

The Comboni Lay Missionaries in the last four MCCJ chapters 1997 – 2003 – 2009 – 2015

CHAPTER ACTS: XV GENERAL CHAPTER 1997

11. The whole Church sees herself as missionary. New agents and new forms of proclamation arise. ... Lay people take up mission as vocation (cf. RM 71-72).

72. Comboni collaborated with others, as does a wise person who admits personal limitations and is open to the contribution of others. He saw the need to unite all interested forces for Africa, and invited all who could contribute to the regeneration of the continent to join him (women and men, priests, lay people, religious, Africans and Europeans). He also kept contact with many organisations, encouraging them to co-operate among themselves and so improve the apostolic work.

79. At local level we favour the formation of apostolic communities which include pastoral agents working in the same place (priests, religious women and men, lay missionaries, catechists, etc.). In such an apostolic community of fellowship and friendship they plan and evaluate pastoral activity, pray together, and share in some way the financial resources, always safeguarding the autonomy of each group (cf. RL 68).

Comboni Family

80. Among the missionary institutes, we prefer in a special way to collaborate with the Comboni Missionary Sisters, the Comboni Secular Missionaries and the Comboni Lay Missionaries. Comboni is not simply the Founder of the two original institutes, but he also inspires a joint mission where there is room for lay persons, sisters, priests and brothers. We want to build a greater communion with the different expressions of the Comboni family, offering our collaboration in the field of commitments, in projects of missionary promotion, etc.

81. We thank the Lord for the many lay people who unselfishly are helping our communities, collaborating and sharing with us the spirituality of Comboni and the missionary service.

COMBONI LAY MISSIONARIES

82. All people of God are called to serve the evangelising mission of the Church. Comboni built his work on this principle. He had a number of lay people among his collaborators and considered them important in evangelization and in fostering missionary awareness in the Church.

83. Comboni lay missionaries (CLM) share in the missionary activity of the Church in keeping with the Founder's charism (cf. RL 14; 77.6). For the people of God, they are a sign of collaboration between the local churches where the Comboni family is working. Since each local church has something to share and is also in need of receiving, CLM may come from any and be sent to any Comboni province.

84. The General Chapter of 1991 has described the *motivations for a more direct involvement* in the project and has given some practical guidelines (cf. CA '91, 60-63). Meanwhile, different groups of CLM have developed. They have enriched the charism of the Founder *beyond the boundaries of the Institute* (CA '91, 61.3; cf. VC 54).

85. The experiences over the last six years encourage us to reaffirm the CLM project. There are, however, difficulties and questions that have to be clarified on the part of the CLM and on the part of the Comboni provinces:

- The identity of the various models of lay missionaries;
- The religious, missionary, cultural and professional preparation;
- The relationship with the sending and receiving churches;
- The relationship with the sending and receiving Comboni provinces;
- The relationship with the local Comboni community;
- Their insertion in apostolic communities.

86. The pluralism of the CLM project, while enriching the mission on the human and project level, requires a certain unified vision and a definition of some essential points common to all CLM groups.

Lay dimension

87. The commitment of the CLM must be grounded on faith in Christ and on a sense of belonging to the Church. The witness as a Christian lay person - which is to transform the secular world from within through values of the Kingdom - is, therefore, fundamental.

88. Their missionary service is seen as a community project and not as a personal one. This requires a formation to live and work as a community, either within a CLM group or with the Comboni missionaries and other pastoral agents (apostolic community), in the context of programmes of the local church.

Missionary dimension

89. The CLM are available for missionary service in the world, according to the charism of Daniel Comboni, *among those peoples or groups of people not yet or only inadequately evangelised* (RL 13; cf. 15).

90. In some provinces there are, apart from the CLM, other Comboni lay groups in support of this project and for missionary promotion at local level, from where future CLM may come.

91. The lay missionary vocation is fulfilled through:

- Respect and openness to other cultures and the ability to adapt to their values, rhythm, customs and their community and religious expressions, etc.;
- Personal witness and a life of faith, together with the Christian community; the missionary animation of the local church and the formation of local pastoral agents;
- Professional work at the service of human promotion; a socio-political commitment for justice and peace and the formation of local professional cadres.

Comboni dimension

92. The CLM become part of the Comboni family through knowledge of the Founder, the identification with his charism and spirituality, and concretely through:

- The preferential option for the least;
- Community life;
- Close collaboration with the local or provincial Comboni community.

93. The General Chapter requests the provinces to assess and - if necessary - revise their CLM programmes. Each province may establish further criteria and principles for receiving and sending CLM and make them known to the whole Institute.

94. The “Laity Committee” established by the former General Council should be restructured and enriched with other lay people and Comboni missionaries. It may go on with the task spelled out in the letter of the General Council of 6th. January 1994.

97. Alongside the difficulties there are also new opportunities awaiting:

- A growing sense of missionary responsibility among the laity;

104. The mission promoter at various levels:

- 104.5** Integrate our lay collaborators in the mission promotion initiatives, so that we respond more effectively to the demands made on us and at the same time ensure greater continuity.

CHAPTER ACTS XVI GENERAL CHAPTER 2003

B) The Church context

10. On the positive side we would point to committed lay groups and movements in the social and ecclesial fields, the growth of new forms of ministry, the involvement of women and youth, and a commitment to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

12. A good number of Catholics, pastors, consecrated persons and lay people, are becoming more aware of their prophetic and missionary vocation. They pay attention to the cry of the poor, a special *theological locus* and *the suffering face of Christ*; making a clear option for them, they become involved in JPIC activities. Thus the Church becomes a people that is messianic, paschal and missionary.

42. Comboni's *Plan* and our tradition are the principal sources of our missionary methodology. Taking inspiration from these and always working as a community to make Jesus Christ and his Kingdom present:

42.3 We work in the local Church in collaboration with all the agents present, according to the diverse charisms and ministries: clergy, religious Institutes, lay people, organisations and movements that are committed to fostering human dignity;

Human development projects

50. Teams of Brothers engaged in human development projects must be encouraged. They must be one of the priorities when assigning Brothers, especially for the first time, while taking into account the profession of each of them.

Projects will fit the following criteria:

50.3 In line with Comboni tradition, they must be open to collaboration with other local and missionary forces, especially CLM;

In the Comboni community

99. Various ministries interact in a complementary manner in the apostolic community.

99.3 "*The ministry of CLM is a sharing in the missionary activity of the Church according to the charism of the Founder*" (cfr. CA '97, No. 83). Motivated by their faith in Christ and their belonging to the Church, they collaborate from within in the transformation of the secular realities through the values of the Kingdom of God (cfr. CA '97, No. 87).

We collaborate in their promotion and formation, and we help them to achieve greater self-sufficiency.

In the ecclesial community

100. *In the ecclesial community*

100.3 Along the same lines, we must promote more decisively the local structures that train laity and pastoral agents for an increasingly professional participation in evangelisation and human development.

D) Missionary Animation

105. Through MA, which has always been an integral part of our identity (cfr. CA '97, Nos. 95-106), we help the local Church to open out to the *ad gentes* missionary dimension, and we are instruments of communion and sharing among Churches (RL 72), as our Founder was right from the first.

105.7 In this sector there must be care to collaborate with missionary and vocational organisms, both diocesan and local, and to involve the laity as much as possible, both individuals and groups.

Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM)

125. We confirm the validity of the reflection and the proposals of the last Chapter regarding the CLM (CA '97, Nos. 82-94).

126. We express support to the central committee of the CLM in creating two pilot projects during the next six years, one in Africa and the other in America; and its proposal to call the fourth general assembly of the CLM in 2004.

CHAPTER ACTS: XVII GENERAL CHAPTER 2009

AN IDENTITY PROFESSED

C. Working Premises

5.6 We confirm our desire to be a "cenacle of apostles" (W 2648; 4088):

- c. we share the Comboni charism with the other members of the Comboni Family (Comboni Sisters, Seculars, CLM);

Identity and membership of the Institute

9. To reaffirm a sense of belonging to the Institute through memory of the past and prophecy today:

9.3 To favour communion and collaboration with the other members of the Comboni Family (the Sisters, the Seculars, CLM) and to share our charism with the laity.

Requalification and prophetic choices

62. Evaluation and requalification of our presence according to stipulated conventions.

62.4 Europe: frontier situations in the Church and society, MA, JPIC, immigrants, collaboration with the CLM and revision of material structures.

Missionary Animation

68 To renew our MA

68.1 MA places among its objectives the creation of networks of solidarity between Churches for the benefit of the needy, working with existing pastoral agencies, particularly with the laity.

D. Planning Guidelines and Action Plan

178. Taking care of elderly and infirm confreres

178.6 The collaboration of lay volunteers in caring for elderly and infirm confreres is already a very positive and much appreciated tradition. PCs should continue to favour and encourage it.

E. Action Plan

189. Over the next six years, the Circumscriptions where still there are no independent CLMs should do everything possible to favour their presence and formation.

The 14 PRIORITIES: MISSION

Assessment of our presence (no. 62)

5. Evaluation and requalification of our presence according to stipulated conventions.

5.4 Europe: frontier situations in the Church and society, MA, JPIC, immigrants, collaboration with the CLM and revision of material structures.

CHAPTER ACTS: XVIII GENERAL CHAPTER 2015

Extract from the minutes of the chapter where, one way or another, reference to the CLM or Comboni Family work is done.

PERSONS

34. We are called to re-discover the Comboni Family (MCCJ, CMS, CSM, CLM) as the charismatic place outside of which we will not be able to fully capture the prophetic intuition of Saint Daniel Comboni.

35. We acknowledge the journey travelled by the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) and we intend to continue accompanying their processes of formation, structuring and self-reliance which help to consolidate their identity as a Lay Family, that is Missionary and Comboni, at the service of the Mission. In this journey we base ourselves on the agreements made by the CLM themselves in each Circumscription and at the international level.

Operational indications

A. THE MISSION

44. Reflection upon, and revision of, our Commitments

44.14 The Chapter encourages new forms of communion in which the MCCJ, CMS, CSM and LCM, in full respect for their own identity, may live in Communities inspired by the charism of Comboni and the passion for announcing the Good News.

44.15 Moreover, the Chapter acknowledges the emergence of new forms of community life – inter-Congregational and open to lay people – as possible models of ‘communion in Mission’.

45. Evangelization and specific pastoral services

45.3 An important way to re-qualify our missionary presence is the option for specific pastoral services: inter-religious dialogue, JP/IC, education, health care, Mass Media, Missionary Animation, the urban apostolate, and the apostolate among indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, pastoralists, migrants, refugees and youth.

- These pastoral services are to be in line with the Continental priorities (CA '03, Nos. 43 and 50; CA '09, Nos. 62 and 63), shared among several Circumscriptions, and lived in broader collaboration on the inter-Provincial or Continental levels.
- In this manner, even if the number of Communities is reduced, by networking (with the Comboni Family, other pastoral agents, Organizations, reflection and research centres), we will be able to develop a specific pastoral presence.
- In addition to the specializations foreseen at the level of the Circumscriptions, it should be possible to share personnel and skills, and draw up plans of specialization at the inter-Provincial level.

C. RE-ORGANIZATION

Coordination of the Institute and the General Direction

46. The Chapter decides to unify the General Secretariates of Evangelization and Missionary Animation, and the Sectors of JP/IC and CLM into a single ‘General Secretariate for Mission’ headed by a General Secretary for Mission, who will work in a team effort with other Confrères according to the operational guidelines established to this end by the General Council.