



Office of the Provincial Superior

CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES

EAST NIGERIA PROVINCE.

CIRCULAR LETTER

Announcement of the VIII Provincial Chapter

Dear brothers,

1. Through this letter, I wish to invite you all to participate in the process of the preparation of our Provincial Chapter and officially announce the celebration of the VIII Provincial Chapter that we hope would be held in June 2022.

At the Threshold of the Provincial Chapter

2. We are at the threshold of the Golden Jubilee celebration of our presence in Nigeria. At this time, we are grateful to God who has been faithful to his promises. Like the biblical mustard seed¹, we have grown amidst the challenges of missionary life in leaps and bounds charting a course as a Province “going forth”². Called by Christ and following in the footsteps of St Anthony Mary Claret, we have created a beautiful Claretian family in which all of us are pieces of a great mosaic in the Church and in our society.
3. We are graced with brothers and friends from diverse backgrounds, languages and cultures. By bringing our different gifts, experiences and resources, we enrich the Congregation and the Church. For this, we are grateful to God.
4. We are grateful for our confreres who laboured with us in the Lord’s vineyard but have been called home to the Father after the completion of their heavenly race. (cf. 2Tim 4:7). Our faith in the Resurrection of the Lord teaches that their work is only changed and not ended since they continue to intercede for us from heaven. “Our Father Founder and the blessed martyrs are in the forefront among them.

¹ Cf. Mt. 13:31

² MS, 66

Their stories are colourful threads in the tapestry of the Congregational history and their spiritual resources and dedicated life form part of our spiritual heritage.”³

5. As we prepare to celebrate our Jubilee, we need to have a deeper and more dynamic awareness of our identity as Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to the need to live and express it in a new way so that it does not die but continues to remain alive and to be a source of life and shelter for many.

What the Constitutions say about the Provincial Chapter

6. The Constitutions give us some concrete indications about the nature and objectives of the Provincial Chapter.⁴ These should be our main point of reference.
7. The Constitutions tell us that the Provincial Chapter is a *chapter in the true and strict sense*.⁵ In other words, the Provincial Chapter is at the service of the charism.⁶ It is an evident observation but of great importance. It is an affirmation that sets us in the perspective of faith, because it invites us to enter into an attentive dialogue with the Lord just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus.⁷ “Maintaining the charism alive, striving for it to continue being source of life for those who have received it, seeing how it may continue fertilizing the life of the Church and rendering a relevant service to humanity are the fitting tasks of a Chapter.”⁸
8. The Provincial Chapter *is the instrument that represents the province and expresses the participation, joint responsibility and communion of the whole province. It examines the state of the province in order to set its future course of action*.⁹ Therefore, we must know how to express and promote the fraternity that makes us all feel like brothers and consolidate at the same time our missionary character. We have to learn how to listen to one another and let ourselves be questioned by the

³ Mathew Vattamattam, Circular Letter, May 2020, 3

⁴ Read: CC, 122-127

⁵ Cf. CC, 126

⁶ Cf. CC, 153

⁷ Cf. Lk. 24:13-35

⁸ J.M Batlle, Always Missionaries, 295

⁹ Cf. CC, 122, 125 §1

concerns and proposals that would emerge from the different communities. Our positive response would chart a new course for our province.

9. The Constitutions remind us that the Provincial Chapter, “*applies the norms and directives of the general chapter concerning missionary life, in keeping with local and personal circumstances...*”¹⁰ This chapter using as it were, the *Querida Congregación* as a *lineamenta* would contextualise the exhortations of the XXVI General Chapter and make it present and alive in our local situations.
10. According to the Constitutions, the provincial chapter *elects the provincial superior, his consultors...*¹¹ who will like Peter in turn, strengthen his brothers¹² and encourage the province to walk along right path.
11. We should bear these indications in mind as we are called to actively participate along the chapter journey.

The Context of the VIII Provincial Chapter

12. I want to emphasize the importance of the context in which the Provincial Chapter takes place. It is within a particular historical moment, and this is not insignificant. The situation of our world, the church, the features that characterise our province today require of us some reflection.
13. The Constitutions, which define our mission in the Church, reminds us of the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, “sharing the hopes and joys, the sorrows and trials of the people, especially the poor, we readily offer to join efforts with all who are striving to transform the world according to God’s plan.”¹³ This insertion into history is part of our mission and what truly makes us relevant. We are therefore called to “understand the signs of the times and to know what we ought to do.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Cf. CC,125 §2

¹¹ Cf. CC,125 §3

¹² Cf. Lk. 22:32

¹³ Cf. CC, 46; GS,1

¹⁴ Cf. 1Chron.12:32

14. We live in a world that is filled with uncertainty. The only thing certain about these times is its uncertainty. The Covid-19 pandemic brought with epochal changes to the world that will last for a long time to come. This adds to the miseries already in the world – terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, poverty, environmental degradation and other forms of human atrocities. These are some of the features of the world’s circumstances that profoundly affect our lives and shape our missionary outreach. In the face of all these and more, the Lord says to us: “do not be afraid, for I am with you.”¹⁵
15. We live in a time when the Church is facing all sorts of attacks. The sexual abuse crises has not faded away. On daily basis the integrity of the Church is questioned on the altar of public tribunal. The viciousness of the attacks is so denigrating to consecrated persons that we tend to lose courage and relapse into the world of cynicism, apathy and despair. But the voice of Lord echoes in the background, “I am with always, even to the end of the age”¹⁶
16. Drawing strength from the Lord, we move ahead in the midst of difficulties knowing that we can never be abandoned. It is in difficult times that God brings the best in his saints. The celebration of the Provincial Chapter affords us a moment of grace to strengthen the bond of fraternity and unity, co-responsibility, mutual support and shared vision of a Claretian mission to a broken world.

Proposal for How to Proceed

17. To walk the path of the VIII Provincial Chapter, we shall adopt the ‘new way’ of the Church – the Synodal Way.¹⁷ This process is bottom-up path in which all Claretians would be involved and as far as possible our collaborators. This methodology¹⁸ would be used to facilitate conversations in communities to gather

¹⁵ Isa. 41:10

¹⁶ Mt. 28:20

¹⁷ To speak of synodality in the Congregation implies “walking together” to discern what the Lord may be asking of us at this moment. Echoing what Pope Francis says about the synodal Church: it is like a family in which we all listen to one another because we all have something to learn, and we all want to listen to the Holy Spirit. Synodality implies assuming the responsibility that we all have in the animation and government of the Congregation, respecting the principles of subsidiarity, subordination, collaboration and fraternal correction.

¹⁸ This is the methodology used for the XXVI General Chapter in Nemi, Italy.

the fruits of their discernment for the good of our Province. A team of facilitators would assist in this regard.

18. I enjoin us all to be disposed like Mary our Mother to be guided by the Holy Spirit to welcome the future that God wants to co-create with our free and joyful collaboration in his mission.

19. And, finally, I offer you the itinerary of the preparation for the VIII Provincial Chapter. From the secretariat, we shall receive more concrete indications on some of the outlined activities:

- i) Letter of announcement of the VIII Provincial Chapter - January 17, 2022
- ii) Appointment/Inauguration of the Pre-Chapter Committee – February 2, 2022
- iii) Election of Chapter Delegates- April – May 2022.
- iv) Chapter Convocation – May 20, 2022
- v) Chapter Celebration – June 20-25, 2022.

20. The path towards the Provincial Chapter, is a spiritual journey, let us put it into the hands of Mary our Mother and enshrine it in her maternal heart. Let us commit it to the intercession of our Father Founder and the Claretian Martyrs. As we pray the prayer for the success of the chapter in our communities, we shall be filled with the unbreakable hope that is born of the absolute of the Father who keeps his promises. For he has said: “I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future.”¹⁹

New Owerri, January 17, 2022

Memorial of St. Anthony, Abbot.



Simeon Okezuo Nwobi, CMF

Provincial Superior.

¹⁹ Cf. Jer. 29:11