

**REGIONAL MEETING AFRICA MADAGASCAR (RAFMA) FROM 25<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER**  
**TO 5<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023 AT SCOURMONT**

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### **PARTICIPANTS RAFMA 2023 SUPERIORS PRESENT**

|  |   |                      |
|--|---|----------------------|
| 1. Absent                                  | - | Koutaba              |
| 2. Dom Vedaste (Represented by Fr. Justin) |   | Mukoto               |
| 3. Dom John Bosco Kamali                   |   | Victoria             |
| 4. Dom Leonard Zibula                      |   | Kasanza              |
| 5. Dom John Chrysostom                     |   | Maromby              |
| 6. Dom Bonaventure                         |   | Bamenda              |
| 7. Dom Clement                             |   | Kokoubou             |
| 8. Dom Kevin                               |   | Awhum                |
| 9. Dom Augustine Bernard                   |   | Illah                |
| 10. Dom Marius Okoye                       |   | Nsugbe               |
| 11. Dom Étienne                            |   | Seychelles (Invited) |
| 12. Mother Elizabeth                       |   | L'etoile N.D         |
| 13. Mother Hortense Mituga                 |   | Claerte'Dieu         |
| 14. Mother Jane Cherotich                  |   | Butende              |
| 15. Mother Regina Nebo                     |   | Abakaliki            |
| 16. Mother Francesco                       |   | Huambo               |
| 17. Mother Anna Chiara Meli                |   | Mvanda               |
| 18. Mother Mary Angela                     |   | Ampibanjinana        |
| 19. Mother Philomena Kalimbanya            |   | Kibungo              |

## **GENERALATE**

1. Dom Bernardus Peteers      Abbot General
2. Dom Raphael                      Secretary of the Abbot General
3. Dom Emmanuel                  Council member of the Abbot General for 3 days
4. Mother Rachel                      Council member of the Abbot General

## **INVITED**

1. Dom Damien Joseph              Abbot of Scourmont (Hosting Monastery)
2. Mother Isabelle                      Abbess of Igny (for three days)
3. Mother Genevieve                  former Abbess of L'etoile N.D Now helping at  
Mvanda

## **SECRETARIES**

1. Justin Muzindusi (French Speaking)
2. Sr.Elizabeth Nakimbugwe (English Speaking)

## **DELAGATES**

1. Fr. Martin Kasanza
2. Sr. Gertrude Abakaliki

## **AGENDA for the opening day 25/102023**

Introduction

Welcome of the hosting monastery Dom Damien

Echoes from the last General Chapter

Conference of the Abbot General

Linguistic sharing

**25<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

## **OPENING**

At 9:30 the participants of the region of RAFMA assembled in one of the halls at the guest house of Scourmont Abbey. The president (Dom John Bosco) opened the meeting with a prayer. He gave some practical information on how the meeting will

proceed and there after proceeded to welcome the Superiors of RAFMA especially the new ones. He welcomed the Abbot General and the members of his council that were present (his secretary Dom Rapheal, Dom Emmanuel, Mother Rachel) Mother Genevieve from l'etoile N.D but now living in Mvanda. He used the opportunity to welcome other invited guests to this meeting. He welcomed Mother Francesca Abbess of Valserena (Pontifical Commissary of Huambo) who also gave a conference on abuses, Mother Isabelle of Igny and the delegates.

Dom John Bosco made a few remarks on the importance of the meeting, and thereafter, Invited the host, Dom Damiens to give a word of welcome. It was brief and then the president informed us that Dom Damiens will be with us throughout the meetings. On each given day there was a different program which would be on the notice board

At 10:00am the floor was opened to discuss the first topic on the Agenda. (evaluation of the last General Chapter). The Abbot General said it is important to hear the echoes from the superiors to help him and his council to make always a good preparation.

## **ECHOES**

A member commented on how the issue of closing the monasteries was treated with less sensitivity. Many Abbots and Abbesses whose monasteries were being closed were very sad, she remarked. There was no time to appreciate their service, they looked more humiliated yet they did a lot for their communities and the Order. Also the question of dismissing the brethren was raised.

Another asked is there a possibility of dealing with these closing monasteries prior to the General Chapter? She went on to say that some Abbots were really angry and felt not listened to. She got an impression that some were broken down.

There was great joy in this second part of the Chapter, for the successful election of the Abbot General.

It is difficult to evaluate a house report with different languages. Can it be that there is someone who has some knowledge about the community like the father Immediate?

Is it possible to change some of the members of the commission who have been so long on the same commission? This would help in the process of looking at a house with fresh mind and kill the monotonous mood.

Intervention from the above echoes by the Abbot General. First and fore most he said this last General Chapter was more for solving problems. On the issue of dismissal of the brethren this has changed he said. It is no longer for the Abbot

General to write to Rome but the individual member writes his/her wish, presents it to the local superior who then forwards it to the Abbot General and lastly who presents it to the Holy see.

Composition of the commissions: this has been always a problem of the past and is still going on. One thing is that there should be no Father Immediate together with the daughter house in the same commission, because this will affect the quality of expression and openness. This is not an easy job of selecting members of a particular commission. However, to show how complicated this is, even the last two who did the composition of these commissions said it is the last time. The problem remains that if you move one member it all collapses. The commission has the right to call anyone who has knowledge about the house dealt with. He also mentioned it's important to note that older members of the commission introduce the new ones and so this will help the commission on the continuity and growth of the community being dealt with. He also commented on the point raised about some Abbots appearing in more than three commissions. He said some have more daughter houses, that is why it happens that way, but he observed that, it's also good to pay attention to it.

## **Echoes**

A participant was impressed by the quality of sharing in both the General Chapter. Appreciation of the organisation of the whole process of the election. Although it was mentioned by another that some points that were dealt with in the assembly should have been moved to the confidential section of those responsible to do this.

The amount of time given on the question of formation, this showed how important this point was during the second part of the Chapter.

It was a nice experience to see chances given to the young members of the Order to share their experience of the Cistercian life of whom one was a member of RAFMA present with us in this meeting. Who thanked the Abbot General for having allowed them to be present and the trust he showed them.

**Commentary from the Abbot General;** he thanked the superiors for the good participation. He encouraged them to present more members who can do good service for the Order. He said you know your brothers and sisters, bring them forward. If need be to train them the Order is ready. He the (Abbot General) admitted that they would try next time to remove sensitive issues to the right section of confidentiality. On the subject of formation, he apologised that there were too many other problems to be attended to, so that the whole idea of formation was pushed off giving more time to those which were pressing. He mentioned that

formation this time was going to be discussed in the Central commission, giving concrete ideas of what to do, other than discussing its importance.

He also noted that the General Chapter is the highest governance of Order therefore, closure of a house is the business of the General Chapter. He hopes that the statute on fragile communities is clear. Also the General Chapter will take votes towards the suppression of the monastery. He ended on a sad note saying "this is a sensitive situation.

The Abbot General continued sharing on the urgency the Order has on trained personnel of our Order especially secretaries and translators. Because all hired personnel we need money to pay them. This money if we have our own would help our brothers and sisters in formation. He encouraged the superiors to forward names of people who can do this. The Order can invest in them by giving them good training and formation.

There was a suggestion that, could the minutes of the General chapter be put on cloud storage. But the Abbot General answered it takes more time to finish the minutes and this file is so big to be contained on the cloud storage.

11:20 am Wednesday

### **CONFERENCE OF THE ABBOT GENERAL**

The Abbot General began by saying I just want to share with you some important topics that can be helpful to you.

He reminded us of his circular letter which he wrote on the Solemnity of St Bernard to the Order. The issue of belonging to the Order. This has a specific context. After a year of experience, as the Abbot General of the Order and having travelled around all the monasteries of the Order, I made reflections on this issue of what does it mean to belong to the Order. Due to Covid-19 there were some raptures that is,

There was no visitation, the Father Immediate could not exercise his pastoral responsibility of visiting the daughter houses, even still the Abbot General could not visit especially RAFMA felt this impact. This feeling of isolation affected the principal of autonomy (governance, authority and formation). Isolation creates a feeling of being alone, no link from the outside. Now the Order is facing a lot of problems, communities are basing autonomy on wrong assumptions.

The Order has one hundred and fifty-eight (158) communities, but more than 40 percent of our houses have less than ten members. Even some have less than five members. Mostly these communities need this aspect of belonging to the Order. Even in these small communities the members close all possible connection. This

makes it had for the Abbot General to intervene in some situations. We are not made for being alone but we belong to each other. He added, even big communities need to belong, even if they don't need anything, personnel, etc a feeling of being better than others, this attitude doesn't make a community in the Order but a community besides the Order.

These two attitudes can be seen also in our communities. The fragile members our communities need to feel belonging other than being isolated. The healthy members should try to support the fragile members. We all belong to the Body of Christ the Church. Secondly we are all baptised members of the Church. We should be able to see all our brothers and sisters as full members of the community.

To express this point, during my trips to different communities I realized that some superiors lacked a full acting council, no financial committee even the Conventual Chapter was non-functional in this regard. There should be a full composed council of the major superior of three people, one selected by the community. He also noted that some people on the council of the Major superior have over stayed yet there is evolution in the community. This is lack of seeing that each member has a responsibility. He explained that the council is not just a college of people, friends of the Superior, but one which represents different voices of the community members.

In the life of the Order at this present moment, all regions have serious problems. We cannot say that our region is better than others. We only have to humble ourselves because we are all fragile in a sense. We share in the same suffering and joy. Though it differs from region to region. But we cannot be proud that my fragility is better than yours or my joy is better.

The Abbot General continued sharing that: elderly communities are so small that there is no life. In the coming years we shall have to close many he noted. It is a sad situation but if we face it with faith, it can bear fruit for the Order. It frightens all of us if we see communities closing one after another. But we should be grateful for those members who have given their lives in these communities. In the plans of God this is the time for the community to die and bear fruits, fruits that will endure.

He mentioned in RAFMA there are two houses in the process of closing for many years, that is Grandselve and Bellavista. This shows you how difficult it is to close a monastery. This is happening everywhere. It is in God's plan and in time. We should not judge.

I have been reading the visitation cards of recent and noted that there are so many absent brothers and sisters. Looking at the statistics the number of brethren living illegitimately with no proper reason is raising concern. If this is not well arranged according to Canon law, we are still responsible for them. It is important to note that

when they do something morally non-sensible, you are responsible. You are even still responsible for them when they are for studies, service of the order or other duties, please stay in contact with them because you are the superior.

How could you help these members of our community to be integrated once again to the community even those who have legitimately gone to take care of their parents? He answered;

They should regularly return to the monastery, those with permission (exclaustration) and after do not return, this is illegitimate! The Abbot General gave a simple example of a person going to take care of his sick parents and has 3 years of exclaustration, and then all of a sudden they die within three months, do they stay home or the reason of their being home is finished? If they stay at home, this is illegitimate.

The law has changed and we have to follow the right way. As superior you have the obligation to go and look for him/her. You have to come in contact and invite her back to the, community, or to another institute or if the worst happens to dispense him/her it's a duty.

He explained the procedure of dispensation. 'one has to write to the Holy Father directly, give the letter to the Abbot/Abbess, who proceeds and presents it to the Abbot General, who forwards it to the Holy Father and finally the Holy See makes decision. In case he/she refuses, then, start the process of dismissal asking help from the Abbot General and his council. In case you have no idea where the person is, they are dismissed by the very fact of their illegitimate absence. It is your responsibility therefore to make a declaration and the Holy See confirms it.

He said; if the members have to belong to the Order it's better for them to follow the rules of the Order, and if not, help them to live than have empathy.

Finally, I want to talk about formation. It is time now to come up with concrete ideas of how to do this, because we are all convinced about this. It is high time to find measures to help in formation. Some communities are creative and yet some do not even have access to creativity, some have no energy to do anything. Therefore, we need each other to look for good measures. I acknowledge that because of all other problems I did not give time to this issue. Therefore, when the Central commission meets in December online to discuss about this point of formation, we just need to speak about measures and not importance. What are the needs? What do we need to meet these measures? Look inside the Order, search for topics of dialogue etc

I also inform you that the central secretary for formation will be changed during the second half of next year. One of my desires is that the central secretary for formation should be based in Rome so that she/he fulfils this responsibility well. So



that he/she is in touch with the Abbot General and committed to the work of formation for the entire Order. This will improve I hope the work pertaining to formation in the Order.

### **Wednesday afternoon 25-10-2023**

Questions and clarifications that were On the Abbot Generals sharing.

Is the question of absent brethren not just for Europe?

The Abbot General answered it's a general problem for the whole Order. He said statistically about 258 members are absent from their monasteries. This problem of difficult brethren has history traced in the Rule of St. Benedict. Therefore, pastoral care should be applied but not simply throwing them out of the community. You should be creative, take it as a reality that it is not your problem but that the brethren have a problem. Because of this very reason that is why we have asked a white father to give a conference to the new superiors, on how to deal with conflicts. It is not a solution either to send them away to other monasteries, but a responsibility.

There should be a good discernment on vocation. This is very crucial in our communities. It is better to make a good discernment before than afterwards. But are we learning anything from these experiences when we have not made good discernment? He asked.

The Abbot General gave more clarification on the issue of a sense of belonging and economy. Are we able to share and visit the Website OCSO, history of the Order etc. We all need this. We have a biological sense of belonging to our families and so we need to change from this aspect of family to the community and through the community to the Order.

In case of grave mistakes, the superior needs to consult his/her council before making any decision. Having a good council can help you to make the right decision. We are not all knowing, and so our brothers and sisters can help us. Help also can be from the Father Immediate. And there should be enough proof before making any conclusion. It is unjust to send a brother/sister away without having enough proof.

He also said 10% of the brethren are leaving illegitimately. Therefore, there should be prudence on the side of the superiors. This will help to avoid groups and clicks or bringing division and hurting members.

A superior should talk about this with a spiritual guide, he/she can give some distance to the brother. Our absent brethren are more of seeking their rights than doing their obligations right.

**How could this issue of members leaving illegitimately outside the community be reduced?**

The local superior has to do first her duty helped by the Abbot General and his Council. He concluded by saying its worrying situation but I do not like to traumatize you, but rather to sensitize you to look for possible solutions.

**In the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> October at 16:40pm**

The group went into linguistic sharing. The three topics to be shared upon

- 1. Isolation (belonging to the community and the Order)**
- 2. Solidarity**
- 3. Formation**

**Question 1.** Belonging to the Order gives us identity

- We need not to live anyhow, but by living within the umbrella of the Order in communion.
- Leaving our constitutions as members of the Order and leaving out our patrimony
- Our life is Cenobitic and therefore we should try to avoid living individualistic lives, but remain humble and docile to the teachings of the Abbot.
- Belonging to the Order is first of all to have a sense of belonging to the community, to love the brethren and one's community and then this will be transferred to the Order at large.

**Question 2.** Absent brethren.

- superiors have to exercise their pastoral care in a loving way
- members who have problems should be helped to regain their sense of belonging than throwing them out.
- efforts should be made to bring back the absent brethren.
- we should know the motives of such desires as, need to go to study, problems with superiors, desire for priesthood..... this could be the beginning of crisis in one's vocation and therefore attention should be given to such members.

## Formation

- Members shared that we should be careful with those we entrust with this charge and verse vasa (those we admit in formation)
- our communities should be formative
- we should have good formators
- there should be good discernment on candidates before admission.
- there should be formation committee to assist the formator and the superior in this work
- the community should be one and not divided because this will affect those in formation.
- Encourage participation in the experiential program.

When the groups shared their views in the bigger group the Abbot General commented as follows:

Offer is still available for RAFMA, to study in Rome and I would be happy to have some members of RAFMA staying in Rome for studies, more especially if two nuns can. We need intellectual formation for the nuns as well. Covid-19 broke this link but we hope it will start again. Do not send people with problems for studies he commented. It's good to note that this offer is for both monks and nuns of our Order.

In Rome we have St. Anselmo a monastic institute. Mother Francesca of Valserena intervened saying there is a permanent monastic formation programme online, every semester to foster ongoing formation.

**NB She has sent the link and I have already forwarded it to the superiors for consideration.**

The Abbot General noted that some communities have problems with connection. That is why I have a strong feeling that the central secretary should reside in Rome. We have to use the few chances we have though not many. We already have two nuns of our Order following this programme.

I here you all struggling for good intellectual formation but surprisingly none of you is talking about formation on prayer. We should become schools of prayer since this is our number one priority.

It was such an enriching afternoon with the interaction with the Abbot General.

26<sup>th</sup> of October 2023,

Before the meeting could start, the president reminded the superiors, that when making interventions on the house reports, we need to stick to the main points because at the end we shall review them in general.

Mother Regina was the co-ordinator. She invited the group for prayer and made a few announcements, concerning travel arrangements. On the agenda of the day was

### **READING OF THE HOUSE REPORTS.**

They were read in this order

1. **Mukoto (represented by Fr. Justin)** as Dom Vedaste could not come because of the political situation in the country and around the monastery. After reading the floor was open for interventions.

The community was thanked for the courage they have shown by welcoming the refugees in the monastery and continuing to leave the monastic life on the same spot. It is a challenge and we hope that this will not last for ever. It is not easy to live the monastic life to the full in such an environment, it is also a danger to silence but we hope and trust that you will find other ways. **Dom Damiens** commented who is the father immediate of Mukoto.

**Mother Anna Chiara** from Mvanda said, Mukoto became father immediate during the last General Chapter for Mvanda, Kasanza and Koutaba, but because of the situation this pastoral responsibility has not yet been exercised but we remain in communion by praying for them.

**Dom Leonard asked**, we have to strengthen our brothers of Mukoto but for how long will these refugees stay? This is a political situation we have no concrete answers.

**Fr. Justin** answered the question, will the situation get better? In the beginning it was not easy for us to welcome refugees. But now our pastures have been turned into refugee camps. So that we have back our Church and the guesthouse for a normal monastic life, this has however affected our milk production and cheese. Because the cows do not have enough grass for pasture.

The Abbot General spoke last and was touched by how the community witnesses to monastic life even in this situation. The community of Mukoto gives an example to the Order for living out monastic life joyfully in such a situation. This was an

encouraging remark from the Abbot General. He asked Fr. Justin to convey our gratitude to the community.

He also said he has tried to be in touch with the Decastry, to bring their attention to the community to see if they can help. Yes, we have to do anything to bring about the attention of those responsible.

## **2. Clarte-Dieu (read by Mother Hortanse)**

Interventions: this community too is in the Republic of Congo

Dom Emmanuel Counsellor of the Abbot General asked a question; what can we do? Individually we should ask ourselves what is the quality of our monastic life we who live in easier situations as regards to our brothers and sisters leaving in war zones. They have more or less similar situations of fear.

## **3. Maromby (read by Dom Chrysostom)**

Interventions:

In the house report read, the members reacted to the big number of 25 postulants and wondered, those in formation are more than the solemnly professed how will this be done? If the economy of the community is fragile they asked how will you support the foundation?

**Dom Chrysostom** answered we make wine and it is promising if only we organise ourselves well. In formation we need more help and support to form these postulants.

**The Abbot General** commented on the whole situation of Maromby saying two Council members were sent to make a visitation. Because there is a lot of confusion with this foundation (Seychelles) but also about the size of the community. There are ambiguities in the number of the solemnly professed rising from 18 to 27 in shortest possible time. During casting of votes the community did not consider the members in the foundation. Therefore, the votes cast were null and invalid. There was need to consider all the canonical votes of the present brothers in Maromby and Seychelles. However, he noted that the community is full of life. He added as regards to visitation, that it is still one community not two.

## **4. Seychelles (foundation of Maromby) read by Dom Etienne**

Interventions:

**Dom Emmanuel** intervened on the question of the brothers of Seychelles, to send the important data in order to include it in the Eulenchus.

**The Abbot General** explained; when you become foundation, you still remain dependant to the founding house.

**Mother Regina** asked, if the foundation is not capable of supporting the foundation what will happen? The Abbot General answered, that's the problem we are facing here.

**Dom John Bosco** asked wouldn't the problem of finding visas for the brothers in Sychelles affect the economy of the community since the majority would be foreigners. In conclusion the Abbot General said Maromby will need and extraordinary visitation in order to clarify the situation.

## **5. Kasanza (read by Dom Leonard)**

interventions

**Dom Chrysostom** asked what are you thinking as the second income? To open up a shop in the town because it is difficult to sell anything to the local people since they are very poor. Secondly to consider a bakery and growing crops, but this will require machinery.

**Mother Angela** which kind of products do you wish to sell if going to the town takes 8 hours about 108km far away?

**Dom John Bosco** made an observation, the more the monastery is isolated geographically, the harder it becomes to run any business or formation.

**Dom Leonard** asserted that the land is very poor and arid about 8000 acres, as well as the people. Basically making a leaving considerably impossible. Yet all these poor people depend on the monastery for sustenance.

**Dom Bernard Augustine** asked, doesn't this activity of community meetings every day affect other community activities? It is the short chapters we make every day to arrange community work, which strengthens our unity Dom Leonard replied.

Is there a grave reason why the brothers were asked to distance from the community? Yes, they admitted they were wrong they were asked to do so.

The Abbot General asked, has the community ever thought of relocating? If the land is poor, how can the community go on forever living in this place?

There were many other questions concerning the future of this community, whether they have even understood their situation, or to consider the future when

they will not be strong and vibrant what will happen? Even when the help that comes from other sources will stop what will happen?

The solution is relocating. The community has to have courage to act. It is not easy but this is the only possible solution.

General observation, before roads were good but now due to the political situation the infrastructures are in a sorry state which affects creativity. It was also observed that all our communities located in DRC share similar problems.

## **6. L'etoile Notre Dame read by Mother Elizabeth**

Interventions

**Fr. Justin** thanked this community for their generosity. Giving members to other communities for support. He asked why not a foundation? The answer needed no thinking for Mother Elizabeth; because Mvanda is a foundation of L'etoile ND. Though we could not manage to give them the support they needed, that is why we asked Vitorchiano to take over this responsibility.

**Dom Chrysostom**, also commented that, this community is very industrious according to what we saw and experienced when we were for the Regional meeting in 2019. This is very good he encouraged.

**Dom Emmanuel** commented; because there was an issue, the need to re-educate our brothers and sisters on the use of social media. A brother calling his Father Immediate for intervention which disrupted the whole decision making.

To sum it up all the **Abbot General** was impressed by the remark made by Dom Chrysostom, and he also thanked Mother Elizabeth for accepting to go and be a co-visitor with Dom Emmanuel to Kasanza. He encouraged the superiors to accept responsibility when called upon to assist especially in visitation. This will help you gain experience in this work.

## **7. Bamenda read by Dom Bonaventure.**

Interventions

**Dom Kevin** asked what is the political situation in Cameroon? Are there tensions still going on between the Anglo and French?

Another question was why is it some brothers do their studying from the monastery and another sent out doing the same studies?

**Mother Francesco** said, talking about pontifical commissary, am one of them. It is like a grave sin to be one. she asked what was the problem? Is it resolved?

**Dom Bonaventure** answered that tensions are still there between the political powers. About the brother sent out to study, he said it is for the benefit of the community and the brother. Because in the recent years has been working so hard for the community and he is a promising person.

**Finally, the Abbot General**, asked what was the trick behind the calmness of the community? He also answered the question of Mother Francesca saying, the system of pontifical commissary had affected the paternity of this community that is why, the community was helped and it was time for a change but also a big risk. The community was warned strongly that it either changes or it is finished. The Abbot General was happy to hear that regular work in the community was resumed.

## 7 Kokoubou (read by Dom Clement)

### Interventions

There were a few remarks made especially about the period of time spent after temporary profession. The Abbot General said he will explain this when he comes to explain the changes in the Constitution.

**Dom Leonard** asked about the change of habit (they were putting on a grey shirt with hood and trouser). Dom Clement said, we changed because also RAFMA asked and it was always a question why and not the white habit and black scapular.

Also he was asked to explain how the guests will benefit from the readings of the refectory. 'this will be done in the new construction of the refectory and in case of confidentiality the community not to forget to switch of the microphone.

## 8. Butende (read by Mother Jane)

### Interventions

**Dom Augustine Bernard** was touched by the good news of a helpful Father Immediate. He said it's good to hear such and congratulated Dom John Bosco and he encouraged him to keep it up!

**Mother Rachel** asked what was the community trying to do in terms of economy; Mother Jane replied planting coffee and poultry. All these are at their initial beginnings.

**Mother Elizabeth** asked to give more explanation about the sick sister absent from the community. She gave a brief history of the beginning of the sickness of this member which was fanned off by Covid, this sister was advised to go home to be



helped by her sister a nurse by profession, who has actually helped and before our coming I got information that she will return soon at the beginning of November.

**Lastly M. Angela** asked, have you already planted some coffee? Yes, she replied.

### **9. Huambo (read by Mother Francesca Pontifical Commissary)**

Interventions:

**Dom Kevin** asked, what can the Order say about requesting direct help from the Holy see? The Abbot General answered it is not the way but it was the situation at the time.

**Mother Jane** asked? What is your experience of the community? Mother Francesca said she I am a new superior and I have more experience in formation. But it was normal for me to do what I was supposed to do. But also I thank my community for accepting to take in the young sisters from Soke for formation when even they hardly knew a word in Italian.

**Mother Philomena** asked, does the community still do perpetual adoration? No, only during the time of the Offices.

**Fr. Justin** asked, how many sisters are present in the community? Five sisters are living in the community now following the regular life.

**Mother Hortense** asked, because of what has been going on in the community is this the reason why they have changed the name from Huambo to Soke? No it's because the renaming of the regions after the war.

**The Abbot General** said almost at the end, how can we help the community of Soke? It is to support them with prayers so that normal life can be resumed with good formation

### **10. Mvanda read by Mother Anna Chiara**

Interventions:

**Dom John Bosco** asked, could you tell us more about the sister who was baptised? The level of Christian formation for many young people is very low. The three young girls who came to us, they had only received catechism and have never seen a priest. Therefore, we organise Christian formation for them before they should join the community. This will take them longer time before they realise their vocation.

**Dom Leonard** affirmed the above situation in which also those who come to them, since Kasanza is in the RDC. Even some who come have not been practising any religion.

**Mother Hortanse** exclaimed, am wondering to hear that novices are going out to participate in meeting? Are we allowed to go to such meetings? M. Anna Chiara said, this comes once in many years, but also it gives us chance to testify to monastic life and its one way of vocational promotion.

Some said in conclusion to this that it's upon the discernment of each superior to see what is necessary and important to attend.

**Mother Jane** asked the Abbot General, could you please give a comment on this issue? The Abbot General said, it is import that there is a good relationship with the Ordinary of the diocese, because we belong to the diocese. It is good to see which opportunities are there, that bring about this expression well, of course not everything. I give an example of attending the Chrism Mass, because this the day when all the priests of the diocese are together around their Bishop.

### **11. Awhum read by Dom Kevin**

Interventions:

**Dom Clement** thanked Dom Kevin for the good report and asked him to explain more about the coal mines. The mines are at the back of the monastery, they use dynamite to break the coal, which has affected the buildings of the monastery. We have raised complaints about this but being a private entrepreneur they have more say than us but we are still trying we haven't given up. Because this is not only affecting the buildings but also polluting the air which will affect our health.

**Mother Francesca** asked, does the persecution of Christians which is going on in Nigeria affect our monasteries? Not really for the moment.

**The Abbot General** wondered that he hadn't heard in the house report about Akokwa. Dom Kevin replied, Akokwa is a pre-foundation of Awhum. At present there are seven brothers and they are doing well. It is our desire that Akokwa be recognised as a foundation. I thought to present this to RAFMA in the regional meeting before the GC of 2025.

**Mother Jane** asked to be explained about the silos. The silos are for storing maize grain for future use. When the maize is out of stock the prices often are inflating. This will help us to sell maize at the best price.

### **12. Nsugbe read by Dom Marius**

Interventions:

**Dom John Bosco** started off by making some clarifications in the last paragraph of the report. He explained Bamenda is the Mother House of Nsugbe, therefore, it is the founding house, and now that they are back with in the structures of the Order.

**The Abbot General** too, said we have to be careful about the use of words. In other words, he too explained the link between the two monasteries. He said: if the superior of the founding house which is Bamenda, then Bamenda has the first right. If there are other reasons, then the superior of Bamenda can delegate another Father Immediate for Nsugbe.

**Dom Clement** asked, will the water project do well? Yes, together with other projects

### **13. Abakaliki read by Sr. Gertrude (delegate) for M. Regina**

Interventions:

**Fr. Justin** asked Mother Regina to give a little history about Abakaliki and M. Justina. Mother Regina gave a brief history about M. Justina and Abakaliki and how she struggled to make the foundation. She was not able to leave in Nigeria because of ill health. Shortly she died of cancer. The community has thought of bringing back the remains of M. Justina and the founding house also accepted by vote. Now we are in the process.

**Dom John Bosco** asked, could you explain more about selling of poultry eggs freezing? The Central Bank of Nigeria introduced a policy on cash based transactions. This aims to reduce the amount of money (physical cash) circulating in the economy so as to encourage more electronic based transactions. This affected us very much because people didn't have money to purchase goods. But now life has turned to normal.

### **14. Illah by Dom Augustine Bernard**

Interventions:

**Dom Leonard** asked, where is Dom Ogechukwu? He explained, He is taking one-year sabbatical at the monastery of Koningshoven Tilburg in the Netherlands.

**Dom Augustine** also explained about Fr. Abraham. He was the founder of Illah and a founder of Matiya Mulumba Knights. He wanted to spread monastic life in Nigeria but he couldn't because of poor health. The cause of his beatification has begun by the Knights and for us is to support them with prayers.

### **15. Kibungo read by M. Philomena**

Interventions:

**Dom Clement** Thanked Mother Philomena for the brief report but very clear.

**The Abbot General** in reference to the word *punctuality* appearing in the house reports wondered what could be the reason? Mother Philomena explained, it is because the sisters are so much taken up by the work and it becomes difficult to respond to the bell.

### ***A summary of different views on improving punctuality***

- One shared that we keep reminding the brothers about this.
- We have made a regulation, when you come late you kneel in front of the sanctuary facing the community.
- Another said, we ring the bell fifteen minutes earlier etc.

In conclusion the **Abbot General** said now here is work for the region, to enforce the life of the community to live the monastic life

### **16. Ampibanjinana read by M. Angela**

Interventions:

**Dom Clement** requested for more explanation about those candidates. M Angela said: our candidates have no secondary education and it is because also their parents cannot afford. The community pays for them.

**The Abbot General** asked, what is their age? They are 22 and 23 she answered.

**Dom Boneventure** asked, I see you have many activities, do you have workers? She answered, yes six of them. They work alternatively. Though this is somehow a problem because the workers are at unusual time still in the house which affects the monastic environment. We hope to build a bigger bakery shop.

### **17. Victoria read by Dom John Bosco**

**Dom Clement**, thanked Dom John Bosco for the report and asked in the economy am more interested about the bamboo, could you tell us a bit more? Dom John Bosco explained, it is a new project sponsored by our mother house. The idea was got from a Dutch man who leaves in Ghana and is doing the same. The community has thought about it, it's not only for improving our economy but also for conserving the environment. We hope to build a small factory for making paper from the bamboo trees instead of just cutting them for sale. The project is at its initial stage.

**Fr. Justin** asked who is the brother in Cameroon? It is Fr. Dominic who is in Koutaba helping as long as it takes.

**Dom Etienne** asked, who is leaving in the former monastery in Kenya? It is a diocesan congregation of the Spiritans and the land is under the care of the Episcopal conference of Kenya.

## **Any news from Koutaba?**

The President said; Fr. Etienne was looking for visas. The Abbot General gave this information that, the Pontifical Commissary (Fr. Henri) is doing well and having a difficult task for this community. After the GC 2022 he had to send away two brothers and also other three are yet to be sent away. One was to be sent to Mukoto and another to Kokoubou but this hasn't been possible yet.

## **General observations in the house reports**

- Enforcement in the area of formation
- Punctuality at the Offices of Terce and Sext
- Economy in general to be improved or on the way to improvement.

**27<sup>TH</sup> October 2023**

Dom John Bosco co-ordinated the meeting and started with an opening prayer, made a few announcements; Mass tomorrow Friday will be in English, main celebrant the secretary of the Abbot General Dom Raphael. It is a day of fasting, praying for peace in Israel, Palestine and all other parts of the world On the agenda of the day was the presentation of M. Francesca of Valserena, on Abuses. And then group discussions.

## **PRESENTATION OF MOTHER FRANCESCA, THE ORDER IN THE FACE OF THE WOUND OF ABUSE (DOC.TEXT see Appendix)**

Mother Francesca began by pointing out some general elements.

Power

Sexuality

Conscience/psychological

What is the reason for these problems? Do they exist? What is the breeding ground for these problems?

**Below are some answers:**

***Sexual revolution***

***Moral decline***

***Sexual freedom***

***Social context***

## ***Lack of proper Anthropological knowledge***

### ***Crisis of faith.***

Mother Francesca asked does this echo in your life?

Dom John Bosco answered, it would be very difficult to give an answer to this, especially on the abuse of power.

**Mother Hortense** added there is a difference about authority in Africa and Europe.

She answered (M. Francesca), it is the difference of history but the reality is the same for both Africa and Europe. There is a need to speak about it. This is very important she said. We need to live in fraternal communion.

Another echo was when people do not get what they want, they call it abuse of power.

**M. Francesca** answered, also the superiors are vulnerable, not only the young, old and sick.

Another echo in form of question. All these abuses are true he affirmed. but is it not for condemning or a way getting money from the Church?

In summary this contains briefly the message in the text.

## **Afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

We started with linguistic sharing. In the English speaking group Dom Kevin

Opened the sharing and introduced the theme. He paused a question to guide this sharing. These forms of abuses are they common in Africa (let us share our opinion)

### **The following are some of the responses**

- ❖ These abuses do exist and like the abuse of power, its two way. All categories are vulnerable in the sense and we have to take extra caution to weigh our words.
- ❖ Some superiors can abuse power by acting all knowing, like lord. Therefore, we have been open to listen all members of the community regardless of their status.
- ❖ It was also noted that retired superiors can suffer abuse because of the way they treated members, therefore it is good to treat people well so as to enjoy our days when our time of service is ended.
- ❖ We have to go back to our African roots of showing respect to the elders. In our situations today the young do not respect the elders and they feel offended and actually abused. The moral values have been turned upside down.

- ❖ We need to know why these abuses are happening today in our monasteries, mainly because we feel disconnected or isolated in a sense from the source of life (Church, Order and community)
- ❖ To devise means of how we can revive our spiritual life. Being mindful of our monastic life and values
- ❖ There is spiritual emptiness, watered prayer life and the like
- ❖ All people can be vulnerable regardless of the age. The community members are vulnerable and the superior too. Both need to be listened to and helped.
- ❖ On formation: Many people have been abused in our times and these are the ones we receive in our monastery. Therefore, absolute attention must be given in the area of vocation discernment. So that they receive good spiritual foundation.

### **Some suggestions were made to avoid such situations of abuse**

Candidates going through psychological tests before entrance to know their motives

Another psychological test before solemn vows and ordination

Superiors were encouraged to pray more so as to recharge their spiritual life.

To educate our brothers and sisters on the use of social media.

Mother Francesca added, we should avoid the sin of accusing generations, saying things like; Our time was better or we are better than them. Our duty remains that of bringing awareness to the community about these abuses in the Church at large.

The members also reacted to the question of trans-gender. In general, these should not be admitted in our communities.

### **28<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

Mother Regina was the co-ordinator, on the agenda was the sharing Dom Armand on Mothers Immediate, M. Anna Chiara on finances and of Dom Clement from Kokoubou on the role of the Region.

### **MOTHERS IMMEDIATE by Dom Armand**

Summary of the conference

The last General chapter posed this question of Mothers Immediate, and the Chapter asked the Law of Commission to prepare a document. There has been a document sent over the last year to the communities of the Order.

The last GC studied at length this theme of the mothers immediate and someone said, do not move very fast, because mothers immediate do not exist in our law. The Law of commission studied this issue.

This is not a canonical office to give to another person but rather one of the important elements of the role of the Abbot to be responsible of the community and a collegial responsibility in the nun's community. If there was affiliation in nun's monastery, but unfortunately this does not exist. It would be good to find another terminology (Pastoral Assistant) other than mothers immediate. It is also wrong to have an Abbess, exercising paternity for another community. This will be worked upon during the next GC (2025).

### **Dom Armand gave a history of the Orders legislation**

When St. Benedict was writing this Rule, he did not think about the link between monasteries. He was often staying as Abbot of 2-3 monasteries. The first group to be created was a link with Clunny. This link suppressed all other monasteries. This meant that all monks made their profession at Clunny. Citeaux was the first to create this link in our Order for all the monasteries and power was collegial (General Chapter). Filiation is another basic element in the structures of the Order. It is a relationship between two or more communities of the Order, and not individual persons. Therefore, the Father Immediate has the pastoral responsibility over his daughter houses. Till Vatican Council II the nuns were under the men. Decisions were made by men in the GC. There has been a good relationship between the two.

It was in 1990 when the meetings of the women became Chapters. The General assembly was held in two different rooms but same place, and they each voted separately. It was in the nature of the Order that one Chapter(women) couldn't make decision. It was not until 2011, that a decision was made to have a single Chapter of both Abbots and Abbesses exercising the same power and authority, voting at the same time.

The situation of the Mothers Immediate is having the same principles as Superior Ad nutum. There was a change in the statute and they were recognised as Major Superiors. If the superior is having many filiations, for example, and he lacks the capacity to take responsibility for the filiation, then he delegated his powers as Abbot to another. It is good to note the use of words here. We often say "**delegated Father Immediate**", but it is right to say, "**delegate of the Father Immediate**". He explained more, if you also want an Abbess to exercise this she is the Delegate of the Father Immediate, than to say Mother Immediate. We have already four Abbesses doing this in our Order (Mother Joan of Witland, Mother Bridget of Tautra, Mother Pascale of Arnhem, and Mother Catherine). It is important to note that this responsibility is for some time, because the founding monastery becomes the Father



Immediate of the foundation. It will be the responsibility of the next GC in 2025 which will help to change this for the already existing monasteries. Better to find the right terminology, instead of Mothers Immediate, possibly to use Pastoral Assistant?

Dom Armand also explained the role of the Father immediate. He has the pastoral responsibility over his daughter houses. Therefore, there is no juridical impediment to change from the nuns houses the same as it is in men's houses. so the founding house becomes automatically Mother Immediate. This creates a link between the nun's monasteries. At the moment there is no juridical link when a nun's monastery becomes autonomous. This will help to give more responsibility to the nuns and to lighten the work of the Abbots. In order for this to happen there should be juridical changes for both nuns and monks. Points for consideration are in cases of visitation, election, chaplains of the nuns etc

### **There were some questions and interaction**

Can a Counsellor of the Abbot General be a Mother Immediate? Nothing can impede this but there would be a conflict of interest for an individual (what is important). A Counsellor of the Abbot can be elected as Abbot or Abbess but the Abbot can have a reason to refuse this.

The Decastry want us to be under Cor orans, in the area of formation. Is it necessary to work so hard for solutions when the decastry is taking us in another direction?

Can we have Cardinal protector? In our order we have the Procurator who works hand in hand with the Holy See.

There were many other questions leading to the same answer of the role of the Father Immediate.

In his own opinion Dom Armand said for him he is not for Mothers Immediate, but the Order to delegated more responsibility to women. Because if we go in this direction it means that we should have the same structures. The Order has been moving forward since the second Vatican Council to greater unity. These terms are just words which do don't change anything.

### **Group sharing**

The group made some discussion and after having listened to Dom Armand they thought it's better to formulate votes

We suggest instead of Mothers Immediate, to delegate of Father Immediate

Change from Mothers Immediate to Pastoral assistant

We suggest to harmonize the structures

## **In the Afternoon was the presentation of the Financial report by M. Anna Chiara**

Mother Ann Chiara announced that this time I would like to pass on this responsibility to another person. She said since 2001 if not 2002 I was entrusted with this responsibility by the region. In turn I asked Mother Daniella, who was in charge of the accounts at the Generalate to assist me. She gave a brief history of the beginnings of the office and the account of the region.

It was in Koutaba when the Regional meeting was held in this monastery some years back that, this account was born during the time Dom Bernardo Olivera as Abbot General of the Order. He gave some of the funds to RAFMA (10,000 Euros) and to the region of Latin America as a gift; after having sold one of the monasteries of the Order. The purpose was to help the running of these meetings for the region and since then each community of the region has been contributing whether you know it or not. We began with a contribution of 50 Euros yearly, and at present we contribute 150 Euros. This common fund has helped to organise these meetings and emergencies since then.

Presently the account has 11,212 Euros she said at last.

questions were asked by the superiors and answers were general. Below are some of the questions

1. Do other regions have an account in the Vatican? **The abbot General** answered it is only RAFMA with such account.
2. Can we find another way or continue with the yearly contributions? **Mother Anna Chiara** said it is hard to find someone to donate us money on this account.
3. Could this account be transferred to any of the countries within the region?  
A member objected that this can be a great temptation to use the money. While another intervened saying it is impossible since there is a protocol to be followed when operating an account.  
Another said, for now it will not be kept in Nigeria.  
While another said, preferable it is safer in a European Bank. Considering the problem of hackers in our countries and more so safer with a religious organisation.
4. Why don't we do as other regions do in cases of travel? When there is need  
yes
5. How many communities asked for help this time and how many have asked other people? **The Abbot General asked**

**Mother Rachel** intervened saying there one or two superiors who have asked her if there would be a refund on what is spent on tickets and visas.

6. Who should then be the next treasurer? One said Mother Rachel, yet another the commission of Aid????
7. What is the nature of this work? **Mother Anna Chiara** answered, there is no work here it's just an office because those responsible are doing it well.

**The abbot General** gave a final remark that the account should not be transferred to the care of the Commission of Aid. How could those in need contribute to their own needs? In case Dom Emmanuel is left in charge, then you have to ask (the president) to be given annual report.

This was such an intriguing topic which aroused questions of great interest and curiosity and am sure each one was contented. This will be reflected in the votes I suppose.

## **ROLE OF THE REGION (TEXT see Appendix)**

### ***Summary of some important points to remember from the presentation***

- *To stimulate communion in the geographical area*
- *Useful for the preparation of the Central Commission and the GC*
- *Provide opportunities to deal with questions of common interest*
- *Sharing our heritage on an international level of the Order*
- *Expression of communion and fraternal charity*
- *Addressing problems specific to the Region*
- *It is an open theme for the next GC in 2025*

*Dom Clement gave his personal opinion in the life of the Order today concerning the role of the Region.*

*Subsidiary, solidarity, formation and politics.*

*He made a final conclusion saying as a Region, we cannot help from speaking about politics because, when we talk of economy this is part and parcel of politics. He also mentioned that there is so much in our cultures that rhymes well with our Cistercian culture therefore it is good for us to live it and share it with the Order at large.*

## **sharing in the English speaking group on the role of the Region**

In the group discussions, all affirmed that the Region has a significant role to play and most importantly is to help in finding Father Immediate for individual communities, pastoral sharing amongst superiors of the same region and encouragement and finding possible solutions before the General Chapters concerning similar problems, this will help the Central Commission in the preparation of the GC and save time.

The Abbot General could bring to the attention of the president of the Region some points like for example those we have dealt with this meeting, to be discussed before the GC.

Regions to look among their regions to see competent brothers and sisters who can help to do economic visitation among others. Trusting our own brothers and sisters

Present list of people among our communities who can benefit the interests of the Order.

Is there a possibility of creating a sub-region within the region?

## **Abbot Generals contribution on the role of the Regions**

I would like to thank Dom Clement on the point he shared about subsidiary. The principle of subsidiary is that every decision on the lower level has to be taken on its level.

If we think of this in our communities, your sisters in the community are not children, they can make their own decision, and if you do not allow them to do this, then you are a dictator. In the Order, the decisions of the community are not to be made by the General Chapter or the Immediate or the Abbot General.

The Regions are involved in taking decision. For example, a Region can take a decision that a community cannot take novices. But here the principle of subsidiary is to consult the Superiors of the Region. The Father Immediate cannot do this either. In our Order, there are a lot of opportunities for the Region to do this before thinking of other structures.

There is also a problem of function, because not all Regions are functioning. It can be that the Region is small geographically, this is easy to organise but if the Region is big with cultural differences and language, it would be very difficult to organise.

Another thing some Regions are financially stable; they have all the finances they need while others do not have.

The first role of the Region is to prepare the General Chapter. Secondly is support each other in pastoral sharing. If a Region can meet once every year, this will be

easy to organise. If the Region meets only once every three years, this gives it a weaker voice (Region) in the Chapter.

If there can be restructuring of the Regions this will improve the quality of the participation and, my dream is that big Regions like RAFMA and others make sub-regions. This will help to facilitate the principle of pastoral sharing using one language. In these meetings we can know what the sub-region wants.

I give an example; it is important for RAFMA to help Kasanza. By creating a commission of aid, because the community needs help from the Order. It would be the role of the Region to help but the Region cannot help because of the situation and distance. This is a very challenging situation for me and the Council on how we can help this community. It is just an example to help you think.

This principle of the sub-regions is already in the Regions of CNE and ORLIENS

### **Reactions on the sharing of the Abbot General**

**Mother Regina;** I agree the geographical location of the monasteries is a problem. This meeting was to be in Madagascar in Africa but, we could not because of so many problems which would affect the attendance of Superiors. There is also this problem of having new superiors every time, whereby there is no continuation and then they have no idea of what was there. We keep discussing almost the same things.

**Mother Jane;** I am happy about this proposal of the sub-regions. But then when there is this need of organising formation, wouldn't this problem of transportation hinder the idea?

The Abbot General asked this question, do you like this principle? Then do not say that we lack means, because the means are there.

**Mother Francesca;** what can we do with the bomb? The Abbot General said let it explode. He went on and said, I have no power to make decisions but the Region can discuss about it.

**Mother Philomena;** it is true there is a problem of distance. The real problem is that of leadership and formation. We have to deepen our sense of belonging. I am also wondering if we are not operating at the level of politics in communities.

**Dom Chrysostom;** We have already tried to create a link between our communities in Madagascar and Soke so that we can share in formation and collaborating to share formators.

**Dom Bonaventure;** Can't a Region go to mission to help another? The Abbot General affirmed this is another role of Region. There is a community of our Order which has decided not to make any foundation, He explained. This decision was made in order to help. It is a vibrant community and they lacked space. This is another possibility. It could be a solution that may be instead of thinking of foundations we do this. This community gives a big a lesson to us. What they are doing is to revitalise the fragile community. In order to do this well you need to prepare both the community which is in need and the people you want to send. So that there are no expectations. In case there are communities which want to do this am happy to hear this news.

**Fr. Justin;** told the good example of the of the monks who were sent to Mukoto from Tamie. Not all the time that people can disappoint us but a good selection is very vital in this matter.

**Dom Damiens;** as an invited person from outside RAFMA, I realise that the Region is big and the distance is a problem. In the regard am in agreement with the principle of working in sub-regions. But I also react on the issue of the nuns or monks sent to help; There should be prior preparation for those to be sent, they may know that they have gone to learn how to help, this is very important.

He also added that I would be happy to have a member from RAFMA to join in our CNE meeting which is slated for March 11<sup>th</sup> – 16 2024 at Chimay. Everything will be catered for.

**Dom John Bosco;** liked this idea and of having another member from another Region to attend its meeting. This will help us to learn from each other. I was invited to REM but I could not make it since this meeting coincided with this of RAFMA.

**Mother Francesca;** also affirmed that when the Region is big the worker is slower while when the region is cut to sub-regions it makes the work easier. Therefore, we should make links that are helpful.

**Dom Chrysostom;** it is sad when a community closes but it would be good that the community in such a situation, to express its need for help. Because I have ever asked some superiors if I could send some brothers to help, and they didn't accept my offer.

**Dom Clement;** said that there is no secret but I give the example of my community, we had 6 juniors and we thought if they could go and help in the community of Bellefontaine and it was not accepted. But the reason was some 2 brothers had been sent to the same monastery and they were not of good example and even left the Order all together.

**Dom John Bosco**; thanked the Abbot General for bringing up this whole idea of the sub-regions. All along this has been a problem. But he commented that this should create a closer link and relationships among the communities of the same geographical location. If this does not work in this line also the whole idea of the sub-regions will not work.

**Mother Francesca**; asked that I come from a Region (REM) which is already organised, why should there be sub-regions?

**The Abbot General** answered in reply, these Regions are the future of the Order. He noted the Regions from Europe have more voice in the Order and the others follow. It is one Order! Space should be given also to other Regions to participate. I give an example of the Commission of Aid, there are 2 members on this Commission coming from the same Region. It is the fault of the Chapter, that there is no fair selection of representatives from other Regions.

**The Abbot General** commented on the closing monasteries, yes it is sad but we have to put into consideration that there is a time for everything. There is time to die in order to give life to others.

At the end of this interaction, the president of the Region added a detail, that all superiors should encourage their members to learn another language, French or Spanish. The Order needs people who can speak several languages.

**29<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

The President announced that this being a Sunday, we shall have only one conference by the Abbot General and a free afternoon. This was welcomed with joy.

There were a few announcements for our trip by Dom Damien to Orval, the time of leaving and emphasis was made about the departure time.

## **ABBOT GENERAL CLARIFYING CHANGES ON THE NEW TEXT OF THE CONSTITUTIONS FOR BOTH MONKS AND NUNS**

The abbot General introduced the Superiors into the new changes by saying a few words; because the decastry has made a new legislation for contemplatives mentioned in Vultum Dei Querere, and in Cor orans, we had to bring our constitutions within the new legislation. This would affect both because we are a single Order. Because Cor Orans did not accept the principle of a single Order in our case, the Law commission was asked to study the Constitutions since 2018 and proposed a lot of changes which we used in the last GC for votes.

In order not to lose that principle of single Order, it affected the constitutions of the monks. That is, the men have taken in a lot from Cor Orans, especially on the issue of the time spent in formation. According to Cor Orans all contemplatives of the Church should have 9 years of formation. There was a lot of reactions about this decision from the members of the Order about this decision and our GC asked the for dispensation.

Since then the Abbot General and his Council have worked hard with the Law Commission to correct and to change some mistakes in the text. This was done and presented to the Holy See and we had to wait for the response. The response came in April of this year and they had accepted the changes in the monk's Constitutions but refused that of the nuns. He stressed, **9 years of formation for nuns** remains 9 years! No further discussion, this is the personal wish of the Holy Father and it is final. We decided to leave that point of formation and move on with other points. We thanked the Decastry for their cooperation and in August we finally got an answer from the Decastry that most of our suggestions were accepted.

Also the Holy See had made some minor remarks on the statutes of foundation and fragile communities which also aroused a lot of reactions from the Canonist of the Order, because the Holy See cannot interfere although on the other hand it can if what has been presented is not in agreement with Cora orans. The abbot General said what I have now is a text of experiment. The Holy See also asked for this text in Latin, therefore we had to look for a translator who is busy in her final stages of completing the text in the coming week.

### **Below are some changes in the text of the constitutions:**

**Constitution 13.3** this has do with the principle of our life. Our Order is Cenobitic. From now, it will be in case someone want to go out of the community for more than a year, permission from the superior-consent of the Council and consultation of the Father Immediate before the decision is made.

**Constitution 29.** Separation from the world. There was a lot of discussions in the last GC because also there was a big difference with nuns. This has been amended. Now we have the same text for both monks and nuns.

It's good to mention here some of the types of enclosures that the church has he explained

- Papal enclosure
- Constitutional enclosure
- Monastic enclosure (which contains the 2 above).



We have the monastic enclosure which allows us to take care of our guest in a more hospitable way.

**Constitution 30 bis A&B.** this is a new constitution about the abuse of minors and the vulnerable. Here the Abbot General explained in depth the need to draw up a protocol for communities. This is a document prepared by the whole community in agreement to where and to what extent is the enclosure, who comes in, who is allowed to leave, how to deal with guests, can the brothers/sisters go in the guesthouse freely, do you receive minors, where do the monks leave, can they receive guests in their rooms? All this should be put on paper, discussed by the Council, brought to the Convetual and then declare this as a protocol to be observed by all.

This protocol can be shown to the visitor, and he or she will have to confirm that she has seen the protocol. This will help you safeguard the community and the individual members in case of abuse. This should be kept safely in the archives for reference. The Abbot General promised to send guidelines on this issue to help the communities to reflect together with their members on the values of monastic life, that is, enclosure, silence.... etc.

In the exchange of the Abbot General, he explained more about who are vulnerable. This differs from country to country. The vulnerable are those who are in a state of incapacity that they cannot defend themselves. This can be psychological or physical with no age limit. He gave an example of a novice in formation experiencing crisis in the formation process, he/she is vulnerable because she depends on another person for help. The aging in our communities are vulnerable, how do we take care of them? This topic is very broad.

**Constitution 34 (bis).** Appointment of a Pontifical Commissary. This is to do with the suspension of autonomy of a monastery. He told us for the moment we have 7 monasteries under this principle. All them have different situations. Here the responsibility of a Commissary is to find ways to revitalize the community if not, he/she must work towards its closure.

**Constitution 37B.** Consent of the absolute majority is needed for a nun to leave outside the enclosure to live eremitical life. (consequences of the new Constitution 62.2)

**Statute 39.2C.** The community loses the right to elect its superior when the number goes down to 5. But this doesn't mean to close it. It can still exist.

**Statute 40. A.** Resignation from the office. (Only in exceptional cases the Abbot General and his Council cannot make a decision).

**Statute 46.1.A.** this applies to both. The new stage of aspirancy. This should be 12 months but not more than 2 years. It is a must. This stage is outside the monastery, or left to the jurisdiction of each superior. To either stay inside or outside the community but not obligatory. While postulancy is of a minimum of one year but, it can be prolonged according to the needs of a candidate but not more than 5 five years. From now on the **stage of aspirant(candidate) is an official stage.** Aspirants are not **obliged** to live in the community but in the guest house and also not in the guest house for a year. Free arrangement of each community.

**Constitution 52.** (Monks) have 3 years of temporary vows but may not be prolonged for more than 6 years.

**Cts.52.** (nuns) have 5 years of temporal profession followed 3 or 2 years but not more than 9 years. NB. They have the first 3 years of profession, and the 1 in two years. This is to prepare them for longer commitment.

It's also worth noting that the difference in formation is the years of temporally profession.

**Constitution 58.** Paying attention to the newly solemnly professed members of the community.

**Constitution 60.** Old monks and nuns of the Order who wish to change stability to other monasteries, now need no probation, they only need a vote of the Conventual of the absolute majority.

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

### **continuation of the Constitution by the Abbot General**

**Constitution 75.** It is a new constitution for monks concerning visitation. The Father Immediate can delegate a visitor once in 6 years. Who can visit? Both can also former superiors.

**Statute 75.2.A.** When there is delegation the Father Immediate consults the superior and then takes the initiative. But also the community can ask, but it cannot oblige the Immediate.

The Abbot General also explained the another situation of need for an assistant in a visitation. He explained there is no such a thing as co-visitor, for there cannot be two visitors, but simply an assistant. Also the situation in the need of a translator. In all these cases a superior and the community should be consulted.

These are the major changes in the text of the constitution. There were questions also asked in reference to those constitutions and clarifications were given immediately.

At the end of his sharing, the Abbot General informed the region about a new foundation of Sept-fons in Senegal. He gave a brief history of the foundation and what has already happened. The brothers in Sept-fons have voted for the foundation. 2 brothers were sent to Senegal and in 2021 started to live the regular life. The community of Sept-fons appointed a Superior and named the founders 7 brothers in number. They have provisional houses and they will have to start the construction of the Monastery, but they cannot do this till the next GC has made a decision.

We thank God for this new shoot in the land of Africa.

### **31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**

There was a trip to Orval, another monastery in geographical location of Belgium and a daughter house of Scourmont. Dom Damiens was our guide. We were received by the Abbot and the community. However, on arrival there Dom Clement received sad news of the passing on of his dear father Gabriel, we prayed for him in a special way at mass. It was a well spent day with our brothers at Orval. It was very interesting to know the history of this community since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and how the monks have preserved this fortune and how they are persevering few as they may be to live the life and to give life. We celebrated the Eucharist together and shared a good meal. We returned in good time at Scourmont to be in the first vespers of All Saints day.

### **1<sup>st</sup> November 2023**

This being a Solemnity, we had one conference from the Abbot General contributing and commenting on the role of the Region. In order to allow flow of sharing we put the Abbot General 's contribution in the context of the text where this subject was treated on the role of the Region.

It was announced that we shall have dinner with the community of Scourmont, and the community of Chimay was invited. It was another day of communion and sharing. In the afternoon we were free.

## Sharing of Dom Armand on Affiliation and in the afternoon

### Pastoral sharing.

D. Armand: Cor Orans n°54-64 on Contemplative women: "This is a particular form of aid in favour of a monastery which has very precarious or non-existent autonomy".

We can already make a few remarks: The Instruction is about autonomous monasteries. In N°18 there was a difference between presupposed juridical autonomy and real autonomy of life, in all its dimensions... relational, vocational; liturgical, economic...

The second remark, in the fact that some monasteries do not have real autonomy, it is for these monasteries that affiliation has been presented in favour of these Communities. Affiliation is established by the Holy See at no. 55 and is organized as legal aid. The first aim is to help Fragile Communities overcome difficulties. And the second is to help the Community with its suppression.

There is nothing to prevent communities from turning to the Holy See, but the latter will not respond without consulting the Order's authorities.

However, each Order is invited to review its Constitutions to integrate these laws into Cor Orans. This was the task of the General Chapter. You will find it in the report of the Law Commissions and in the booklet in preparation for the General Chapter.

The affiliation in Cor Orans is different from ours, and the document was studied by Commission 14 "The adaptation of the Order's Institution in relation to Cors Orans".

In general, it was well received, except for the point on the Fathers Immediate of the Affiliated House and the Affiliating House. And two votes were taken following this report.

## Affiliation (original text) below

1. (CO 54) Affiliation is a particular form of help that the **General Chapter** establishes in particular situations in favour of the community of a monastery *sui juris* which has only an asserted autonomy, but in reality, very precarious or, in fact, non-existent.
2. The request for this special form of help may be made at the free initiative of the community experiencing increasing fragility or by the Father Immediate of that house, or it may arise from the study of the situation of the community in the General Chapter itself. Only the General Chapter is competent to decide to establish it, after consultation with the fragile community and the community that would be available to provide this service. Between General Chapters, when the case is urgent, the Abbot General and his Council may establish it after the same consultations. Consultation of the communities concerned does not necessarily require a vote or a specific majority.
3. (CO 55) Affiliation is configured as a juridical support that must assess whether the inability to manage the life of the autonomous monastery in all its dimensions is only temporary or is irreversible, helping the community of the affiliated monastery to overcome difficulties or to put in place what is necessary to bring about the suppression of this monastery.
4. (CO 56) In these cases, it is up to the General Chapter to evaluate the opportunity of setting up a Commission for the Future formed by the superior of the affiliating monastery and at least two other persons designated by the General Chapter.
5. (CO 57) Through affiliation, the General Chapter suspends the *status* of autonomous monastery, rendering it *donec aliter provideatur* a house dependent on another autonomous monastery of the Order, according to what is established in the present Statute and any other provisions on the matter given by the General Chapter.
6. (CO 58) The Major Superior of the autonomous affiliating monastery is constituted Major Superior of the affiliated monastery.
7. (CO 59) The local Superior of the affiliated monastery is a nun/monk in solemn vows, appointed by the Major Superior of the autonomous monastery with the consent of his/her Council, having heard the nuns/monks of the community of the affiliated monastery. This local Superior is constituted the legal representative of the affiliated monastery and her/his function is limited to managing the ordinary daily life of the community according to the indications of the major superior.
8. (CO 60) The affiliated monastery can accept candidates, but the novitiate and initial formation must be performed in the affiliating monastery or in another monastery established by the General Chapter

9. (CO 61) The candidates of the affiliated monastery are admitted to the novitiate, the novices to temporary profession, and the temporary professed to solemn profession by the Major Superior of the affiliating monastery, having heard the community of the affiliated monastery and obtained the favourable vote of the Conventual Chapter of the affiliating monastery.
10. (CO 62) Profession will be made for the affiliated monastery.
11. (CO 63) During the time of affiliation, the finances of the two monasteries are administered separately.
12. (CO 64) The celebration of the Conventual Chapter is suspended in the affiliated monastery, but the possibility of calling local Chapters remains unaffected.
13. In the affiliated monastery the regular Visitation is made by the same Visitor who makes the Regular Visitation of the monastery to which it is affiliated. As long as this juridical form continues, the functions of Father Immediate of the affiliated house are assumed by the same person who is Father Immediate of the monastery to which it is affiliated.
14. Affiliation ends when, in the judgement of the General Chapter, the fragile community has sufficiently recovered its real autonomy of life, or when it is judged that the situation of fragility is irreversible and the monastery must be suppressed.



### **Corrected version, Rome, February 2023**

The above text is in its originality with no additions or commentaries.

Dom Armand said this is the text that is under experiment and that is why the Regions were asked to study it again before the next GC in case of need for correction. He added at the moment we have no Affiliations. They would be two but one it will not work and the other, there is a problem of distance.

### **Dom Armand asked?**

1. What do you think of this possibility of Affiliation?
2. Could it be modified or do we keep the drafted text?

Group sharing on the topic of Affiliation basing on the above questions

Our work here is primarily to give opinion on this issue of affiliation but we know that this system is already trying to be in existence. Therefore, the law commission can continue to study the text.

This is new in African context, we need to deepen this aspect because it is not only being fragile in the aspect of numbers but also fragile in other aspects, so that a community can be revitalized. What are other possible ways of helping a fragile community.

A concrete example of Kasanza in the Region is a sign of fragility

What can be done? Who should help? This will strengthen our Charter of Charity. Which community can assist? The problem remains that of language barrier.

No.12 could be modified; adding ...” the possibility of calling consultative meetings remains un affected”

No.9 could be modified as well. ...having heard the community of the affiliated monastery and obtained the favourable vote of the Conventual Chapter, of the affiliated monastery by a consultative vote.

Question: when the mandate of the Major Superior of the filiation comes to an end who votes?

Dom Armand explained that these are two separate communities and therefore election is in the community of filiation.

**3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**

Dom John Bosco had asked Dom Armand to guide us through the formulated votes since he is of good experience. The morning was dedicated to the study of the votes in question. This took the whole morning. In the afternoon the groups went into discussion on concrete proposals on how to improve formation in our Region.

After the group discussion these three ideas were concrete for the Region

1. To organise a workshop that will be for Superiors and formators. This will help to impart what has been given to the communities.
2. To have experienced members of the Order make some video recordings which can be useful in formation
3. Organise workshops for Superiors and Cellarers in the area of economy.

In conclusion all this should be done at the Sub-region to help in the organization and management and to curb the problem of language barrier.

It was also noted that it is good that all our brothers and sisters be formed in their own countries before embarking in studying overseas. This will help in the process of discernment, whom to send and the level of trust we have in these people will have been proved in the process.

Mother Regina was the moderator she invited Dom Armand to go through again in the revised questions on possible votes before the exercise could begin. After the first break in the morning voting begun. Dom John Bosco read the French text, while Mother Regina read the English text. The two delegates helped in the counting of the votes. This exercise was successfully done and below are the results.

**Questions on possible votes: they were 17 voters**

1. We wish to modify the distribution of house reports, so that they are not studied by the same commissions as at previous General Chapters.

Yes 11                                      No 6                                      Abstention 0  
Accepted

2. We would like the composition of the General Chapter commissions to be balanced, so as to include both old and new members.

Yes 14                                      No 3                                      Abstention 0  
Accepted

3. We would like to see a Commission to study delicate cases, as the Pastoral Commission used to do.

Yes 16                                      No 1                                      Abstention 0  
Accepted

4. We appreciated electronic voting at the last General Chapters and recommend that the method be improved to ensure greater discretion.

Yes 16                                      No 0                                      Abstention 1  
  
Accepted

5. a. We would like to rethink the role of the Central Formation Secretary,



Yes 17  
unanimous

No 0

Abstention 0

b. And if possible, that he/she reside at the Generalate.

Yes 12  
Accepted

No 4

Abstention 1

6. We would like meetings of the Regional Secretaries for Formation to be held from time to time.

Yes 14  
Accepted

No 3

Abstention 0

7. In the interest of the unity of our Order, we ask that there be further dialogue with the Decastery for Consecrated Life regarding certain points of Cor Orans.

Yes 17  
unanimous

No 0

Abstention 0

8. On the question of Mothers Immediate, we prefer to adopt the term "Delegate of the Father Immediate".

Yes 14  
Accepted

No 2

Abstention 1

9. We would like to see an in-depth study of the issue of Mothers Immediate and for the question to be re-examined in the regions.

Yes 13  
Accepted

No 4

Abstention 0

10. We recommend that communities draw up a Protocol for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, in accordance with the laws of the country and the local Church.

Yes 16                      No 0                      Abstention 1  
Accepted

11. Concerning finances, we wish to retain the Regional fund.

Yes 13                      No 4                      Abstention 0  
Accepted

12. We would like this fund to be managed by the accountant of the Generalate (Dom Emmanuel).

Yes 15                      No 1                      Abstention 1  
Accepted

13. We would like the fund manager to provide an annual report on the operation of the account.

Yes 13                      No 3                      Abstention 1  
Accepted

14. We would like the issue of the "probation" period in statute 60.A to be revised.

Yes 17                      No 0                      Abstention 0  
unanimous

15. We accept, ad experimentum, the Abbot General's proposal to work in sub-regions first and then meet once in a Regional meeting before the next General Chapter.

Yes 11                      No 6                      Abstention 0  
Accepted

16. Who will represent RAFMA at the CNE meeting in March 2024?

Dom Clement 1 vote

Dom Leonard 1 vote

M. Angela 1 vote

Dom. Vedaste 1 Votes

M. Philomena 11 votes

Abstention 1 vote

Mother Philomena was appointed and agreed to perform this duty.

### **In the afternoon**

Mother Rachel returned to Rome, her presence was highly appreciated.

A word from the regional secretaries and their reports (**see text in the Appendix**)

Sister Elisabeth

Father Justin

**5<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

### **Evaluation of the meeting in general**

- The initial beginnings of the meeting were well organised a word of thanks to the president
- We thank Dom Damien for the invitation and giving us more allowance for preparing ourselves in good time before and after
- The meeting started off well with the presence of the Abbot General and his Secretary who did a good job of translation we thank him
- The interjections were good and with a spirit of fraternity
- The meeting was successful because all that was on the agenda was done
- There was ample time for each to express him/herself. We are grateful the coordinators who did a good job together M. Regina and Dom John Bosco
- We thank the organisers of this meeting for it is not easy to organise such a diverse group
- The creation of the WhatsApp group for the purpose of communication was appreciated
- The spirit of the meeting was calm and friendly
- We appreciate the good work of the secretaries
- The house reports were well presented
- We appreciate the good work of Dom Clement who presented a well organised presentation on the role of the Region.
- The relationship among the superiors was very touching there were no tensions
- Time was respected, thanks to the good time keeper (Sr. Gertrude)

- All kept their responsibilities
- The presence of three of 2 Council members of the Abbot General added more effect
- The presence of invited members, M. Francesca, M. Isabella, M. Genevieve, Dom Damiens and Dom Armand was appreciated
- The pastoral sharing was appreciated
- The contributions of the elder brothers and sisters was appreciated
- Appreciation to the community of Scourmont, Dom Damiens, the guest masters and the staff.
- We appreciate the wonderful hospitality and the good meals
- For some it was our first time in such a meeting and therefore we have a lot to share with our communities
- The atmosphere of the liturgy in the community was very good even with Swahili music, this was uplifting
- Great thanks to Dom Armand who took time to explain Cor Orans
- We suggest that there should be a person who can translate both English and French not necessarily from the group
- If there could be food for thought
- We appreciate very much the idea of the sub regions

Dom Damiens thanked everyone and for the invitation. It was good to meet all of you. It was an honour for us and an opportunity to discover RAFMA. We are soon having our Regional meeting CNE hope to see one of you again.

Dom John Bosco made a final conclusion in these words, "I would like to thank M. Francesca Abbesses from Valserena, we invited her on behalf of Soke, she agreed to be with us. I was afraid for her, since time in Europe is mathematical, but in Africa time is elastic. In her humility, she agreed to be with us. I hope she'll come back again, because with her, we were able to work out the votes.

We are grateful to all those who helped us to get the visas and the drivers. The liturgy was very meditative and open to Africa.

I'm pleased that the emphasis was placed on formation, with concrete proposals on the need for the Formation of Superiors with Formators.

I thank all those who took part in this Regional Meeting. I pray that the fraternity expressed here will continue in our communities and produce much fruit for the Region. I especially thank the delegates M. Geneviève, Sr. Gertrude, and Father Martin. Finally, I wish everyone a safe journey. See you soon  
With these words I bring this meeting to a close”.

The meeting ended at 10:45 on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2023.

Sr. Elizabeth (Secretary)

