

# Cordially

May 2014



From the Prefecture of the Apostolate  
To the Prefects and coordinators of the Apostolate and Youth Ministry

Greetings to all from Rome. In this May issue, the following themes are presented: the encounter JPIC & Solidarity Vic, February 3-9 2014; the visit of the Polish Province's missionary activity; preparations for World Youth Day 2016 in Cracow; the CMF United Nations Team in New York; upcoming encounters.

## 1. JPIC and Solidarity. Vic, 2014

The encounter-workshop on JPIC & Solidarity took place in Vic from February 3 to 9, 2014. It was a thematic encounter, approached with the idea of reflecting on the themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and Solidarity in the Congregation, following the directives of the 24th General Chapter. It was organized by the General Prefecture of the Apostolate, in broad collaboration with the Secretary General of JPIC and the Procurator General of the Missions, both parts of the organizational chart of the Prefecture of the Apostolate. The participants were thirty-seven Claretians and four lay people, involved in JPIC and the Social Apostolate -- representatives of practically every major organism of the Congregation.

The first part of the encounter, based on "TO SEE" consisted of two conferences: the first on Fr. Claret and his experience of JPIC in Cuba (Carlos Sánchez CMF; the second on JPIC in the Bible (Ricardo Volo CMF). Fourteen Claretian experiences of JPIC, taken from four continents, were presented along with these two excellent reflections as examples of everything that is presently being achieved in the Congregation. The small group meetings and dialogues in assembly, were of use to us in order to "JUDGE" and decide on what can be defined as the characteristics of the JPIC and Solidarity proper to the Claretian Missionaries. In addition, the conclusions of the encounter contain, in addition, important directions of the

organization in the areas of JPIC, Procure (Procurator), PROCLADE and the United Nations; these will be delivered to the commission that will prepare the document of the next General Chapter.

There are three preliminary considerations to the conclusions of the encounter. The preferential option for the poor is based on the Word of God and on the life of our Founder and backs up the importance that the JPIC has for us. The dimensions of the JPIC must be characteristics of our work that stand out in all ministries. We must organize and effectively coordinate this aspect of the JPIC in our work at every level: congregational, on that of conferences and of major and community organisms.

The seven characteristics of the commitment of the Claretian Missionaries with respect to the JPIC are:

- a) We need to *critically analyze* the society that surrounds us and come to involve ourselves especially in the life of the marginalized so that we might be able to develop and offer to them creative and engaging answers.
- b) Claretian communities *must be places* where the marginalized might feel welcomed. We must accompany them in shaping their own future so that they might be able to live in freedom and with dignity.
- c) All of our initiatives must be *rooted in the lives of peoples*, respecting their culture and identity, in order that they might be able to develop themselves.
- d) We must develop *a life of witness* based on Gospel values that will allow us to be prophetic witnesses.
- e) We must promote *movements and organizations* for human development in collaboration with the Church or social entities and make them independent at the proper time.
- f) We must exert influence on the economic and political realities of our societies

to *struggle against systems that produce poverty and marginalization.*

g) We must be conscious of the growing number of *questions relative to the environment and ecology* and give an answer to them with attitudes of prevention, resistance to injustices, the search for a solution to them and for rehabilitation in times of disaster.

h) We must work in an atmosphere of *dialogue with other cultures* and with nature with the purpose of promoting reconciliation and reducing conflicts,

We see that it is appropriate to create an area, within the Prefecture of the Apostolate, with the name of "Solidarity and Mission," where JPIC, the Procurator of Missions, PROCLADE and the presence of the United Nations might be functionally interrelated and coordinated. This understanding must form the basis upon which the organization and structures of the JPIC must be established at the different organizational levels of the Congregation.

## 2. Visit to the Polish Province

The visit to the Polish Province was carried out between the fourth and eighth of May, 2014. I was able to visit all of the houses in Poland, Russia (Siberia), Belarus and the Czech Republic.

The Polish Province is currently comprised of 76 missionaries; 45 in Poland, 9 in Russia, 4 in Belarus, 3 in the Czech Republic, 9 (two of them students) in Ivory Coast, two in service in Germany and 4 in the service of other organizations. Nine are brothers, 64 are priests and two are deacons. There are three postulants, no novices and three students in Philosophy and Theology.

Our approach to the countries and peoples of the Polish Province is to approach the convulsive history of Central and Eastern Europe over many centuries, especially the twentieth. The continuous changes in the countries' borders, the forced removal of entire populations from one region to another, wars, the taking over and systematic destruction of cities and populations can still be felt in the background of the current set of problems of these countries. For this reason, I believe it will be interesting, first of all, to enter a little into the description of the situation of these countries, of course in a very

schematic manner and from the subjective view of the General Prefecture of the Apostolate.

**Poland** is a nation that belongs to the European Union, with a population of 38.5 million that is 95% Catholic. After the invasion and devastation caused by the Nazis, it had to suffer the communist takeover of a Russia in the soviet Stalinist line. The influence of communist ideology was not as intense as in the other countries belonging to the Soviet Union's block behind the Iron Curtain; this was most especially due to the strong establishment of the Catholic Church and to its commitment to liberation from soviet communist oppression.

After the fall of Communism, Poland is living an important transformation in the values that have constituted its way of life over many years; as in other parts of the world, the values and anti-values of economic liberalism are positioning themselves as the normative values of a great part of the population. This change in the universe of values is also producing big changes in the values lived by Catholics, especially the new generation. The Catholic Church has great social and moral weight in Poland, which comes from its past, but circumstances are changing. It is very important to prepare Christian communities and individual Christians, beginning right now, for the possible times in which the withdrawal from faith and traditional religious practices will be greater. Of course, this is a challenge to the presence of the Claretian Missionaries; the Province is looking for ways to respond to what still remains. I present here some of the most important achievements.

The *Institute of Consecrated Life*, located in Wroclaw, offers: a Master's degree in Consecrated Life in two years, subordinate to the Faculty of Theology of Wroclaw; open courses in Consecrated Life, held in our house in Krzydlina Mala, the only one of its kind in Poland and, this year, with the help of more than 120 people; the magazine *Consecrated Life*, published four times a year with 800 copies in circulation and 600 subscribers. The publishing house *The Word Publishers*, that had a lot of activity in other times, is presently in a maintenance mode, hoping for better times that, surely, will come. The *itinerant services of the Word*, by means of conferences, exercises, retreats and missions is another part of this. The

*Procure of Missions*, broadly tied to the mission of Ivory Coast is achieving a great work of missionary consciousness all over Poland; it has developed a system of contact with donors of funds that is really interesting.

*Parochial Ministry* has, for its development, three rural areas (Miedary, Paczyna, and Krzydlina) and two parishes in urban areas (Wroclaw and Lodz). They take very good care of liturgical aspects and have an active presence in the schools located in their territories. There exists, especially in the urban parishes, a very interesting work with groups of altar servers and their families. I believe that, with this base, the Youth-Vocational Ministry can be well developed for adolescents and well as for younger boys and girls.

In the parish of Wroclaw, which we have been serving for about four years now, there is a large group of young university students that has been functioning for more than 20 years under the inspiration of its founder, a diocesan priest, and with which Fr. Piotr Beza, a Claretian priest, has been working very broadly. The group is made up of more than 200 university students that develop different activities: prayer groups, charismatic prayer groups, social commitment groups, groups of reflection on questions of faith and society, marriage preparation groups, etc. In this group of young university students, more than forty vocations to different religious institutes and to the secular priesthood have been born.

**Siberia** is a region of Russia with an expanse of 13.1 million square kilometers and with 40 million inhabitants. During the period of the communist dictatorship, it was a place of deportation for thousands of people from other areas within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and, for this reason, as in other places of the now extinct Soviet Union, we can find Catholics with roots in other countries. The believers are, for the most part, Orthodox Christians with very weak ties to their church, including attendance at religious services. There exists a high percentage of atheists or people who are simply indifferent, the fruit of the communist period.

The groups of Catholics are small and are in the process of being rebuilt as communities, after the fierce persecution of the communist era. The Catholic faith, maintained by those who are

now grandparents, is seeing a resurgence in families that feel that the Catholic Christian heritage is a great wealth and identity; this continues to permit the growth of the number of Catholics in the communities and the number of infant and adult baptisms.

Our presence in Siberia is centered in: Brask (250,000 inhabitants), where a Catholic community of about 300 people is served; Atchinsk (100,000 inhabitants), with a community of about 150 people and, above all, Krasnojarsk. In Krasnojarsk (more than 1,000,000 inhabitants), a city of incessant and booming growth, we have two parishes, that of the Transfiguration, in the city center and Holy Family, about 20 kilometers from the center of town, in one of the expanding neighborhoods. The parish of the Transfiguration was, during the communist era, a municipal concert hall, for which it is still used; it is the church that is the point of reference for the Catholics in the central part of the city which is about 300 people. The parish of the Holy Family, the parish church built by the Claretians, serves about 200 people. Plans are had to create a small school of catechists and pastoral helpers.

**Belarus** is a nation of 207,000 square kilometers with 9,500,000 inhabitants that belongs to the Russian Federation; it is a dictatorial regime with a president that is of communist inspiration. The main religion is the Orthodox Church, and the second is the Catholic Church. Religious practice is very low among the Orthodox, but much better among the Catholics; the communist regime fiercely persecuted religion, especially the Catholic religion; consequently, we find ourselves with a high percentage of unbelievers or those that are non-practicing. The Catholic faith maintained itself, as in neighboring Russia, by means of hidden religious practices, given the persecution to which it was subjected; the "grandmothers" are recognized as the ones that kept and transmitted the Catholic faith of their ancestors to the new generation - those coming from Belarus itself, but also from Poland and Germany, the fruit of diverse deportations suffered throughout the years in this part of Europe. The traditional communist control and the sense that property and services are under the common control of the State remains, curiously, more so at the present time than in Russia itself.

In Belarus, there are presently four Claretians, one of them Belarussian, who live in three parishes that are very distant one from the other (Jeziory, Zelwa and Mohilew). Jeziory and Zelwa are pretty much rural, while Mohylew (400,000 inhabitants) situated on the border with Russia, is a city of strong growth with lots of missionary possibilities.

Our work in Belarus is centered, as it is in Russia, on our being with the Catholic communities, in the midst of an environment that is a mixture of unbelief and an Orthodox majority. They are Catholic communities very frequently displaced from their regions. During the time of communism, these Catholic communities suffered persecution and being silenced; today, the Claretians, along with other congregations and secular priests, are with them as they reencounter their Catholic identity and the new formation of their communities. Relations between the Church and the government are not good; the government does not permit the free practice of the Catholic faith. This lack of freedom with respect to the priests that are not Belarussian, leads to their not being able to be pastors of large city parishes and in their only being able to have religious celebrations in their own parish churches, or because it is not legally possible for them to celebrate outside of the church in which they are pastors. Foreign priests, without government permission, may not celebrate the Eucharist in public. The permanence of priests that are not Belarussian is always dependent on having a visa and on the arbitrary attitude of the authorities that can find any excuse whatsoever to expel them.

**The Czech Republic** (10 million inhabitants) and, specifically Bohemia, where the city of Prague is found, is one of the areas with the highest percentage of atheism in Europe. The percentage of atheists in the Czech Republic is between 90 to 95%, the greater percentage being in Prague. The problem with the Hussites in the 16th century, the nationalism of the 19th century against Austria and, in parallel, against the Catholic Church, in addition to the years of communism, have brought about this unique situation, with respect to atheism and religious indifference in this part of Europe.

The presence of the Claretians in the Czech Republic began in 1992 in Lisolaya, a

neighborhood of Prague, with an international community, working with young university students. The difficulty of the work with the university students indicates the necessity of taking on a parish in Sokolov (near Carlove Wary). Within a short time, it was necessary to leave Sokolov and to take on the present parish in Prague and that of Bochov; shortly thereafter, the activity with the university students was ended. At the present time, they serve a parish in Prague and the rural area in Bochov (2000 inhabitants), 100 kilometers from the capital.

### **3. Preparations for the 2016 World Youth Day in Cracow begins.**

The Claretian Missionary team from Poland, made up of Fr. Aleksander Bober, Fr. Piotr Beza, and Fr. Marcin Kowalewski have begun to prepare the World Youth Day 2016 in Cracow (July 25 to August 1). They will be joined by Fr. Juan Carlos Martos, the representative of the General Government and others who are responsible for the Youth-Vocational Pastoral of Europe. We will receive the official letter of invitation shortly.

### **4. Meeting of the United Nations Team**

On 22, 23 and 24 May took place in White Plains, NY, (USA), a meeting of "The Claretian team meeting at the for United Nations" (CMFUN Team) to define new guidelines for the future. The General Government appointed Brian Culley cmf as representative of the Claretian Missionaries and Internazionale PROCLADE before ECOSOC and UN. The meeting was called by the General Prefect of Apostolate. There were, as participants of this meeting, the CMF UN Team, the G. P. of Apostolate and The JPIC Secretary. The conclusions included actions, working areas and targets for the next two years. We will give you more information in the next Cordially

### **5. The 2014 encounters**

#### **\* BIBLICAL TEAM**

July 17-23, Colmenar Viejo (Spain)

#### **\* ENCOUNTER OF THE PREFECTS OF THE APOSTOLATE**

July 26-August 5, Lisbon (Portugal)

#### **\* THIRD CONGRESS OF CLARETIAN EDUCATORS**

September 29- October 5, Bangalore (India)

Rome, May 25, 2014

Miguel Angel Velasco López CMF  
General Prefecture of the Apostolate  
[www.apostoladocmf.org](http://www.apostoladocmf.org)

