

**A SYNTHESIS OF THE “CONVERSATIONS” IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES,
PASTORAL ACTIVITIES, AND PROJECTS OF THE PROVINCE**

Theme:

Rooted in Christ and Audacious as a Missionary Province

1. Introduction:

The journey towards the VIII Provincial Chapter began on January 17, 2022 with the announcement of the Chapter to the Province. On February 2, 2022, the Chapter Planning committee was constituted and inaugurated. Soon after the committee rolled out the guidelines and the schedules for the synodal conversations, held in the 19 local communities and Residences of the Province, the second level of conversations involving the 8 major activities and 25 pastoral positions in the Province; the third level of conversations on the 6 geographical zones and countries to reflect on number 43 of the QC XVIII General Chapter exhortation 2021 could not hold due to logistical reasons. Alongside the weeds that weaken our missionary life, we have discovered seeds of life that the Spirit is sowing in our Province that help us to embrace the future with hope as we project our dreams. Within the unpredictable framework of the Covid-19 pandemic, we conversed with other people from our communities and pastoral environments (Claretian Family, consecrated men and women, laity, persons of other confessions, religions, and beliefs). The threefold approaches (synodal, narrative and appreciative) were adopted throughout the whole process of conversations

A. FIRST PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION: *A Province Going Forth*

I. Biblical Pastoral Ministry

Seeds of life

In our pre-capitular conversations, we have perceived signs of life, thanks to the Spirit of our Father Founder and the different sources of light that guided us:

1. The word of God is the centre and source of our spirituality. Much have been done in biblical ministry through printing of the yearly bible diary, many scriptural books written by members, online daily and weekly reflections.
2. Through the biblical pastoral ministry and communication, we have offered improved pastoral care to the people of God. Our missionaries have manifested their interest and the use of the Word of God in their ministry of preaching.

3. The lay faithful in our parishes testify to the unique preaching methods of the Claretians.
4. We have been engaged also in preaching retreats based on the Word of God.

Challenges

In evaluating ourselves as a *Province going forth*, we also affirm that,

1. The Word of God should be given more emphasis in all our communities. Both at the provincial and community levels, there should be a person or persons charged with the responsibility of promoting and propagating the Word of God.
2. There is need to develop a provincial biblical program for the Youth running through all our educational institutions. However, we should ensure that there is no friction between provincial program and those of the dioceses in which we work.
3. Lectio Divina should be given more attention in our communities.
4. The place of the Social and Communication Media to the proclamation of the Gospel in our Province cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, we should employ every means possible to proclaim the Gospel, especially through social media and other modern means of communication like the Radio, Television and Digital Technology.
5. CLACOM should be upgraded to serve the needs of our time. Clacom should not only engage in writing and printing of the Bible Diary, but it should also organize biblical programs like the Bible week in parishes, quiz in schools.
6. There is need to establish a communication media at the Claretian University of Nigeria (CUN) to harmonize and animate our apostolates.
7. Our missionaries should be involved in biblical movements and associations in the parishes and Dioceses where we work.
8. Our missionary audacity is held back by acedia and indifference. The attitude of “the way it has always been done” continues to have force among us and stops the process towards Synodality in the Province.

II. Parishes, Chaplaincies, and Missions

Seeds of life

1. Our missionaries have made great impacts on the lives of people. Through our missionary activities, local vocations to the priesthood and religious life have been promoted. The successes in our missionary activities are owing to teamwork, availability, and selflessness.
2. Our Province has shown her availability in accepting to run parishes, chaplaincies, and missions even in difficult peripheral areas. It is commendable that Bishops have found our Congregation worthy to be entrusted with key positions in their dioceses, the care of the souls of the faithful in major sodalities in the Church.

3. In the last sexennial, we have established Schools, and Basic Christian Communities in our parishes. In some of our parishes, empowerment programs have also been set up to assist indigent families set up small scale businesses.
4. Some of our Missionaries have been involved in the formation of other Institutes of Consecrated life in Nigeria. Some of our confreres have distinguished themselves in preaching retreats and giving conferences to priests, male and female religious groups and functioned as spiritual directors, offering spiritual guidance to the faithful.
5. Our missionaries have offered effective witnessing through the proclamation of the Gospel and the life of simplicity and have maintained collaboration and harmonious relationship with the local churches.

Weeds and Challenges

1. We have not been able to sustain some parishes entrusted to the members of our Province due to lack of teamwork and in-fighting among the pastoral team. Some Bishops in some instances took over the running of the parishes.
2. There is need to consider the pastoral suitability of our personnel before they are given pastoral responsibilities.
3. There should be a feasibility study of new missions before the Province sends her missionaries and should ensure adequate accompaniment through orientations, solidarity and mission support of the missionaries to be sent.
4. Some of our personnel are not open to learn new cultures and languages in their mission areas and they transpose a sense of superiority. Every member of the Province should have the opportunity to go on mission.
5. Our Province runs several parishes and chaplaincies in Nigeria. The perennial question has been, what is "Claretian" in our parishes? The good example of how St Anthony Mary Claret Parish, new Owerri is organised should be adopted as a model of running Claretian parishes, to give the needed Claretian touch in the parochial ministry.
6. The Province should give pastoral orientations to our members to reduce aberrations in the Divine liturgy, while promoting suitable adaptations and creativity in the parishes so as to allow our charismatic gifts in the church to flower.
7. To avoid frictions and conflicts among our missionaries, there is need to make proper description of functions for each person assigned to a mission. We dream of strengthening the Lay Claretian and Vocation Movements

III. Education Ministries

Seeds of life

1. Our Province has done well with the Education apostolate. With less than 3 schools a decade ago, the Province has 7 nursery/primary schools and 4 secondary schools doing very well, apart from the schools that we run jointly in the parishes where we work. In the last year we have gone ahead in collaboration with the West Nigeria delegation, to establish a tertiary education Institution
2. The Province has engaged in education ministries from the primary to tertiary levels. This has remained a veritable means of evangelization and a source of income and recruitment of vocation.
3. The Claretian University project is a uniting inter-provincial project of the congregation.

Challenges

1. The challenge facing the Province is how to run and coordinate these institutions productively and allowing the Claretian charism to flower in them.
2. The relationship between one school of the Province and others is not well defined and the operators of these schools see themselves more like sole administrators.
3. The establishment of the **Claretian University of Nigeria** is an interprovincial missionary audacity, however, there is a noticeable acedia and indifference holding us back from accepting its reality.
4. There is urgent need to create a Provincial Education Charter, that will promote seamless relationship among the institutions, unified governance, centralized funding and administration for transparency and quality assurance and unifying the ministries of the Province.
5. There should be a unique Claretian plan and policy in our education ministries. Such plan and policy should include the location for the citing of the schools, entrepreneurial style of education, the training of personnel that will be involved in the administration and management of the schools, employment and recruitment policies, scholarship schemes for indigent students, education fund and so on.

Dreams

1. We dream of a coordinated provincial education Charter with well-thought-out plan and policies, coordinated by the constituted provincial education commission.
2. We dream of seeing the Claretian University of Nigeria to develop an ecclesiastical faculty of Philosophy and Theology and other sacred sciences.

3. We dream of Claretian University of Nigeria moved to a permanent site outside Maryland Nekede.
4. The Claretian University has brought major changes in the configuration of the activities in Maryland and its communities. There is need to structurally adjust the communities and their personnel to reflect the new reality.

IV. Youth Ministry

Seeds of life

1. Through our school apostolate we have been able to reach out to the youth, by walking with them and making it easier for them to hear the calls of Jesus and to choose profitable lifestyles.
2. The establishment of the prefecture for pastoral youth and vocations ministry will give great boost to the effort of the Province to promote some projects with the youth, like the "Claret Youth", through which we take steps to continue preparing the agents of evangelization of young people and to live more intensely the Church's journey in this field

Weeds and Challenges

In evaluating ourselves as a *Congregation going forth*, we also affirm that:

1. The Province needs to train a person for the Youth Ministry. Such a person should be experienced, mature, and versatile. He should have zeal and passion for the Youth, open-minded, patient, one who understands the language and psychology of the Youth, and able to carry them along. He should have good knowledge of the modern means of communication.
2. The project and activity for the Youth Ministry can be extended to our schools. Therefore, the Director of the Youth Ministry should be incorporated into provincial school board.
3. There is need to develop a provincial program for the Youth running through all our educational institutions. However, we should ensure that there is no friction between provincial program and those of the dioceses in which we work.
4. There is need to establish a provincial empowerment and skill acquisition centre for the Youth.
5. Conferences and symposia should be organized by our missionaries involved in the Biblical apostolate. The printing of the Bible Diary should continue and be improved upon with a unique Claretian character. Our parishes and schools should organize Bible quiz.

B. SECOND PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION: *Community of Witnesses and Messengers*

I. Economic Life of the Province

Seeds of life

1. Since the last sexennial, there has been efforts to build a strong financial base for the Province. Despite the socio-economic situation of Nigeria which affects the economy of the Province, we acknowledge the resilience of the provincial administration in fostering a solid economic base.
2. Sharing of goods and services have increased significantly in the Province; while among local communities there is a noticeable sense of cooperation and solidarity.
3. The Province has been striving towards economic self-reliance. Such efforts are seen in the establishment of schools, revitalization of Utonkon farm, and the contribution of her members from apostolates and missions.
4. Following the new accounting plan of the congregation, an effort has been made to offer good programs for the formation of all the economies, in matters of economy and administration of the Province.
5. The Province is grateful to the General Government through the FUNDUS to grant low interest loan to pursue this noble objective of making the Province self-reliant
6. The Claret water and the Utonkon farm projects have become productive ventures of the Province due to painstaking services of their managers.

Weeds and Challenges

1. There is need to intensify efforts to establish more self-financing projects in the Province, such as schools, farms, etc. to finance the apostolates of the Province.
2. Some of our members are not painstaking in the management of our finances and projects. Therefore, openness, sincerity and accountability are very necessary.
3. The Province is yet to be self-reliant. Our personnel have not been maximally empowered towards yielding dividends for the Province. There is need to take adequate care of the welfare of our ageing priests and priests in the Houses of formation. The Province needs a care home for our elderly priests.
4. The Province should adopt a central funding system for our schools for quality assurance and transparency in operations.

Dreams

1. We dream of an economic self-reliant Province where members are transparent and make contributions to the Province. This could be achieved through the empowerment of our personnel in different fields of human endeavour.
2. We should also establish economic self-reliant projects. Such projects could be in real estate and landed property, printing press and so on. Our projects should be supervised and well-managed by experts.
3. In its journey towards self-financing, the Province took internal loans from the *FUNDUS*. There is need to set clear criteria that should prevent our members that lack accountability culture from being appointed to manage the self-reliant projects of the Province.

II. Governance in the Province

Seeds of life

1. The members of the government have tried in carrying out their assignment of maintaining unity, understanding, and progress in our mission and formation of our future missionaries.
2. We thank God for the generosity and efforts of the Provincial Government in the accompaniment of persons, the promotion of creativity and innovation.
3. We also rejoice that the Province is collaborating with other branches of the Claretian Family in the apostolate of the Province as we are working with Religious of Mary Immaculate - Claretian Missionary Sisters (RMI) and Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (MMI) sisters.

Weeds and Challenges

1. The government has not been faithful to holding the usual periodical Permanent Board meetings and through which timely information is disseminated to the members of the Province.
2. Social media information should not substitute for legal hardcopy documents.

Dreams

1. We dream of a Province where the members of the government are elected based on their administrative competence and are pastorally oriented towards maintaining peace, harmony and progress.
2. We dream of a government that activates the different commissions of the Province and makes them functional.
3. Efforts should be made to secure the lands and buildings of Late Fr. Obika Joseph at Buipe and Nekede.
4. There should be integration of interculturality in the formation houses.

III. Community

Signs of life

1. Our community life has been strengthened by **community prayers, dialogue, common celebration of Claretian feasts and Marian feasts, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and a healthy collaboration with the people of God.**
2. In our missionary activities, we have contributed to the holistic development of our host communities.
3. Members of the Province have shared with one another in their local communities. The communities have their superiors, vicars, and bursars that coordinate the life of the members. The communities have tried to maintain their hours of prayers, meals, and recollections as well as their apostolates and ministries.
4. We are a community-oriented congregation. Our community life is expressed by our communal living and sustained by daily Eucharistic celebration, prayer in common, and monthly recollections and observance of annual Retreats.
5. As missionaries called to a life of witness to Christ, we promote harmonious living irrespective of our different apostolates and qualifications, strengthened by love, mutual dialogue, openness and trust, and respect for one another.

Weeds and Challenges

1. Proper communication and ability to plan together and work together should be encouraged. In all we do, the common good of the Province should be our emphasis.
2. As a Congregation made up of members from different cultures and languages, we need to be open to other cultures and worldviews.
3. Many local superiors are not familiar with their roles, as elaborated in our constitutions, as symbol of unity and animation. It appears that their only role is to participate in the Provincial Chapters. There is need to follow proper criteria in the appointment of local superiors and give them proper formation and orientation.
4. Local superiors are designated for a term of 3 years renewable once, for a maximum of 6 years in the same house; for designation of a local superior for a third consecutive 3-year term in the same House, is granted only by the Superior General with his Council. Dir. 424c. Some local superiors of our Province have been perpetually superiors in the same House and even when they are transferred.
5. We should ensure that the sick and aged members are cared for. The welfare of members should be of utmost importance.
6. Some members find solace outside the community and consequently endanger their religious life and community

Dreams

1. We dream of a religious community where every member will find a home.
2. Where the welfare of the members should be of paramount importance.
3. Where the communities should adopt the PEE method of apostolate (Plan, Execute, and Evaluate together).

IV. Secretariat

1. Our Story in the Province

Our story in the Province which comes from our personal shared stories is that of PROVIDENCE. Our vocation as Claretians and the foundation of our Province is marked by the “hand of providence”¹. Our title therefore for the chapter document of the synodal VIII Provincial Chapter could be captioned”
THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE

Challenge

1. Social media communication in the provincial platforms and chart groups is beneficial for rapid sharing and dissemination of information. However, to curb the abuses that have started creeping in the nature and disrespectful language being used by some members in sharing information, there is an urgent need to set ground rules to protect the integrity of platforms, our members and communities.

¹ Father Christian Mary Ihedoro sees the foundation of Claretian Missionaries in Nigeria as a “hand of Providence” as he narrates how it started: “After the civil war in 1970, I visited Nigeria. But I couldn’t go back as quickly as I wanted because I lost my briefcase (containing my travelling documents) at Owerri Post Office. As I was waiting for some new travel papers especially the visa, the then Bishop of Owerri – Bishop Emeritus M. Unegbu sent me to Enyiogugu Parish ... When eventually I got a new passport and the needed visa in 1971, I went to the Bishop to inform him of my readiness to travel back to my Province of Equatorial Guinea. But it was not easy for him to allow me to leave, for he pleaded in these words: “I have no one to replace you if you do not come back, the people will lynch me.”” This incident necessitated the foundation of the Claretian Missionaries in Nigeria. Fr. Christian Mary Ihedoro travelled back to Equatorial Guinea and spoke with his local superiors and then Father General, Anthonio Leghisa, Cmf about establishing the Congregation in Nigeria. They gave their consent and sent to him some priests from the United States Province to assist him as soon as he settled in Nigeria to begin the foundation of the Congregation. He said: “Our first group of Novices began their programme of Novitiate formation on 15th Sept. 1973. This date has become the formal reckoning date for our establishment in Nigeria” (cf. Christian Mary Ihedoro. “Nigerian Claretians in a Difficult Beginning and in Joyful Hope for the Future.” In Wence Chigekwu Madu - Chrys Nnaemeka Ogbozo. *Missionary Challenges of Today*, Claretian Missionaries, Province of Nigeria, 1998, pp. 24-25.

C. THIRD PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION: *Men who Adore God in the Spirit.*

I. Formation

Seeds of life

1. Since our foundation in Nigeria in 1973, the Province has established its presence Nigeria, Ghana, Chad, and other parts of Africa and even outside the shores of Africa. We train seminarians from various languages and cultural backgrounds. This has brought about multi-cultural in our formation houses, especially Nekede and Umuchu and Attakwu formation centres, and has exposed our missionaries in formation to people from other cultural and language backgrounds.
2. We recognize the efforts we have made and are still making in the formation of our future missionaries in their initial formation and the on-going formation of our missionaries who are already launched into the ministry.
3. The maturity and the resilient attitude exhibited by our seminarians, the availability of our members in taking up missions, and the specialization of our missionaries in different fields of human endeavour attest to our efforts.
4. We are grateful to the Congregation for the establishment of African Institute of Consecrated Life (AICLA), Abuja as a major resource for strengthening consecrated life in Africa.
5. There has been much infrastructural development in the Province in the last sexennial. New schools have been established. We are happy that the Claretian University of Nigeria, Nekede, has taken off; a new CIP hostel has been constructed and massive renovations were carried out at the Theologate and the Novitiate.

Weeds and Challenges

1. Our formation has not been integral. The Province, for instance, requires the service of a psychologist. While we appreciate the renovation efforts in our formation houses, we need to invest more in spiritual and human development of the candidates.
2. Even though there is a roadmap (plan of formation) for initial and on-going formation in the Province, it needs to be adapted to the new program of formation beginning with postulancy, novitiate, philosophical studies, apostolic year, and theological studies, to suit multi-cultural formation.
3. The Province has abundance of suitably trained formators but not one of them is involved in the formation work of the Province now from vocation screening to ongoing formations.
4. Current formators in the Province should urgently be given specific training in formation and should be drawn from experienced missionaries.
5. The one-year apostolic experience of our students after the philosophical studies is highly priced. This program should be elaborated to include

possibilities for skill acquisitions. Pastoral-year students could be sent to other language and cultural zones so that they are exposed to other cultures.

Dreams

1. The Province dreams of integrally formed missionaries who will be available for missions anywhere in the world.
2. The Province should endeavour to recruit qualitative vocations.
3. The Province dreams of more of our missionaries specializing in different fields according to the needs of the Province.
4. The Province dreams of establishing one of the formation houses such as Postulate outside Nigeria.

II. Spirituality in the Province

Seeds of life

1. Our community life has been strengthened by **community prayers, dialogue, common celebration of Claretian feasts and Marian feasts, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and a healthy collaboration with the people of God.**
2. We are happy to affirm that **forge program** adapted as part of a 21-day retreat program in the Province, is an effective tool of re-initiation of our missionaries.
3. Through our day-to-day life of witnessing, we continue to strive towards spiritual growth. Our spiritual life has been engendered by Marian and Eucharistic devotions.

Challenges

1. The Eucharist should be the center of our life. We can deepen our Eucharistic and the Cordi-Marian Spirituality through Eucharistic Adoration and Marian Devotion in the community.
2. We should stive to promote the devotion to Mary in our areas of mission.
3. Those charged with the task of promoting the Marian spirituality/devotion should be trained.
4. The communities should practice Eucharistic adoration and observe Marian devotions and novena to Saint Anthony Mary Claret in their spirituality.

D. SOME ISSUES FOR MORE ELABORATE STUDIES BY THE VIII PROVINCIAL CHAPTER

1. The juridical reorganization and consolidation of positions in the East Nigeria Province to create the **Independent Delegation of North Nigeria.**
2. The framework for the **self-sufficiency plan and the economic policy** of the Province that will be strictly implemented according to the prescriptions of the Congregation.

3. Evolving an **educational policy** that will incorporate all levels, to coordinate our educational institutions and the formation of values and the transmission of the light of the Gospel.

E. CONCLUSION

This synthesis is a gathering of the fruits of the conversations that took place in the Province from February – March 2022, amidst hard times imposed by the Covid-19 and insecurity. These are only opinions and expressions of our members and people who collaborate with us and others not associated with us. We have shared some stories *that have given us life* and defined our charismatic identity as a Province that came into existence by Divine Providence. Also, we have shared some comments about *what weakens us*, understood as diseases or warning signs (weeds), *what demands our attention* (challenges), and *what gives us life* (seeds). Finally, we have had conversations about *what makes us dream*, about our future as a Province. Detailed reflections on the issues raised will be dealt with in the Chapter when we shall have the 3rd and the 4th conversations, etc. In the meantime, we are called upon to keep the conversations going in our communities and apostolates. We are all invited to continue dialoguing among ourselves and with those with whom we share the mission. In this way, guided by a synodal, narrative, and appreciative method, we will be able to synchronize with the dreams of the Province for the coming years and live out our commitments in fidelity as joyful messengers of the Gospel.

We express our deep appreciation to the Provincial Government for appointing us into the pre-Chapter committee to animate the synodal process towards our VIII Provincial Chapter. It is our hope and prayers that the spirit of Synodality will pervade the Province and create a new climate of love and peace.