

BEGGARS OF LIGHT

Brother Superior General's 2014 Christmas Message



*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
In the Word was life, and that life was the light of all people.
This light shines in the darkness,
and darkness has not overcome it.
(John 1:1.4-5)*

Light and darkness are two deeply engraved notions in human psychology, two concepts highlighting the contrast between irreconcilable realities. Where light reigns, darkness is excluded. Where there is darkness, light is banished.

On the other hand, given the importance of light for the development of ecosystems on planet Earth, light is logically associated to life, and darkness to death. For this reason, ancient peoples celebrated in various ways, especially with large bonfires, the triumph of the sun over darkness. This happened, for example, during the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen.

Following the same symbolism, the Church decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus in December, in proximity to the winter solstice: with the coming of Jesus, hope and light are reborn in the world. We will celebrate this with joy on December 25th: Jesus, whom we acknowledge and proclaim as Light of the World, is coming to us!

Christmas is not just the memory of an event that took place over 2000 years ago, but a celebration deeply connecting with the most profound and intimate aspirations of the human heart, which yearns for light, and longs for the fullness of life personally and for everyone on the planet. However, our daily experience is that of the coexistence of light and darkness, good and evil, even in our own hearts: If the light in you has turned into darkness, how terrible that darkness will be! (Mt 6:23).

This light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it! Against all odds, and although the daily news seem to indicate otherwise, we firmly believe that life is stronger than death, and light overcomes darkness.

This is probably what the builders of New Grange, north of Dublin, experienced. It is a huge mound of about 80 meters in diameter, dating back to the Neolithic Era, about five thousand years ago. The structure is made of approximately 280 thousand tons of pebble. The white stone covering it came from the coast, which is about 80 km away.

This archaeological site is famous, above all, because of a phenomenon recurring every year on December 21st, the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere. There is a hole on the





a whimper of pain deep in the soul, like a call waiting for someone to see our suffering and pay attention to us. The darkness in Bartimaeus begs for a caress, such as our own darkness does.

We are beggars of light. In our deepest self, we glimpse an empty space, an unhealed wound, an insatiable thirst. Oftentimes we give in to the temptation of filling that emptiness with material possessions or intellectual knowledge; when we realize it is useless, our frustration grows deeper.

The celebration of Christmas is a wonderful opportunity to grow in the conviction that our darkness is nothing else but a deep yearning for light.

tomb's front door, which is aligned with the rising sun precisely that day, so the sunlight goes through it and crosses the aisle all the way to the center of the burial chamber. This portent lasts only twenty minutes, during which a place that is immersed in darkness all year round becomes completely flooded with light.

For five thousand years, as the builders of New Grange intended, light has beaten the site's internal darkness on December 21st. I think this is a beautiful image to express the deep yearning for light dwelling in each of us, and the conviction that darkness has not the last word.

Discussing the Gospel text on the healing of Bartimaeus, Luigi Verdi wrote: Bartimaeus is a beggar of light, like all of us... Sitting in a corner of the road, he is screaming, as we all do. Whatever cannot dance its way out and surface to the lips and skin, he yells from the depths of his soul. We know all too well the cry dwelling within us: each of us has

I wish you a very happy New Year 2015, as we search together for light. The path lying ahead requires abandoning the easy solutions aimed at simply killing pain, and choosing peaceful and patient silence, which can slowly drill our superficiality and lead us to our deepest self.

*By night we hasten, by night,
under a moonless sky, we go moonless,
for when it comes to finding the source,
only our thirst leads us onward.*

Luis Rosales, Retablo de Navidad.

My best wishes for you and your loved ones, and Merry Christmas!

Br. Emili Turú, Superior General



"WE ARE ALL BROTHERS"

Letter of the Leaders of fifteen Congregations of Brothers

As part of the Year of Consecrated Life, we present some resources created by the "All Brothers" group in Rome. You can find a letter to All Brothers signed by the leaders of 15 Congregations of Brothers, a prayer and a poster to celebrate "We Are All Brothers".

In the next pages you find the letter's text.
The other files can be downloaded in <http://www.champagnat.org/400.php?a=6&n=3464>.

"Might this Year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and to work together, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action?"

(Apostolic letter of his holiness pope Francis to all consecrated people on the occasion of the year of consecrated life, II 3 paragraph 3)

Dear Brothers

Pope Francis's question inspire us, as representatives of fifteen religious congregations of Brothers, to write to you. This common letter is meant to represent the great vision we have of working together for God's dream for humanity.

The Year of Consecrated Life

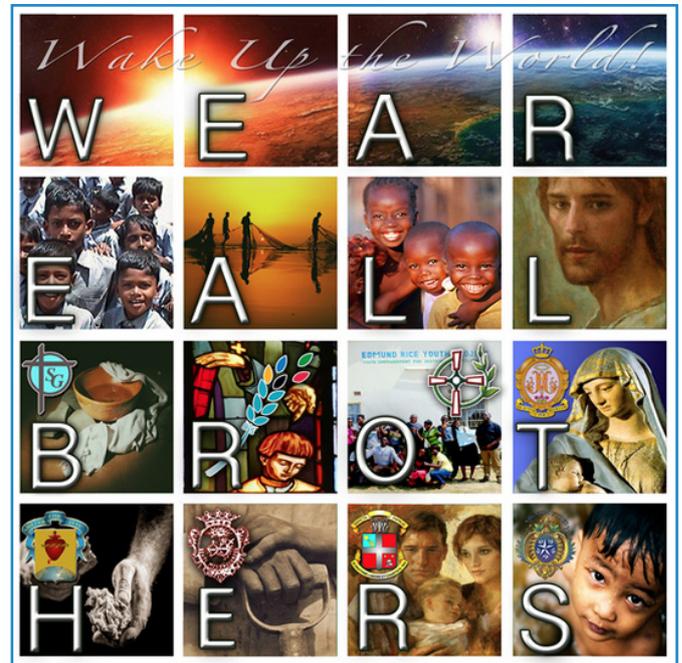
1. On the 29th of November, 2013, Pope Francis announced 2015 as the Year of Consecrated Life during his meeting with the assembly of the Union of Superiors General. On the 31st of January last, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) provided through its Prefect, Cardinal Joao Braz de Avis, and secretary of the congregation, Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM, the objectives and agenda for the celebration of the year of consecrated life. This presentation was followed by the publication of the first of three letters which are meant to spark reflection among consecrated men and women on the meaning of our vocation and mission in the Church. The first letter, "Rejoice", is inspired by the teachings of Pope Francis. A second letter, "Scrutinize", will soon be released. Since then, many of us have begun to prepare to participate in this celebration of the universal Church.

The objectives of this year, as they were announced by CICLSAL are, firstly, to remember "with grateful memory" our fruitful journey of renewal in the last 50 years since Vatican II and the publication of the decree Perfectae Caritatis; secondly, to embrace the future with hope; and thirdly, to live the present with passion.

2. (...) Among the special events, there will be a symposium for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 27 to 30 January 2016 in Rome. Also in the various dioceses, regions, countries and continents, other initiatives will be taken.

3. This great event is an invitation to "rejoice" as the letter that we have received from the CICLSAL has so well indicated. Therefore, we invite all of you to join in this celebration and show everyone the joy of the Gospel that we live in the vocation that we have received and the mission that we carry out together with a large number of people with whom we collaborate: priests, religious and lay people, Christians and non-Christians.

4. "The lamp is put on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house" (Mt 5:15). Our common vocation as Brothers also needs to be seen, known, understood and appreciated in the Church. Our presence and our initiatives in this celebration of the universal Church are part of our religious



life and our mission. We cannot remain on the sidelines as Religious Brothers. Our desire to change the world, the great visions and impulses we feel, our courage and our dreams, inspire in us the desire to use this year to give witness to the gift of our particular vocation for the Church today.

The Religious Brother

5. In the context of the Church-Communion-People-of-God promoted by the Second Vatican Council, the Religious Brother's vocation complements all other vocations. Although we are few in numbers, our Brother's vocation is a precious treasure that is worth appreciating, displaying, sharing, understanding, deepening and living. We receive the gift of fraternity and we want to share it as a constitutive dimension of the Church. With this belief in the meaning of the life, vocation and mission of the Religious Brother in the Church, CICLSAL is preparing a document on The Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church. We are still awaiting publication, yet at the same time we know that what matters most is our presence and daily contribution to the message of the gospel to every heart.

6. "You are my witnesses that I am God", the book of consolation of Isaiah reminds us (Is 43:12). We are witnesses, we are signs, so we need to be visible. It is through our fraternal relationships, relationships that offer freedom, that we primarily proclaim the joy of the gospel of sonship and brotherhood. So we want to be seen during this Year of Consecrated Life, that all men and women can see our "good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

7. In addition, this celebration gives us a special opportunity to celebrate our vocation as Brothers in a diversity of charisms. God acts in diversity and delights in diversity. While we are brothers and share the gift of a specific vocation, we are also different, fruits of the Spirit and of the sensitivity of men and women who have responded in different moments of history to the needs of the poor. This testimony of harmony and cooperation in diversity is an important component of the Good News that the world needs today. To get to know each other, appreciate each other and deepen our relationships is the first condition, so that all the people of God can also know and appreciate our vocation. Therefore, we ask all to "celebrate together in our diversity" as we have been doing.

The recent history of collaboration among Brothers Congregations

8. In 2010 representatives of eight Congregations of Brothers involved in education with their headquarters in Rome began to meet on a regular basis. Those Congregations are Brothers of the Christian Schools, Marist Brothers, Edmund Rice Christian Brothers, St. Gabriel Brothers, Sacred Heart Brothers, Brothers of Christian Instruction, Brothers of the Holy Family and Brothers of Mercy. When the men from the different Congregations gathered, we realised that we have much in common and a unique way of life to celebrate and share in the Church and the world.

9. The first significant initiative organised by the committee was a month-long inter-Congregational formation experience called "We Are All Brothers" which took place in Rome in 2012, aimed at deepening our common identity and mission as Brothers in the Church and in the world of today; reflecting, praying and living together at this important time in our history; and fostering closer ties between our Institutes of Brothers. The evaluation of the participants was very positive and at the core of the experience were a strong sense of shared interna-

tional brotherhood and a realisation that there were lots of similarities in our different histories.

10. In different parts of the world there have also been significant experiences of sharing among Brothers. Earlier this year, for example, the third CLAR seminar in Colombia saw about 90 Brothers explore together the theme "Listening To God Where Life Cries Out To Us". Similar gatherings have taken place in other places. The Religious Brothers Conference in North America is but one example of the collaboration among Brothers' institutes across the world. These experiences lead us to a more profound appreciation of fraternal sharing. Our dream is a greater collaboration among all congregations of Brothers.

A proposal for the Year of Consecrated Life

11. We believe that the Year of Consecrated Life that Pope Francis inaugurates today provides us with an opportunity. From Rome we offer you a series of invitations and resources that will help us to deepen the sense of brotherhood among us.

12. We encourage you at a local level to invite neighbouring Brothers communities to gather some time during the year to get to know each other better and to share brotherhood. Obviously this is easier in some places than in others.

13. At Province level we are encouraging leadership teams to make contact with the other Brothers' Institutes to explore the possibilities for some shared experiences and to deepen the initiatives that are already underway in sharing our Brotherhood, in shared vocation ministry, initial and ongoing



formation experiences and in ministry together.

14. At Congregation level, we here in Rome hope to organise a day of Brotherhood later in 2015 to share and celebrate together. We will also be sending out a poster which you can use to promote the vocation of Brotherhood. A prayer is also being distributed that can be used by communities or with neighbouring Brothers.

We hope that this year will be for all of us an opportunity for renewal. Finally, we pray that Mary our mother will continue to inspire and accompany us.

Rome, November 30th 2014

- * Br. Cees J.H.M. Van Dam, Superior General, St. Aloysius Gonzaga Brothers
- * Br. Edmond Chevallereau, Superior General, Frères Missionnaires des Campagnes
- * Br. Emili Turú, Superior General, Marist Brothers
- * Br. Giuseppe Visconti, Superior General, Fratelli di San Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo
- * Br. Hervé Janson, Superior General, Little Brothers of Jesus
- * Br. Hugh O'Neill, Congregation Leader, Edmund Rice Christian Brothers
- vBr. Jesús Etayo Arrondo, Superior General, Brothers Hospitaliers of St. John of God
- * Br. John Kallarackal, Superior General, St. Gabriel Brothers
- * Br. José Ignacio Carmona Ollo, Superior General, Sacred Heart Brothers
- * Br. Juan Andrés Martos Moro, Superior General, Brothers of the Holy Family
- * Br. Lawrence Obiko, Superior General, Brothers of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy
- * Br. Paolo Barolo, Superior General, Brothers of our Lady of Mercy
- * Br. René Stockman, Superior General, Brothers of Charity
- * Br. Robert Schieler, Superior General, Brothers of the Christian Schools
- * Br. Yannick Houssay, Superior General, Brothers of Christian Instruction

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