

b. this Commission define the objectives of this web-site: internal and external communication, maintenance of the site, the use of different languages, the possible impact of this new technology on the environment (in what way can this service be of use to the poor), and work out a budget.

II. Our Charism in Practice: Apostolic Priorities

1. Cultures and Continents to be Evangelised

| **Convictions**

The challenge of the faith for evolving cultures

29 Each person finds his roots in his birthplace, his education, and in belonging to a particular race of people and to a particular Church. However, today, the intermingling of cultures and populations is increasing.

This is both an opportunity and a challenge for an Assumptionist, who is a man of his time. It calls him to be searching continually for a more fruitful encounter between his culture and the Gospel. Inculturation is a never-ending task because culture is a living and complex reality. Even in western society everything is in a permanent state of evolution: young people, inter-marriage, science and technology, methods of communication.... Wherever you are, the inculturation of Christianity is a continual process. Every place becomes a place of mission. No one culture can pretend to dominate the others.

Paying greater attention to Continents

30 For us, being Catholic, means entering into dialogue with people of other nations and different cultures. Today each continent has a clearer role in the organisation of the world. Jean Paul II has given the Church a new vitality by holding Continental Synods, which, some believe, reflect the Patriarchates of the first millennium. We are challenged today to bring stability to the Continents by using appropriate initiatives.

A mission without borders

31 For us, being Catholic means hearing the mission call to go beyond our borders – the global element of mission. It is a call to go to places where Assumptionists are not present, to places which will influence the future shape of the world. Going to a new “Areopagus” or to new geographical locations will only be possible with a greater collaboration at the heart of the Institute.

International communities

32 For some of us, being Catholic will mean experiencing an international community by living in a country different from our own or by living in an international community. This is a particular form of witness and provides a crucible for a more universal fraternity.

The demands imposed by internationality

33 Internationality necessarily requires mobility on the part of religious, flexibility on the part of the Provinces, and conversion on the part of everyone. Living this internationality obliges us to cross geographical frontiers and to change our mentalities. To live in an international community is always difficult.

34 Internationality must retain a character proper to our apostolic spirit; we must seek to

- make it a community endeavour;

- love those to whom we are sent, especially the marginalised;

- accept differences; be willing to welcome others (RL. 8);

- connect faith with life;

- share in the life of the people concerned;

- be willing to reach out to the greatest number (concern for everyone);
- desire to integrate human development into the programme of evangelisation;
- affirm small communities, action groups, support groups and spiritual groups;
- be fully integrated into the local Church.

The fruits of internationality

35 The implications of Internationality:

- social. It is a courageous witness in the face of the divisions, nationalism, and exclusion that affect our world. The multiethnic and multicultural aspect of religious life is a prophetic sign (cf. *Vita consecrata*, 51). It is a positive step in the process of globalisation.
- ecclesial. This is the way we live our unity and diversity, the communion and reconciliation of the Church of Christ - our catholicity. The one who unites us is stronger than that which divides us.
- spiritual. It opens us to a discovery of Christ and of the human person, which both stimulates and enriches us. It calls us to strive to live the Gospel and our vocation at a deeper level.

A preferred choice at the Assumption

36 Ever since its origins, in each new age, the Assumption has looked towards new continents and avenues of activity as yet unexplored like the press, the cinema and popular works. This has been a consistent trait in our history. Hence the importance of encouraging every Assumptionist to leave his country.

Today, the Assumption is present in 26 countries. It provides an international experience in its formation communities, in its new foundations, and in developing the international dimension of Bayard Presse... It also collaborates with our Assumption Sister Congregations.

37 The Chapter compliments the inter-Provincial collaboration in Latin America. It acknowledges that the Major Superiors concerned have found in this collaboration concrete solutions for their needs which include meetings of: formation personnel, Major Superiors, vocation promoters, young priests and deacons, religious in formation (CAFAL), etc. Furthermore, the noviciate in Chile and the new foundation in Riobamba are a great witness to a commitment made at a continental level.

38 Without underestimating what is already being done elsewhere, the itinerary followed by the Latin American continent gives food for thought. Each continent, given its actual situation, must begin thinking about greater inter-Provincial collaboration. A real desire on the part of the Major Superiors concerned is the remedy for success.

| Recommendations

39 Every religious should have some form of intercultural formation,

- by reflecting on the multiethnic and multicultural dimension he encounters within his own pastoral activity;

- by reading with interest the Assumptionist bulletins he receives;

- by becoming more aware of foreigners living in his country; through study, visits, and several years of mission outside his own country;

- by welcoming brother Assumptionists from other countries into his community,

- by offering hospitality in our churches to different Christian religious expressions.

40 To continue the meetings organised at a continental and international level: for formation personnel, vocation promoters, novice masters ...

- in planning these meetings, to set aside time to visit the country and the Assumptionist communities;

- on an international level, promote the COIA, and the CAFI...and encourage the Summer University in France to become more international;

- after 26 years of existence to make an evaluation of the COIA in order to give it clearer objectives.

41 Reinforce the international missionary foundations that already exist.

42 Encourage new international foundations,

- by sending young people to London (to learn English) or to Brussels (the seat of European institutions);

- by opening a community in West Africa with the collaboration of several Provinces and in conjunction with the other Assumptionist families;

- by appealing to our confreres in the younger Churches to support other Provinces whose apostolates serve multiethnic groups.

43 Develop international formation communities like the ones in Rome, Nairobi, and the Noviciate at Pomaire (Chile).

At Nairobi, the theology program receives religious in formation from four nations: the Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar. Studies are in English.

At Pomaire, the Latin American novitiate receives novices from six countries. The common language is Spanish.

At Rome, at the wish of the Council of the Congregation in 1998, we are forming a community for religious who wish to pursue specialized studies in the Roman Universities. The language is Italian. The General Chapter wants this group to have more structure including a religious in charge of the students who will be an integral part of the community.

44 Improve evangelisation by creating or intensifying the collaboration between Provinces or Regions in each Continent, principally in Europe, as requested by the General Chapter of 1993. This collaboration may take different forms.

Note that in Europe the Assumption is present in Belgium, Bulgaria, England, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Romania, Russia, Spain, and Turkey. Note that some of these countries do not belong to the European Community.

The Assumption already organises meetings of formation personnel, vocation promoters, and co-ordinates the summer activities of the young.

45 The General Chapter requests the Provincials of Europe to work together so that the Assumption on the Continent might organise:

- a project for the poor, for immigrants or for the countries of Eastern Europe;

- a study on ageing in our societies and in our Provinces.

2. Justice and Peace – In Solidarity with the Poor.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you something to drink, a stranger and welcome you, naked and clothe you, sick or in prison and come to visit you? In Truth, I tell you, in so far as you helped one of the least of these brothers of mine you helped me”

Mt 25, 37–40

“It is through the evangelisation of the poor that the evangelisation of the world begins! With this in mind let us be faithful to our vocation”

E.S.163

“The spirit of our Founder forces us to embrace the great causes of God and of man, to go wherever God is threatened in man and man in threatened as image of God. We must be

daring, show initiative and be unselfishly generous while being faithful to the teachings and orientations of the Church”

RL.4

| **Observations**

46 In the process of globalisation the gap between the rich countries and the poor countries is expanding. We see the development of an unrestricted liberalism, of dictatorships and of multiple forms of corruption. They often give rise to uncertainty, exclusion, migration, and a violence that impinge upon human dignity and human rights.

47 Ever since its origin, the Assumption has called men and women from among the poor: through its alummates, colleges, worker movements, etc. Many of us come from modest backgrounds. These are our roots. Assumptionist history is well furnished with examples of people involved in social ministry: Frs. Emmanuel d’Alzon, Etienne Pernet, Henri Halluin (Vincent de Paul de l’Artois), Barthélémy Lampre (a martyr for charity), Luis Madina, and our confreres in the Apostolate of the Sea, the orphanages, the worker movements, our missions etc.

48 Today most communities are aware of the effects of poverty and exclusion and offer help to the most deprived. The desire to have an effective presence among the poor, in various forms, is still a major priority in many Provinces.

49 As an international Congregation present in 26 countries, the Assumption encourages all religious to broaden their horizons. It prompts us to be attentive to the social and political events in other countries and to the life in their Churches. Several Fund-Raising Centres support various missionary works by providing indispensable financial aide to foundations made by the younger Churches: in Africa, Madagascar, Latin America and to the Churches being reborn in Eastern Europe.

50 A universal consciousness gives a new dimension, a new élan to our international

solidarity. In the Continents faced with many challenges, religious seek to live and witness to the vow of poverty in a more convincing way.

| **Convictions**

51 Our option for the poor does not belong to us. It is the cry of God:

“I have seen the misery of my people...” (Exodus 3:7).

52 Our solidarity with the poor is a necessity, an evangelical requirement, and not an option. In a world where men and women still lose their work, their country, their dignity, their hope and their lives, we wish to be at their side: “I have come that they may have life” (John 10:10). This kind of solidarity today situates us at the heart of the mission of the Church as spelled out in “Vita Consecrata” (No 82).

53 “The option for the poor touches the heart of our Assumptionist vocation” states the Chapter of 1987. It expresses the social dimension of our charism. Today, postulants, novices and young religious ask the Assumption to help them live out this solidarity with the poor.

54 We believe that living the vow of poverty, individually and in community, is a desire for the Reign of God, by fighting injustice and sharing in new forms of solidarity with others, in conformity with our Rule of life and the Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata.

55 Our solidarity with the poor is a school for personal and communal conversion. It stimulates our faith, generosity, and detachment “*in* order to achieve greater inner freedom and to place ourselves alongside the poor and the oppressed” (RL. 27). From which we hear the call: “Everyone for the poor. Many with the poor. Some like the poor”.

| **Recommendations**

To help communities share

56 Since social fragmentation is increasing as much in the Northern as in the Southern Hemisphere, each community is called to keep itself informed of world events and to question the social and political dimension of its apostolic life. This is as true today as it was yesterday.

57 The Chapter recommends that communities, in their Local Chapters or their community meetings, reflect on their option for the poor and help their members to examine and strengthen their solidarity with the poor:

- by seeking to understand, personally and in community, the causes of poverty, social injustice and violence;

- by reflecting on their individual and communal practice of poverty;

- by keeping informed of the initiatives taken against unemployment and exclusion;

- by seeking to develop the solidarity of the community and its members with the most destitute.

58 The Chapter recommends that the Congregation commit itself to making a prophetic gesture of solidarity with the most poor to mark the Jubilee 2000 and its 150th anniversary.

Each Province will suggest a significant project for its Continent, to the General Council by the end of February 2000. The latter will study the proposals presented and communicate them to the Provinces.

During the Council of the Congregation in June 2000 a choice will be made of one or more prophetic gestures, and it will determine the means necessary to follow it through.

Each Province and each community will be invited to participate in financing this project using whatever means are feasible to raise funds within its local communities.

Some projects suggested by the Chapter include: in Europe, to support an ecumenical social work in the Orient like the orphanage of the Oblate sisters in Romania; in Africa, in keeping with our tradition, to take over the running of the newspaper “Lakroan’ iMadagasikara” and re-launch it with the support of International Bayard Presse, or, the construction of a school or a medical centre...

To awaken – to sensitize – to form

59 The Provincial governments and formation personnel have the responsibility of continuing animation concerning our commitment to the poor. They invite religious and communities to keep themselves informed and share their experiences.

In the “Ratio Institutionis” (page 77), “during his formation the young professed will have first hand experience of the apostolic priorities of the Assumption, in particular those with the most poor...”. The Chapter recommends that young religious do manual work so as to experience something of the conditions in which the poor work or, become involved in a social insertion programme. This will be the occasion to introduce him to the Catholic Action movements and organisations of solidarity.

Managing our goods to improve our sharing

60 The management of goods is not a neutral element. The General Chapter voted in Rules and Recommendations for our temporal administration, to develop greater solidarity between us, and to provide better formation for all religious, especially for treasurers.

61 The Chapter requests that our solidarity extend beyond the Congregation. It invites each Province and community to find its own way of expressing this. In particular, in preparing its annual budget, each community is invited to set aside a part of its income (e.g. 1% as is the case in certain Provinces) to support an action of solidarity.

Creating a network or using what already exists

62 In a world where different kinds of exchanges are developing, it is necessary to go further than the individual action of a community or a Province, however generous.

63 To promote a common project at the heart of the Assumption and with other partners, the Chapter requests the General Council to oversee:

a. The creation of an inter-Assumption development agency, an 'NGO' (non governmental organisation), responsible for choosing projects, finding funds and providing sustained support for the development projects undertaken by different Provinces;

b. The forming of "Justice and Peace" commissions at all levels, from national to international, using appropriate structures and in keeping with our Assumptionist tradition.

To Improve communication between

Provinces – Countries – Continents

64 In a Congregation that claims to be doctrinal, its social apostolate needs to deepen its knowledge continually and develop its exchanges.

65 To promote this, the Chapter recommends:

- a. that the appointed religious in the Province and the General Council organise national and international meetings some time before the next General Chapter;

- b. that the future Commissions of “Justice and Peace” publish a catalogue of their social works covering all the initiatives and projects in the different Provinces;

- c. that the General Council create a network of correspondents on “Justice and Peace – in solidarity with the poor”, to inform and publicise situations of injustice and violation of Human Rights witnessed by the Assumption across the world.

- d. that the Provinces invite one or another religious to specialise, at the University level, in development issues, in both rich and poor countries, from economic and social, theological and political perspectives.

3. Ecumenism and Encounter with Other Faiths

Ecumenism

66 The ecumenical mission is one of the major apostolic priorities of the Assumption. It obliges us to work for the unity of the Church, as Christ wanted, and to be men of communion like St. Augustine and Emmanuel d’Alzon. In an era when the effects of globalisation bring human beings together in some ways and create new divisions between and within nations in others, the concern for the unity of the Church and the work for unity among people grows ever more urgent.

The timeliness of ecumenism in the Church and in the world

67 Since the General Chapter of 1993, the Catholic Church has confirmed its official ecumenical policy in many documents, notably:

- the Ecumenical Directory of the Church (1993);

- the Apostolic Letter “Orientate Lumen”(1995);

- the Encyclical “Ut unum sint” (1995);

- the acts of various Synods, most especially the Synod on religious life in 1994 in which Fr. Claude Maréchal spoke about religious life and the ecumenical dialogue;

- the texts regarding ecumenical convergence between Anglicans and Catholics (Primacy of Peter), Lutherans and Catholics (Justification), in the Catholic-Protestant Group and the Franco-Swiss of Dombes (Marie);

- the messages of Pope John Paul II after his visits, especially his ecumenical visit to Bucharest in May 1999.

This process in favor of unity in the Church faces various difficulties, like the resurgence of nationalism, the withdrawal into confessional identity, the habitual inertia in our Churches. Yet each of us is called to witness to the ecumenical commitment of men and women in our countries.

The status of ecumenism at the Assumption

68 Since the last General Chapter we wish to highlight:

- a. the visits of the Superior General and the delegated Assistant encouraging ecumenical initiatives in Africa and Eastern Europe;

- b. the consolidation of Assumptionist communities in Romania, Bulgaria and Russia, in collaboration with the Oblates of the Assumption;

- c. the request of the Chapter of 1993 to help the mission in the Orient, which met with little success;

- d. the continuing ecumenical work of Georges Tavard and Daniel Olivier; a young Belgian religious has devoted his thesis to the Anglican-Catholic relations;

- e. the Assumptionist retreat of the North American Province in 1999 animated by a pastor from the United Church of Christ;

- f. the monthly participation of Assumptionists in ecumenical meetings in England;

- g. the ecumenical meetings in Butembo with Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists and the 7th Day Adventists, on themes of: Confessional Identity (May 1996), Baptism and the Remission of Sins (July 1997);

- h. the publications of the Institute of Oriental Studies established in 1991 by the Assumptionist Province in Holland, in collaboration with the University of Nimegan;

i. the challenge presented by the proliferation of sects in Africa, Madagascar and Latin America.

| Recommendations

69 The General Chapter requests that:

a. each local community be ecumenical – a place of communion and a place of prayer for unity; and that it collaborate more closely with those who, like us, are open to ecumenism. Each community will make a special point of praying for unity in the Orient;

b. a dialogue in charity precede and prepare for a dialogue in truth. Ecumenical work is not just the prerogative of specialists or for those who live in Eastern Europe. It is also part of our collaboration with other Christian Churches at the level of justice, peace, and solidarity;

c. in renewing the intellectual policy at the Assumption, Provincials invite young religious to specialize in this area;

d. religious, who work in Eastern European countries where the Orthodox are a majority, meet together to adopt a common policy for their ecumenical mission. They should invite someone from the Provincial Government plus an expert in this field. Then, religious dispersed throughout the Orient can be, if not specialists, at least apostles, for this great cause;

e. the spirituality and theology of the Oriental tradition be included in Assumptionist formation (at the noviciate and in other houses of formation);

f. young Assumptionists from different Provinces have the possibility of experiencing the Orient through sessions or visits (like the session at Istanbul in July 1999);

g. that the COIA become an even better school of ecumenical formation within the Assumption.

Encounters with Other Faiths

70 Today all our societies are becoming increasingly multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious. The other major religions (Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism) are not tied to one particular place. We can no longer close our eyes to the presence of these other religions within the same family and the same district as a result of immigration.

71 A number of our communities experience this inter-faith encounter more acutely, e.g. in Turkey and Korea. Several religious are engaged in the pastoral care of migrants. In the North American Province, one religious specialises in Judaeo-Christian dialogue.

72 This sporadic inter-religious dialogue at the Assumption needs to be developed since it shows “the significance of three terms familiar to us: Truth, Charity, and Unity. We must always question the truth, practice charity and believe in the unity of Salvation in Jesus Christ” (Our mission after 150 years, p.35).

| Recommendations

73 The Chapter requests that:

a. on the anniversary of the meeting at Assisi (27 October), communities share with others their concern for inter-religious dialogue;

b. Assumptionists profit from the Jubilee 2000 by seeking reconciliation for times in the past marked by a virulent anti-Semitism, and by giving our “older brothers” (the Jews) their rightful place;

c. the Provinces of Europe, where Islam is growing, together study this phenomenon in all of its aspects through an ongoing and open encounter with the Muslims;

d. that the Summer University in 2003 adopt the theme “Christianity’s encounter with other Religions especially those of Asia”.

4. Laity and Religious Working Together for the Kingdom

74 In 1987, the General Chapter examined the theme of collaboration between religious and laity. In seeking to develop this initial reflection and to reaffirm our commitment to greater collaboration, we took a further step at the Chapter of 1993.

75 After re-reading the reference texts dealing with the question of laity and religious, the General Chapter of 1999 defined three types of belonging to this lay-religious relationship as experienced across the Congregation today:

- laity who work with or for us, salaried workers...

- laity who collaborate or share responsibility with us...

- lay associates who ask for a greater commitment with us, to share our charism, to live our spirit... They desire something much more specific, a type of “accompaniment”. They want a serious lay-religious association in a shared apostolate and spirituality.

Our benefactors have their own particular place in this lay-religious relationship.

Looking to the future

76 The Assumption has worked and collaborated with the laity ever since its origin. Each Province has its own form of relationship with them. We have a certain expertise in this area. But we still need to go further today because society and the Church, and the laity themselves demand this of us. The men and women with whom we have contact desire to share our spirituality. Faced with this invitation in many of our Provinces, some religious have openly expressed their willingness to work jointly with the laity in their Assumptionist apostolic projects.

Heirs of our Founder and of an ecclesiology developed since Vatican II, and in fidelity to our Rule of Life (16 & 20), we have to be founders with the laity.

77 Hesitation, reticence, and fear still hinder our commitment to work alongside and with the laity today. Yet the expectation and desire for this are increasing. Each religious and each community has a responsibility to develop this collaboration. The Chapter invites us to go still further:

- let our life styles, our choices and our habits be disturbed and upset;

- let us practice a real and full co-responsibility;

- let us discover the riches of true collaboration, not just its difficulties;

- let us dare to cease being the only ones with initiative, the ones with the “power”, the masters and the decision makers;

- let us share our prayer and our dinner table;

- let us introduce the laity with whom we are in relationship to our community so that they will meet other Assumptionists.

78 This is an invitation to a personal and community conversion that could lead to a radical change and conversion in our mentality.

At the opening of our 150th anniversary and strengthened by the ground covered since 1987, our Chapter is convinced that we must go further with new resolve and confidence in the call of the Holy Spirit.

| Convictions

79 Rooted in the same baptism, laity and religious live unique vocations that are different but complementary. Laity and religious look for God in the countenance of Christ so as to bear witness to the Kingdom.

80 We must be attentive to the various demands the laity make of us.

81 The laity provoke us to be workers of the Kingdom as Assumptionists and disciples of our Founder. We must welcome this new breath of life. Some laity are ready to suggest projects in which they wish to see us involved.

82 In living the charism, we are called to share it with those laity who so desire. They want to make it theirs. Our charism does not belong to us. It is entrusted to us. We are not its proprietors. It is what makes us what we are, i.e. "Assumptionist".

83 Various obstacles prevent us making progress in our lay-religious collaboration. Sharing our work and mission demands a real conversion on the part of each religious and each

community. We must pass resolutely from “working with” to “collaboration”.

84 The younger generations of Assumptionists are particularly called to co-responsibility between lay people and religious. Formation in this area is an absolute necessity.

| Recommendations

85 In response to the request by the laity for a deeper commitment with us, the General Chapter offers them a Charter (Covenant) by which religious and laity can make a common commitment. The text (Cf. following #88 below) is a first step. Each Province will be able to experiment with its use.

86 The Chapter proposes that each Province create a Lay-religious Commission made up of lay people and religious. The Province, under the guidance of this Commission, will launch an enquiry to identify the expectations and projects expressed by the laity in order to draw up a set of suitable proposals.

87 The Chapter requests that the General Council set up an International Lay-religious Commission. This will be composed principally of delegates from the Provincial Commissions. This Commission, in conjunction with the General Council, will have as its objective:

- to evaluate, before the next General Chapter, the use of the present Charter in order to produce a Charter of Commitment;

- to set up an “Assumptionist Network” having as its aim to link up, support, stimulate and encourage people and groups in fulfilling their hopes;

- to produce guidelines for sharing our charism with our lay associates including our benefactors.

88 It is in this perspective that the Chapter points to the necessity of greater association with the laity in our apostolates. We must develop a structured policy for young volunteers: volunteer programmes between North and South, study courses, grants for study.

The Proposed Charter

Assumptionists,

heirs of Emmanuel d'Alzon,

our charism calls us to a

close collaboration with the laity

in spreading the Kingdom of God.

Lay people associated with the

Assumption,

heirs of Emmanuel d'Alzon,

we wish to spread

the Kingdom of God

in the spirit of the Assumption.

TOGETHER,

we wish to strengthen our baptismal vocation,

as we deepen our appreciation of the spirit of the Augustinians of the

Assumption,

and to work for the edification of the Church by proclaiming Jesus Christ.

“We seek to live together in harmony,

having but one heart and one mind intent on God.”

Jesus Christ is at the centre of our lives.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit, and in the example of Mary,

we commit ourselves to follow him in faith, hope and charity.

He is the one who calls us to journey together.

We believe in the development of all people.

We seek to be present wherever God is threatened in man

and man is threatened as image of God.

“MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME!”

We make ours the motto of Emmanuel d’Alzon,

which calls us to work together for the coming

of the Kingdom of God in us and in the world.

We seek, before all else, to share the hopes and joys,

the suffering and torment of people today,

especially the poor, and those who thirst for justice and peace.

Prayer is the ever-renewable source of our apostolic action.

We acknowledge its absolute necessity.

It allows us to enter into an intimacy with the One whom we proclaim.

Our prayer challenges our life in the light of the Gospel.

In keeping with our Assumptionist vocation,

we seek always to be open to and capable of invention.

We will regularly review the quality of our apostolic service,

and its doctrinal, social, and ecumenical character.

As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the foundation

of the Augustinians of the Assumption,

the Spirit calls us to take a step further in collaboration.

Laité and religious,

TOGETHER,

we will seek to make progress along this road.

This charter is but the first step on this journey.

It needs to be ratified every day.

It also demands that the fidelity to our baptismal calling

grow ever stronger.

We commit ourselves to work together

To make this a common Charter of commitment

at the service of the Kingdom of God.

“OUT OF LOVE FOR OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST”

5. Awakening Vocations

“It is not sufficient for a true religious to be happy in his vocation, he must also desire to awaken vocations in others and pray to our Lord for them” (E.S. 674)

89 Our Rule of Life calls us to awaken vocations; it must be one of our priorities:

“We give priority to... the awakening and support of Christian vocations, particularly religious and priestly vocations” (RL. 16)

“The awakening of vocations is one of the characteristic missions of our Congregation. We collaborate actively in this field with the local Church” (RL. 133)

“By their prayer and the testimony of their lives, the religious and the communities are responsible for awakening vocations. They shall be particularly concerned with discerning, calling and welcoming those who wish to follow Christ with the Assumptionist community” (RL. 134)

| Facts

90 Since the last General Chapter in 1993, several Provinces in different continents have made a serious effort to re-launch the vocations apostolate, appointing and forming religious for this ministry.

England has established a new community, setting aside two active religious, to welcome those discerning their vocation.

In collaboration with other members of the Assumptionist family and teams of lay people, the

vocations work in Latin America is being intensified.

Certain Provinces have produced a clear vocational strategy appointing religious convinced of this mission and providing a detailed set of propositions and materials.

91 This effort is often part of a broader plan for youth ministry: to help young people discover the meaning of their lives, to discover Christ and the Gospel, to find their place in society and the Church, as well as to develop their personal vocation.

92 The General Council had organised two Sessions for those promoting vocations: one in the Southern Hemisphere (Eugenopolis, July 1998); the other in the Northern Hemisphere (Rome, November 1998).

93 The Northern Hemisphere, like Latin America, decided to organize an annual meeting of Vocations Commissions. This meeting will be primarily concerned with activities in common.

| Convictions

94 Assumptionists recognise that they work for vocations both in and with the Church. Their tradition and experience lead them to consecrate themselves to this task in an unselfish way.

“The pastoral care of vocations is both a personal and communal responsibility. In fact, it is the whole Church that calls, but rarely without the assistance of a ‘precursor’ or a herald who points the Messianic finger and speaks the words of invitation. Yes, vocations require a personal call, and this is only possible through contact and personal encounter”. (Cardinal Danneels, “Me Voici Seigneur”, Easter 1999, p.34)

95 It is normal that an Institute uses some of its energy for its own promotion and renewal, in the name of its vocation and mission in the Church.

96 The concern for vocations is everyone's mission. Authentic communities, where religious live a warm, rich and convivial relationship that expresses the openness, joy and family spirit proper to the Assumption, attract young people. Attracting people to religious life is not dependent on age. The witness of an older brother, happy in his vocation, can have a great impact on young people.

97 Promoting vocations is the concern of every Assumptionist and every community. The radical nature and visibility of our religious commitments, the quality of our fraternal life and our prayer, are determining factors in this apostolate.

98 Those responsible for the pastoral care of vocations must have a good formation in the human sciences and in (Assumptionist) spirituality, and be able to make the initial discernment.

99 Religious life has a value in itself. Within this context the vocation of lay-religious has a particular place at the Assumption. It has its own richness. It reminds us of the importance and value of our religious life independent of the ordained ministry.

| Recommendations

100 At the level of the local community

During its Local Chapter, each community will evaluate its work for vocations, beginning with its prayer for vocations. Every community must be capable of welcoming young people. The community can invite them to share the Word of God which integrates prayer with life and invites the young people to search for the truth in their lives.

101 At the level of the Province

Each Province will set up a pastoral programme for its vocations work, defining its objectives, appointing personnel, and clarifying means, including funding. It is important that we make our apostolates places where vocations, in the broadest sense, are encouraged. Here, as in other areas, we must “dare” to collaborate with the laity.

102 The Commission for vocations ministry, together with the Provincial Council, will search for ways of contacting young people. It will support any initiatives taken in this area (retreats, meetings, camps, volunteer networks, pilgrimages...). Vocation Ministry is a team effort. Therefore, when the possibility arises, it will work in collaboration with other Congregations of the Assumption family.

103 The religious chosen by the Provincial for this work will attend formation sessions for accompaniment and discernment. We must develop an Augustinian method of accompaniment.

104 Each Province must make vocation work a priority, by creating a Commission for Vocation Promotion, by providing the necessary financial support and by questioning communities on their involvement in this priority.

105 At the General Level

During the Council of the Congregation, those Provincials involved will establish a continental commission that will organise meetings to exchange experiences and collaborate in various activities.

106 The General Council will organise an international meeting of Vocation Promoters before the next General Chapter.

107 The General Chapter, following the wishes expressed at the meetings of Vocation Promoters, requests that the whole of the Assumption celebrate an annual triduum of prayer for Vocations (from 19th to 21st November). The General Council will produce guidelines for celebrating this triduum.

108 Questions for regular reflection on this priority

- a. How much does the work of awakening vocations enter into our personal and communal agenda? If we are convinced of this priority, how can we express it? Do we lack faith, daring, hope...? Each one of us has the responsibility of awakening vocations, but, for our action to bear fruit, our community must live the Gospel in a fraternal and communal way.

- b. Is not the vocation apostolate all too frequently sacrificed in favour of other pastoral needs that appear more urgent and necessary or even if we do not admit it more personally attractive and fulfilling?

- c. How do we help the laity share this mission with us? They are involved in different groups (parishes, organisations, colleges...). Are not the young people they meet waiting for information and seeking an opportunity to know more about the mission of a priest and religious?

- d. How much is our community able to welcome young people and let them participate both in our community life and our life of prayer? Are we able to let ourselves be “put out” by them... Do we not expect them to be what we are or were?

- e. The Assumptionist Charism is a treasure for the Church. Have we reflected on it enough, prayed about it, studied it, and allowed the young people who knock at our door to participate in it?

6. A Passion for Education and Communication

109 “We commit ourselves to extend the Kingdom of our Lord by the following works: 1) Teaching in its broadest sense...” (Constitutions 1855)

“We work to build up the Church by proclaiming Jesus Christ. We give priority to education in the faith, to training responsible lay people, awakening and affirming Christian vocations, particularly religious and priestly vocations. The proclamation of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the promotion of the whole person in justice, love and unity. (RL. 16)

“If the media in its broadest sense generates its own culture, exposing all areas of life and creating fashion images, then its evangelisation is a particular form of inculturation. Will the media ever become one of the more explicit concerns of the Congregation, a privileged field of apostolate with a recognised expertise? [...] Why not develop this apostolate which was and remains our own, why not use the media in our different continents for the purpose of evangelization?” (Fr. Claude Maréchal, Report for the General Chapter of 1999, The Passion for God in the Face of a New Century, pp. 31 & 83).

| **Facts**

110 The media has an increasing influence on our societies according to the particularities of each one (press, audio-visual, Internet,...) and, with the rapid development of technological innovation, they condition and influence the life of every person and group, including religious. By influencing social values both positively and negatively, they are helping to shape a new culture.

111 Freedom of expression, openness to many cultures, diversity of expression and multiplicity of opinions, are strong influences today.

It is not uncommon to be confronted with scepticism, indifference, unbelief, religious and moral relativism, and ignorance.

From an intellectual viewpoint, it is necessary to acknowledge the advances made in the sciences, especially the human and technological sciences, but all too often they lack a

philosophical and theological grounding.

There is a tendency to equate truth with compromise.

112 Often religion is reduced to personal choice.

The basic doctrinal formation of many Christians is weak. Their faith is superficial and therefore tends towards fideism, pietism, or conservatism. This has also paved the way for a growth in the number of sects.

In the West, there is a dislike of all forms of “bodies” (especially the family and the Church), in the name of individual liberty. This has repercussions on education and communication.

113 We are facing an urgent situation, and the value of education in such a situation is all too often underestimated.

The Congregation is aware of the seriousness of this situation. It sees here a call to search for new methods of evangelisation. It evangelises through the following: literacy centres in the Congo, colleges, universities, Bayard Presse... It is also appropriate to underline the effort of the Province of France with Bayard Presse to make known the life of the Church, offer a Christian perspective to a secular world, create a forum for Christian dialogue, promote a Gospel vision of the human person, a civic consciousness, a sense of social responsibility...

| Convictions

114 We are called to love the world as it is.

115 Like Fr. d’Alzon, we reaffirm the importance of education and its impact on our way of

thinking and acting. It seeks to transform the human person and society in the light of the Gospel ideal.

116 The ambition to be faithful and free, at the service of truth, is always a difficult challenge in communication and education.

To be salt and light, “means being unafraid to go out and take the initiative of speaking to people, to meet them on their home territory, to journey with them and share their lives, and, with undaunting courage and know-how, to offer them a new way forward. The new way that is also the way of Truth.” (Alain Cordier to the General Chapter 1999)

117 Challenges for the Assumption:

- to set new and broader horizons for ourselves.

- to be forward-looking in the Church

- to acquire a higher level of competence

- to promote reflection on the faith

Our efforts in education and communication necessarily require the involvement of the laity and will involve them more and more.

| Recommendations

118 The General Chapter requests that the Provinces:

- a. provide formation in the media and its culture for all religious;
- b. as far as possible, commit a significant number of religious to this apostolate;
- c. expand the international dimension of this commitment: new techniques (Internet), eventual links with Bayard Presse, the creation of original media in the Provinces of the southern Hemisphere...
- d. during the 150th anniversary of the Congregation, organize meetings between religious and laity involved in the same projects in education or communication, on subjects such as the history of the Assumption, its charism, and the advisability of a lay-religious partnership in a shared project.
- e. encourage meetings between religious and those laity associated with the Assumption who have positions of responsibility in "Assumptionist works" (Bayard Presse – Worcester – the colleges – the Summer University...) so as to encourage a deeper sharing in our Assumptionist spirit.

119 The General Chapter invites Provinces to take initiatives in the area of education and communication, given the particular needs and urgencies of their situation and in conformity with the criteria set out in RL.16, e.g.: doctrinal formation, an ecumenical centre in Romania; primary education, adult catechesis, and the Christian media in Africa; basic Christian education in relation to popular religiosity, in Latin America and in Europe... In order to accomplish these projects, the Chapter encourages inter-Provincial collaboration.

120 The General Chapter desires greater collaboration between Assumptionists and the other branches of the Assumptionist family. This collaboration could help us in the area of education, given the commitments and experience of our Sister Congregations.

121 The Chapter requests that, for the 150th anniversary of the Congregation, an information bulletin be published.

This trimestrial bulletin will be the responsibility of the General Council. The first edition will appear in October. It will include a list of events and various programmes, give an account of the events that have taken place (using articles published in the Provincial bulletins), and offer a means of exchanging information on material that has been produced. It will provide a means of sharing initiatives taken by communities, especially local projects.

Each co-ordinator on the Provincial Commission will send the General Council (by e-mail if possible) the information it wishes to have published, using one of the four official languages.

This bulletin is for all those who receive the "INFO-AA", for the Assumptionist family, for our collaborators, and for those in close contact with the Assumption.

122 The General Chapter supports the initiative that an issue of the trimestrial review *L'Assomption et ses Oeuvres* be published in five languages: French, Spanish, English, Dutch and Portuguese. A team of translators has been proposed for this work in agreement with the Provinces that are interested. It is intended that this issue be published for the 15th August 2000.

7. An Intellectual Policy for Assumption

123 The report *An Intellectual policy for the Assumption*, sent to the Capitulants, is a reference document for the Provinces and for the Congregation in general.

| Convictions

124 Study is an essential element of our charism. Our intellectual tradition is aimed at an understanding of the world so that we can address it “in terms that it can understand” (Emmanuel d’Alzon, Letter to Alphonse de Vignamont, 18 March 1835).

125 An intellectual investment is even more necessary today when the faith needs to be more vigilant and rich in meaning as our constantly evolving societies question the relevance of the Church and the value of its message. To respond to this challenge this mission demands of us a high level of competence.

126 All religious need a solid doctrinal foundation. This is fundamental to any eventual specialization. The aim of this formation is to encourage a taste for study and a love for the truth. Study is as important for those involved in pastoral work “at the grass roots” as for those involved in intellectual missions.

127 Being able to communicate is an essential element of study in the Assumption. Through teaching and publications, our Congregation places itself at the meeting point of Church and culture. The Assumption wishes to go to those at the frontiers in our effort to encounter others. This means that specialization requires an openness to others, a sense of compromise, and the desire to communicate in a spirit of welcome and gratuity.

128 Because apostolic needs and individual aptitudes are important criteria in this field, specialisation requires serious planning both for the Province and for the Congregation. It is before all else a mission received for the service of the Church. To determine the type of specialisation to be undertaken, we use the following criteria: our Assumptionist charism, the project of the Province and its needs, and the aptitudes of the religious.

| Orientations

At Provincial level

129 Include formation and specialized studies in the long-term plan of the Province, and then determine its objectives and the means to achieve them. Needs must be clearly defined and workshops planned well in advance.

130 Appoint to the Formation Commission someone responsible for intellectual formation, who will supervise its quality and suggest specializations appropriate for the people concerned. The Provincial will need the support of others in this field since, by himself, he will be unable to fulfil all the tasks incumbent on him.

At the General level

131 Organise meetings to provide mutual support for religious pursuing similar disciplines.

132 Support and encourage the creation of Centres of Augustinian and d'Alzonian spirituality in the Provinces (Cf. 25).

133 Appoint an Assistant responsible for specialized studies on the General Council.

| Ordinances

134 The General Chapter requests the formation of a Commission to promote specialized studies at the Assumption.

- Its objective: to maintain and develop specialised studies.

- Its composition: those responsible for specialized studies at the General and Provincial levels, plus several religious involved in such studies.

- Its task: to take stock of what is happening in the Provinces; to propose strategies for specialized studies to the Congregation; to propose avenues of specialization considered to be important.

- A possible definition: a place which combines evaluation and exploration, and which makes proposals that take into account the particular needs and the competence of individual people.

135 The Chapter requests that appropriate funds be available for study and the subsistence for those committed to specialized studies. It also requests that other sources of funding be found so those Provinces with fewer assets are not penalised. It will be necessary to establish a process of evaluation for requests for funding and to work out ways of financing these grants.

III. The Charism in our daily lives

1. The Animation of Communities

“The Superior is the brother who helps the Local, Provincial, and General community build itself up every day (...) at times he urges them to a more exacting fidelity to the Gospel. He renders to all the service of decision....” (RL. 42 and 60)

| Convictions

136 The aim of animation is to integrate prayer, fraternal living and the apostolate in community. The more one is involved in the life of the Congregation, the more one expects an animation of quality.

137 A fruitful animation would foresee meetings between religious of the same generation and between religious of different generations.

138 Isolated communities or those far from the centre of the Province merit special attention, as well as the retirement communities. Visits and partnerships are encouraged.

139 To assure community animation in all the houses - including retirement communities - it is necessary to promote all kinds of exchanges: feasts, jubilees, retreats, fraternal get-togethers...

140 The quality of community animation depends on the quality of animation in the Province.

| Recommendations

141 The General Chapter requests that communities put into practice the texts we have concerning community exchange and apostolic prayer.

142 It encourages inter-community meetings to reflect on the Letters of the Superior General, documents from the Provincial, and on Church and world events.

143 It encourages religious to participate in sessions and retreats organised by the Province. It asks the Provincial to question his religious on their participation in the activities of the Province.

144 The use of modern technology (including the Internet) can facilitate the exchange of information about the Assumption and the Church.

145 The Chapter requests that communities open their doors to people outside (religious and lay) and share with them their preoccupations, prayer etc.

“At the service of the Provinces and their mission in the Institute, the General Government has the responsibility to foster the fervour and development of apostolic religious life in the Congregation”. (RL. 103)

The Application of Chapter Decisions

146 Our constitutions give great autonomy to the Provinces. The Superior General has experienced great difficulty in seeing that the decisions of the General Chapter or the Council of the Congregation are applied, cf. his report to the Chapter.

| Recommendations

147 To remedy such difficulties, while safeguarding the Augustinian inspiration of our form of religious life, the General Chapter:

a. recalls that our Law allows the Superior General constitutional power to intervene in certain well defined cases. The General Chapter can also decree a Capitular Rule that has the force of law, e.g. RC. 191^{bis};

b. recommends that three years after the General Chapter, the Council of the Congregation examine and evaluate the application of the Ordinances and Capitular Rules of the previous General Chapter and that it take the means necessary to accelerate their application;

c. invites the Superior General to question, if necessary, the Major Superiors in those areas relevant to their responsibilities, viz. the foundation or reinforcement of international communities, specialized studies, and the deepening of our charism;

d. requests the General Bursar to oversee throughout the Congregation the application of the Rules of our Constitutions concerning the management of our goods, to avoid errors, anomalies, or mismanagement.

148 The General Chapter also reaffirms the importance of two forms of animation, the Canonical Visitations and the Letters of the Superior General.

Canonical Visitations

149 The Canonical Visitation made by the General or a delegated Assistant, is a spiritual event that should be received in a climate of fraternity and faith. It is an occasion, for each religious, to reassess his personal, communal and apostolic commitments.

The better the preparation the more the visit will bear fruit. To truly benefit from this exchange, it is desirable that the issues to be addressed be known beforehand both by the visitor and the religious. A list of the themes to be treated can be sent either by the Superior General or by the Provincial to the community and vice-versa.

150 The visit of the Superior General or his delegated Assistant will usually end with a Visitation Report to the Province. This is to be continued. It permits the positive aspects of the communities to be affirmed and relevant issues highlight. The Chapter requests, that after three years, this report be re-evaluated by the local communities and by the Council of the Province.

The Letters of the Superior General

151 The Letters are a particular source of animation for the Congregation. They help put our Charism into practice and transmit our Assumptionist spirit throughout the Provinces.

The Council of the Congregation will choose the topic of these letters, aimed at animating the Congregation, from among the themes voted by the General Chapter. With the Superior General, it will reflect on the best way of presenting the Letter and the themes to be included.

2. Some Aspects of Assumptionist Formation

152 The booklet Assumptionist Formation – a Complement to the Ratio Institutionis – is destined for all religious. It is a particularly precious tool for formation personnel and those in formation. Once the various suggestions made by the Capitular Commission have been included. The booklet will be reviewed for adoption at the next Council of the Congregation. The convictions and orientations below offer the salient points of this Complement. It will be the responsibility of the Superior General to integrate into the booklet the amendments voted by the General Chapter.

The Formation of Apostolic Communities

| Convictions

153 For Assumptionists, the apostolate is fundamentally communitarian. In so far as it is not, we will never be truly Assumptionist. It is clear, therefore, that it is impossible to form an apostolic Assumptionist unless he is well integrated into the community at all levels.

154 Talking about his activities in an informal way presents little difficulty, but true apostolic sharing is more demanding. It requires that we take a step backward to arrive at a more

reflective and spiritual assessment in order to discern the Spirit at work in our daily lives.

155 Apostolic sharing is vital for the whole community. The 3rd part of The passion for the Kingdom of God in our world today (General Chapter of 1993) outlines the main ways to achieve this. It presupposes some basic dispositions, mutual trust, an ability for self criticism, a simplicity in speaking of one's successes as well as one's failures, and a sense of wonder at the work of God.

| Orientations

156 In each Province, an initiation into apostolic sharing through sessions or workshops must be foreseen during the early years of formation following the novitiate.

157 The young religious will record in his journal his apostolic commitments during the year and during his holidays. He will specify for each his motivations, (personal aptitude, the needs of the Church, of the Assumption, of the community...), the criteria used for his choices, his objectives, and his achievements. In this way the young person will himself become aware of his own evolution.

158 Questionnaires, as produced by some Provinces, are very useful in helping a young person evaluate his progress in prayer and personal development The questions will focus on his way of acting, his faith perspective, his aptitudes and inclinations, the effect of his work on his prayer, and the deepening of his theological reflection.

Ongoing Formation in the Spirit of the Assumption

| Convictions

159 Ongoing formation in the spirit of the Assumption aims to lead the young Assumptionist to intensify the triple experience of his intimacy with God, his self emptying, and his passion for the

Kingdom of God. It aims to help him come to a deeper understanding of his identity, his personal relationship with God in both human and spiritual terms.

160 Formation is not just a presentation of the major elements of our charism; it aims to nurture a creative energy in the young person so that he can reinterpret it correctly. It is a pedagogy that leads to an appreciation of the essence of our charism and a desire to spread its riches in the different cultures of our day.

| Orientations

161 At the Provincial level

Foresee during the course of formation, retreats nourished by the spirit of Saint Augustine and Fr. d'Alzon and faithful to their journey.

162 At the Continental level

Organise meetings for young religious. The CAFAL (Assumptionist Community of Formation in Latin America) is a good example of this.

163 At the General Level

Renew the experience of the CAFI (International Community of Assumptionist Formation). The responsibility of determining its structure and its length will be entrusted to the Council of the Congregation.

The Diaconate and first years of Priesthood

164 Before examining the elements of the diaconate and priesthood, let us remember that the vocation of lay religious retains its own importance at the Assumption. Formation must be adapted to the particular circumstances.

The Diaconate

| Convictions

165 A serious initiation into ministry before priestly ordination is necessary. This goal must be respected. It must not be sacrificed to other urgent needs, nor is the trainee there to reinforce a weak pastoral team.

166 Diaconal training is obligatory. The Provincial cannot dispense a religious from it except with the written permission of the Superior General.

| Orientations

167 Diaconal training, before and after ordination to the diaconate, is a full-time requirement. The deacon or future deacon must know clearly, from the beginning, what is required of him. The one who accompanies him must present a written programme of his diaconal training, for him and his community. It must define the respective roles of the community and the one responsible for him. The spirit of this training must be clear and the skills required well defined. The responsibilities must be realistic and allow a margin of autonomy in certain areas. This programme will be approved by the Provincial and sent to the General.

168 The demands made of the deacon and the progress expected must be clearly defined. It is vital for him to consider the major issues of the questionnaire in the Ratio Institutionis before he is called to the Presbyterate. It is necessary that the deacon be informed of the principal attitudes to be developed during this training (cf. The Diaconate and the first years of priesthood. Assumptionist Convictions, Rome, 1996, pp. 7-9).

169 The one who accompanies the deacon should not limit his support to the more technical aspects of this ministry; he should help the deacon assess his way of acting, his spontaneous responses and reflexes, and his relationships. He must continuously encourage him to strive for harmony in his life as a religious cleric, to work in apostolic community and to be a loyal partner in the local Church.

The first years of Priesthood

| Convictions

170 The priest is sent to a whole people not just the Christian community, even in those places where religious practice is very strong. Pastoral care is not only for the Christians who frequent the parish. Others (in the bush or elsewhere) are waiting for the Good News. Lived well, the first years of priesthood should develop a missionary spirit.

171 The proclamation of the Word, in the homily or through commentaries, is an essential part of the mission of the priest. Yet, length of study is not the criterion for good preaching. A homily is not a course nor a demonstration of knowledge, but the Word of God presented to people in a concrete way. Thus it will be for them a light in their lives. Hence this requires the preacher to be humble, to work hard, to be patient, and to do practical exercises to improve.

172 Our Rule of Life clearly defines the characteristics of the Assumptionist apostolate: “It is inseparable from the promotion of the whole person in justice, love and unity” (RV. 16). This doctrinal, social, and ecumenical spirit must inspire and permeate all our activities. We have to question ourselves regularly on this. Whatever the prejudices and sufferings inherited from the past, let us be bridge-builders between the different Christian confessions and work thoughtfully for a better understanding and collaboration.

| Orientations

173 Ensure that an older religious in the community accompany the young priest and help him evaluate his pastoral work and overcome any difficulties.

174 During the first three years, foresee meetings for young priests to share experiences and questions, and adjust theory to practice. These meetings can be organized by Province and by continent and should be under the supervision of an experienced pastor with a good pedagogy.

The Formation Commission

175 A Formation Commission is foreseen in the Capitular Rules. It must exist in a Province where there are young people in formation.

| Orientations

176 It is important to assure a serious reflection on the attitudes of young religious and on various aspects of their formation. The Province must foresee for each year at least three days (consecutive or separate) for serious reflection and shared analysis by the formation personnel, and the organisation of a continental meeting every two years.

177 All these sessions require careful planning. The questionnaires linked to this programme and the required reading should be distributed long enough in advance to allow each house of formation to reflect and reply in writing. The contribution of external collaborators can be very valuable.

Those Responsible for Formation

| Orientations

178 When a Province has five or more religious in formation, the Provincial must be assisted by a religious responsible for formation who will supervise the different stages. If the religious in formation are numerous, this responsibility demands at least a third or half-time commitment.

179 The religious responsible for formation helps the Provincial fulfil the tasks that, for lack of time, can often be neglected. It is recommended that he also support the religious responsible for local formation, visiting them, listening to their difficulties, encouraging meetings and collaboration between them.

180 He will be particularly responsible for:

- convoking and animating the Formation Commission;

- following closely the evolution of the professed religious, and the different stages of their intellectual and pastoral formation;

- reflecting on the fundamental questions which can often be neglected;

- helping the formation personnel carry out their mission as a team;

- supporting initiatives or projects which can, at first sight, appear unrealizable.

181 International meetings of formation personnel facilitate the sharing of experiences, the assimilation of the Ratio Institutions, and the deepening of the Assumptionist charism. The General Council has responsibility for this.

3. Formation for Animation, Management and Solidarity

Formation of Superiors

| Conviction

182 The mission of Superiors is multifunctional and far-reaching: accompanying people and communities, animating meetings and Councils, taking decisions, knowledge of the spirit of the Assumption, an ease with relating to people, leading and speaking in widely differing circumstances...

| Orientations

For Major Superiors

183 The General Council will organize an initiation session on formation for Major Superiors lasting at least one week.

Then, every two or three years, there will be a long session on an important issue concerning Assumptionist life and the animation of communities and Provinces.

The booklet An Assumptionist Provincial provides useful material for a newly appointed Provincial.

For Local Superiors

184 a. The Provincial will organize regular meetings of Local Superiors to help them in their task of animation. The Local Superior. Suggestions for animation is a good reference booklet;

b. the Provincial will encourage Superiors to attend sessions on formation, organized by the Conference of Major Superiors;

c. in each continent, the Provincials will plan, before the next General Chapter, a meeting of Superiors on formation in our charism and on community animation.

Formation in management and solidarity

| Convictions

185 Good accounting and open financial records provide a clearer picture of available resources and facilitate a more just use of our assets. Knowledge of past performance will facilitate decision-making. Knowledge of the accounts will allow us to be more objective rather than remain at the level of vague wishes.

186 Information is a two-way affair: each religious is held accountable, and so is the one with overall responsibility for the finances.

187 Management of finite sums of money is a skill to be learnt. This helps in evaluating expenditure and investment, and the preparation of a personal budget. It is therefore important that people in formation learn how to prepare a budget for their community and the process of analyzing financial statements.

188 Special organizations are ready to finance certain projects and initiatives. Their contribution can be invaluable for those seeking to become self-supporting. It is necessary to learn how to

present the dossier of a project that conforms to the requirements of these organizations and to provide them with a clear account of expenses.

An introduction to these processes must be included in the formation program.

189 In a world of limited resources, one way of living our vow of poverty is in the management of the human and financial resources at our disposal. Accounting is an indispensable tool for assuring good management.

| Recommendations

190 In consequence, the Chapter recommends that each Province:

- a. train several religious in the work of a bursar and in the acquisition of basic accounting skills;
- b. organize economic formation at the local level. The preparation of the budget and the review of accounts provide excellent pedagogical tools;
- c. give the Provincial Bursar the possibility (i.e. the necessary time) to improve his accounting and management skills;
- d. ask the Bursar who is finishing his term to take the time to initiate his successor and guide him through the various dossiers of the Province over several weeks or months as the case may be;
- e. apply the norms which set a limit to the renewal of mandates in reference to the Rule of Life.(62) concerning Superiors;

f. delegate certain tasks to competent laity and use competent advisers in its financial dealings.

191 That for the Congregation as a whole there be:

a. every three years, a session for Provincial Bursars, to which those religious responsible for the Fund-Raising Centers and future development agencies will be invited;

b. continental meetings of Provincial Bursars.

4. Life to the Fullest

A reflection on ageing at the Assumption

192 “Ageing concerns everyone but it concerns us in a particular way. There have always been elderly religious. It is a fact of life. However, the percentage of elderly has never been as high at the Assumption in the Northern Hemisphere as today. This longevity is not being balanced by a proportional replacement.” (The Passion for God in the face of a new Century, p. 104, Fr. Claude Maréchal)

To all of us...

193 We remain brothers in community whatever our age. We are called to grow old together

and to help each other for the whole of our lives. "There is a youthfulness of spirit that lasts through time. It arises from the fact that at every stage in life a person seeks and finds a new task to fulfil, a particular way of being, of serving, and of loving." (Vita Consecrata, 70)

Here lies the secret of our interior liberty and evangelical peace.

194 Life finds expression in relationships. We seek to nurture the relationships we have with our brothers in community, with the members of our families, and with our friends. Isolation and closing in on oneself are snares that are contrary to all community spirit.

195 Each of us finds meaning in life by feeling useful. Professional work and apostolic and pastoral commitments meet this need. Retirement and moving to a retirement house oblige us to re-evaluate our lives.

196 Our sick and aged brothers have the right to special care (RL. 9). The professional care and support given to them in our retirement houses is a great witness to this. The members of active communities should want to show respect, consideration and affection to our venerable elders.

Becoming a senior religious...

197 As we grow older, we become less resilient and less enterprising. But these changes in life can be a spiritual and human blessing for those open to them. This change of rhythm offers possibilities that carry with them a new breath of life.

198 The passage from an active community to a retirement house is difficult. It presupposes an acceptance of this stage in one's life. To facilitate this passage, it is important not to wait until the loss of all one's abilities. Then the religious will be able to bring his own richness and experience to his new community.

To our older brethren...

199 Is not the vocation of our retirement communities to help us live our lives fully to the end? How can they help us be light, warmth, and comfort for each other? Is this not an aspect that the apostolic community should develop?

200 Whether aged or infirm, we still love to contribute to the life of the whole group by doing the work we are capable of doing. The organization of our retirement houses must help the members of the community react, take responsibility, and participate in the life of the Province, according to the capabilities of each one.

201 The Assumption as a whole constitutes one large apostolic community. In this family, the mission is everyone's responsibility, those in good health and those who are ill, the young and the old, each according to his vocation and his situation (RL. 19). The communities in our retirement houses are also apostolic in their own way. Their members represent a wealth of religious fidelity and apostolic generosity.

202 In retirement communities, religious are appointed to accompany their elderly companions in their material and spiritual welfare and in the responsibilities of Superior and Bursar. This loving presence is a sign of evangelical fraternity and the authenticity of the mission entrusted by the Province. As in every mission, it requires dedication, selflessness, certain abilities and formation.

203 The hour of diminishment, infirmity, and the final journey comes to us all. This can be a time of great trial. There is no other road than that of Christ. He alone can draw us closer to Himself, so that with Him and in Him this diminishment which sometimes leads to great suffering, will, through faith, open us to the Resurrection.

IV. Community Organization Serving Community Life and our Mission

1. The Criteria Necessary to be a Province

These criteria are to be considered in their entirety and not like particular points of law. There is always a difference between the criteria and their application to specific situations.

204 The minimum number of religious to constitute a Province is twenty. This calculation takes into account the number of indigenous religious and the religious from other Provinces who work in the territory concerned. This number is not absolute. A small Province can be dynamic. But a handful of religious must not fill all the posts of responsibility foreseen by our Rule of Life.

205 A second criterion is the ability of the Province to assume the necessary responsibilities of animation, formation and finances demanded by a Province and the Congregation.

206 It is equally important for a Province to have the necessary resources for financial autonomy, to have at least three communities, and to have several apostolic commitments. It is preferable that the communities be geographically close to each other.

207 The communities and the religious concerned, with the help of these criteria, will examine their situation in conformity with number 80 of our Rule of Life.

208 A Province that becomes a Region must be attached to an existing Province.

| Applications

Latin America

209 Brazil

In response to the request of the Vice-Province, the General Chapter votes in favor of Brazil becoming a Province (Cf. par. 243–244)

210 The Vicariate of Columbia

The Chapter decides to allow the Assumption in Colombia to continue to grow by retaining its present status as a Vicariate attached to the Superior General for the next six years.

During the Council of the Congregation in 2002, an evaluation will be made using the discernment criteria established during this Chapter. The future structure of the Vicariate (Province, Vice-Province or Region attached to one of the Latin American Provinces) will be examined. The Superior General, the Major Superiors concerned, and the Colombian Vicariate together will work out appropriate statutes.

Europe

211 The General Chapter creates a Commission of European Provincials, or their delegates, whose purpose, in the coming three years, is to propose a constitution for a European structure adapted to the current reality and ageing of the Provinces concerned.

212 England

The General Chapter requests the Province of England to retain its present status for one more year, and work out a solution that conforms to our Rules for the next Council of the

Congregation in the year 2000.

Asia

213 Given the present importance and future of the Asian Continent, the Assumption ought to be present there. The Assumption acknowledges and supports the steps which have been taken in Korea and Vietnam and thanks all those who have made this possible.

The Vicariate of Korea

214 The General Chapter recognizes the complexity of the situation of the mission in Korea and desires to reach a lasting solution without delay. It does not wish to take a decision without having studied the dossier more closely, especially as the General Council is new.

| Recommendations

215 The General Chapter requests that, with the necessary information and clarification:

a. a consortium of Provinces, under the responsibility of one of the major Superiors, take responsibility for the Korean mission.

The Provincials of South Belgium and Spain accepted to make a positive proposal to their Plenary Councils or their Chapter of Application.

To assure relief for Korea, these two Provinces can seek help from other Provinces of the Congregation. Conversations with the Provincials of Latin America and Africa are already taking place.

b. the General Council continue to be responsible for the mission until the consortium of Provinces is able to take over this responsibility, and, with them and the religious in Korea, to examine all possible scenarios. A new form of international support could be to provide help for the Province that allows one of its number to leave for the mission. This is an indirect but efficacious form of support for our mission in Korea and the Far East.

c. the Council of the Congregation, in the year 2000, make a firm decision about this mission.

216 Vietnam

The interest taken by the Province of France in Vietnam is compatible with our presence in Korea. The Chapter supports the initiative taken by the Province of France and encourages it to continue.

2. Management & Sharing of Our Resources

| Ordinances

The General Fund

217 The General Fund provides the funding necessary for the General Government to meet its objectives and apostolic orientations in its service of animation.

218 Given the situation of the General Fund and demands made on it, the Chapter decides:

- not to put a ceiling on the size of this fund;

- to renew the decision to preserve its market value by an indexation that takes into account inflation and the exchange tariffs;

- to authorize the General Council to invest one part (from 3% to 5%) of this fund in social investments or their alternative.

The Apostolic Fund

219 Given the needs of formation and the birth of new apostolic missions, the General Chapter of 1993 decided to create an Apostolic Fund.

220 Thanks to the spirit of solidarity among the Provinces and Regions, this Fund rose to more than 7 million US dollars by 1999.

221 At present this Fund is still not able to replace the Solidarity Fund. The General Chapter invites the Provinces during the upcoming months and years to continue to support this Fund, in keeping with their financial resources. The Provinces are asked to make a decision on the kind of support they can offer and let the Council of the Congregation know in the year 2000.

222 During the next 6 years, the Fund will remain untouched. Care will be taken to see that the investments are spread equitably across the different financial markets.

223 Every year the General Council will give an account to the Council of the Congregation on the development and management of this Fund.

The Inter-Provincial Solidarity Fund

224 The Chapter decides to maintain the Inter-Provincial Solidarity Fund until the next General Chapter in 2005.

This Fund is the expression of the solidarity that exists between the different Provinces (RL. 167). Its first aim is to meet the needs of the life of a Province, but also to address projects that the Province might adopt as its own, by contributing as much financial aid as possible.

225 The General Bursar under the supervision of the Council of the Congregation manages this Fund.

Assessments

226 Assessments are the contributions made by the religious towards the running of the General Government. They support the animation of the Congregation. All religious are obliged to contribute according to their situations.

227 Acknowledging the different situations, the General Chapter institutes two rates, beginning in 1999, for the next three years: assessments are fixed at \$150 US or \$50 US per professed religious.

The 2nd tariff (\$50 US) is for temporarily professed throughout the Congregation and finally professed religious from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico, Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar.

228 The Council of the Congregation will judge if it will be necessary to adjust these rates in 2002.

Travel Expenses

229 At the Council of the Congregation, the religious convoked will pay the cost of their travel up to and including four hundred and fifty US dollars (\$450.00). The General Fund will refund anything in excess of this sum.

A ceiling for Financial Transactions (RL. 97.1 & 123.i)

230 In all financial transactions, personal property and real estate, conveyancing, and borrowing, the Provincial Superior must have the permission of the Superior General, when the sum involved is more than three quarters or equal to the ceiling imposed by the Bishops' Conference in that country.

| Recommendations

A Consultors Group

231 In the spirit of R.C. n° 222, the General Bursar is requested to use professional financiers to help with his fiscal management especially with the portfolio in his charge.

Fund-Raising Centres

232 In several Provinces, the Fund-Raising Centre represents an important source of revenue for financing communities and their work.

The Chapter encourages the Provinces who do not have such an office to study the possibility

of establishing one.

A Fund-Raising Centre offers a favourable opportunity for collaboration and solidarity between the different Congregations of the Assumption.

The Ethics of Financial Management

233 The Chapter requests each Province to exercise careful vigilance in the management of its funds. Management is not a neutral activity. It possesses an ethic that is governed by the Gospel, the social teaching of the Church, and our Augustinian tradition.

234 We will take care to see that our investments are at the service of justice. For this we will choose those enterprises that support the common good and organizations which have a direct social benefit (organizations that lend money to the poor, help create businesses, build homes, etc)

235 The management of our resources remains complex. To live this investment ethic better, the General Bursar and the Provincial Bursars will use financial experts and those specialized organizations that provide the background information and analysis of the objectives of an enterprise.

3. Official Languages of the Congregation and Translations

The Chapter asks that English, Spanish, French and Dutch be maintained as the official languages of the Congregation until the next General Chapter.

236 The Chapter requests that, besides their mother tongue, all young religious be conversant (speak, read, write) one of the following official languages: English, French, or Spanish; and be able to understand (read) a second of these languages.

237 Learning languages is not just the preserve of young religious. Anyone wishing to learn another language will be encouraged.

238 Each Province will send the General Secretary a list of the communities ready to welcome religious for an intensive language course who will provide appropriate supervision.

239 The General Government will be responsible for assuring the translation of official texts and the bulletin, "Info-AA" into the four official languages of the Congregation.

The Provinces concerned will designate a correspondent who (with a team if possible) will be responsible for the translation of these texts.

240 The General Government will encourage the Provinces to translate these and other important texts of the Congregation into the languages used in their area. The General Fund will provide financial support for this.

4. Modification of the Capitular Rules

241 The General Chapter modifies n° 221 of the Capitular Rules as follows: "All the important financial transactions of the communities and the titles of properties must be sent to the Provincial Archives."

5. Brazil Becomes a Province

Motivations:

242 The General Chapter created the Vice-Province of Brazil, attached to the Superior General, on 21st April 1993.

It was erected with a view to unifying the two structures that already existed (a Vice Province and a Region) and to promote a Brazilian Assumption.

During the following 6 years, the Vice Province has progressed and taken in hand its administrative and community responsibilities.

At the Chapter at Pinhal from 5th to 9th October 1998, the religious voted unanimously the following proposal for the General Chapter of 1999: The Vice-Province be promoted to the status of an independent Province.

The Decision of the Chapter:

243 Given the motivated request of the Vice-Province, which presently numbers 37 religious, including 11 Brazilians, the General Chapter votes in favour of the erection of the Province Brazil beginning on 20th May 1999.

6. Powers Delegated to the Superior General for the Final Editing and Interpretation of the Chapter Text

244 The General Chapter delegates the following powers to the Superior General and the General Council:

- a. the power to interpret, in cases of doubt or discussion, the sense or application of the texts promulgated by the Chapter,

- b. the power to adjust the animation texts in their form and expression, while respecting the thought and ideas behind them, in order to improve their presentation to the communities.

V. Letters from the General Chapter

1. To the Religious of the Congregation

Brothers,

On Sunday 2nd May, Pilgrims descended on Rome for the beatification of Padre Pio. The crowds overflowed Saint Peter's Square and that of Saint John Lateran. That same day, at 6 pm, 46 capitulants of the Congregation gathered "in conclave" in the spacious but austere General House of the Christian Brothers. At the end of these three weeks of Chapter we are happy to share with you this time of grace for the Assumption.

Who were these capitulants? They formed a mini Assumption, representing the different continents, countries or ministries where we work. For twenty of the participants it was their first General Chapter. A multicultural assembly presenting a faithful image of the Assumption today. This colourful mixture manifested itself daily in the polyphonic and multilingual liturgies. The visit of three cardinals and two bishops, friends of the Assumption, served to underline the international character of the Congregation and its love for the Universal Church: Cardinal Gantin, (Benin), doyen of the Sacred College; Cardinal Neves, (Brazil), Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops; Cardinal Poupard, (France), President of the Pontifical Council for Culture; Mgr Pelatre, a brother Assumptionist, Apostolic Vicar of Istanbul; and Mgr Gregory, (Brazil), Bishop of Imperatriz.

You will already know the theme of the Chapter from Father General's Letter: The Passion for God in the Face of a New Century. The main focus of our work was the re-expression of our Assumptionist charism motivated by a strong desire to give new energy to the whole Congregation.

The General Chapter thought that a new understanding of our charism could only be achieved with the involvement of the whole of the Assumption, i.e. each one of us reflecting on our lives: "Life rather than words, the heart rather than the pen, conversion instead of written formulas. It is in the reality of our lives, open to the Spirit and converted to the Gospel, that we will discover a new language". Therefore, between now and 2005, the Assumption has made a commitment! It is committed to re-expressing its charism. The Lay people invited to the Chapter—Rene Valette (Lyon), Pierre Rion (Gosselies), Alain Cordier (Bayard Presse)—spoke of their heartfelt joy in being able to share our charism with us. The Chapter took this a step further by proposing a draft structure for a common Charter for laity and religious to share.

Our "small Congregation" already has a long history. At the end of the Chapter, we opened the 150th Anniversary of our foundation. From these 150 years comes a great song of thanksgiving, thanking God for the journey we have made. They hold the memories of so many of our beloved brothers. A history that can be repeated and prayed like the 150 psalms: echoing hymns of joy, songs of pain, cries of the people, supplication... Throughout these years, our brothers have shown by dedicated lives and apostolic zeal, their passion for Christ and for man, for the world and the Church. It is good for us to receive our heritage from them. In our turn, we wish to mark the new century by using our charism to bring new energy to our apostolates.

Are we unrealistic, Utopian, dreamers? No! We are well aware of the situation of the Assumption today: our small number, our ageing, but we are also aware of our dynamism and creativity, our young Provinces, the development of our centenary projects, our growth in the

new worlds, and our growing solidarity. More precise orientations voted by the Chapter cover the whole range of our activities. We spoke of our commitment to the Unity of the Church, (just as Pope Jean Paul completed an ecumenical visit to Romania), of solidarity with the poor, of cultures and continents to be evangelised, of education, communication and the media. Nor did we forget that which conditions the life and development of the Assumption: awakening vocations, formation, and financial management, etc....

To finish, we made our dream for everyone real by electing a truly international General Community. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Chapter placed at the head of the Congregation a team of five men, from five countries and three continents including for the first time, an African. These men are open and capable of understanding the world and the younger generations (four of them have worked in formation).

Brothers, the Chapter has ended, but this is just the beginning.

Rome, 22nd May 1999

From the members of the 30th Assumptionist General Chapter

Note: this letter is also addressed to the Sister Congregations of the Assumption

2. To the Laity and Friends of the Assumption

Dear Friends.

On the 2nd May 1999, Assumptionists came to Rome from all over the world for the 30th General Chapter. We came with great expectations, with a deep trust in God, and with a desire for a new beginning as we stand on the threshold of the 3rd Millennium. And our hope was not disappointed. Very soon we felt a breath of new life among us as if the Spirit of Pentecost had come early. The openness of spirit, the interchange of ideas, the sharing of joys and sorrows, the facing of challenges together all stirred us to a deeper passion to further the Kingdom of God in the world; to go “wherever God is threatened in man and man is threatened as image of God.” (taken from our *Rule of Life*.)

Forty six of us gathered from 16 countries on four continents. We worked long and hard into the night during our three weeks together but this did not inhibit the sound of laughter and camaraderie. Who were these men who came to participate in this special meeting which only occurs every six years? Among us were journalists, missionaries, teachers, youth ministers, and chaplains who work with prisoners, immigrants and college students. It was not unusual to walk down the long (and lofty) marble corridors of the Christian Brother's General House where we stayed and hear conversations in Malgash, Kinande and Portuguese as well as other European languages like Spanish, French and Dutch. There was even the occasional American and English. Our prayer expressed the cultural richness and energy with which we give praise to God. The variety of experiences contributed to the new spirit of solidarity that we felt drawing us closer together each day. A spirit not only calling us to support each other but also to share the graces we have received with you.

The breath of new life among us manifested itself in the election of our new leader, Fr. Richard Lamoureux, a 56 year old American, who has served on the staff of our University in Worcester, USA, for many years. Our new Superior General is joined by four Assistants from three Continents, including one from the Congo, the first African to serve in such a position.

What is this new spirit, this new breath of life?

It is expressed in the desire to reach out to other cultures and continents and announce the Good News in a way that respects their traditions. It is expressed in our desire to educate and help deepen the faith of those we serve. It is expressed in a desire to show greater solidarity with the poor and the marginalised at home and in other parts of the world. It is expressed in the desire to improve our dialogue with Christians of other denominations and make contact with the members of other faiths in a move towards greater unity. It is expressed in our desire to challenge everything in our society that turns people away from the truth, from God. It is expressed in our desire, in the face of ever increasing intolerance, hatred and violence, to encourage a spirit of reconciliation and peace.

During this time we continually returned to the question 'How can we recapture this spiritual energy (what we call our "Charism") of our founder, Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon?' It was as though we were experiencing the vitality of his presence in a new way. Emmanuel d'Alzon has given us so much: a desire to spread the Kingdom of God, to come to know Jesus Christ as a friend and Saviour, to feel the warmth and strength of Mary his mother, all in the context of a deep love for the Church. He was a most generous man, full of enthusiasm. In his passion to open others to the love of Jesus Christ, he poured out the whole of his life, his love and his possessions. He showed us that life comes before words, the heart before the pen, and conversion before formulas.

How can we recapture this spiritual energy, motivation and drive of our founder? The answer to this question is a lifelong challenge. At the end of our meeting we opened the celebrations of our 150th Anniversary. Celebrations we intend to share with you in the months ahead. We also invite you to share with us the effort we will make to re-express our charism over the next six years. It is our belief that only in partnership with you, our friends, can we best understand what we are called to be and to do during the next century. We invite those of you who would like to forge a closer bond with us to consider entering a "Covenant" which we have composed. All of you are invited to join us and become Heralds of the Kingdom of God. Heralds of Good News. Heralds of Hope for the 21st Century.

Yours in the Assumption,

Rome, the 22nd May 1999

The members of the 30th Assumptionist General Chapter

VI. Bibliography and Thematic Index

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Thematic Index of General Chapter Documents

The following pages are an analytical index of the official documents of the General Chapter of 1999. The Index offers a means of discovering a particular text or theme.

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