

Kenya Provincial Chapter of the Holy Ghost Fathers 2023 Diary

At St. Mary Magdalene Retreat House, Resurrection Garden, Archdiocese of Nairobi

The chapter was officially opened by Fr. Kenneth Okoli, the Chapter moderator on Sunday, November 26 evening.

Monday, November 27

Fr. Albertus Toppo, a member of the Redemptorists, led delegates in a recollection. He emphasized on the need to have the “passion for Christ”.

The First Assistant Superior General, Fr. Jeff Duaimé, presided over the Holy Mass of the Holy Spirit. In his homily, he underscored the need to give a counter-witness to today’s society of consumerism, by embracing simplicity that goes beyond our ethnicities, and by fostering the Spiritan identity that rises above differences to realize unity in diversity.

First Assistant Input

On the delayed process of the GC selecting the Provincial Superior, Fr. Jeff:

- ❖ Clarified that the GC has the role of confirming the Spiritan vocation, supporting the mission of the Spiritans, and promoting the unity of the Spiritans in their diversity. In the light of this, GC saw the need to step back and reflect on the consultative process.
- ❖ Dismissed allegations that the GC has a preferred candidate. Instead, the GC plays the role of accompanying circumscriptions in the voting process, to ensure a good process in line with Church and Congregation principles.
- ❖ Said the delay is neither a reflection on the work of the current administration nor the Chapter Preparatory Committee. The delay is aimed at initiating a collective reflection, discernment process, and accompaniment procedure.
- ❖ Highlighted the important place the Province of Kenya holds, including its contribution to the Spiritan mission internationally, taking the lead in the South Sudan mission, hosting the 2nd cycle of formation and confreres for specialized studies. All these combine to make the appointment of the Provincial Superior crucial for the GC. For members in the Province, this need not be a source of problems and divisions, but instead a unifying and positive experience.

On involvement of temporary professed members, the GC had not been aware of their taking part in the *sub secreto* vote in previous Consultative votes. The Directory for the organization of the Congregation 2016 and SRL 176.1 stipulate that while they may take part in the straw vote, only finally professed can vote for the Superior.

The irregularity in the voting process was about the handling of electronic voting. There were about 20 votes, which were emailed directly to the preparatory committee, compromising the *sub secreto* principle (cf. SRL 165.1; Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life – DICLSAL). These votes were supposed to be emailed directly to the GC Secretary. Considering that these votes comprised about a third of the total votes cast, the GC decided that the consultation process for choosing a Provincial Superior be repeated.

On the consultation process for the selection of Councilors, the GC observed a gap in clearly written procedures as required by SRL 170.3, with SRL 170.4 requiring that the selection

ensure proper representation. This chapter needs to review what the Chapter decision of 2009 stated, and give this process the much needed articulation.

On the way forward, there is a need to:

- ❖ Harmonize General Chapter with Provincial chapter, making Bagamoyo II a guiding document for strategic planning, attentive to the signs of the times.
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- ❖ Have in place a “discernment model” that pays attention to the needs of the people of God today and the needs of the Province; a “synodal model” that gives room for listening, prayer, and the Holy Spirit, shunning a “parliamentary model” that fosters power and competition instead of love and service.
- ❖ Focus on the reports from delegates and various commissions, with strategic thinking, since this Chapter’s decisions are for the next eight years.
- ❖ Have the mandate of the current administration “temporarily extended” to sometime in Feb/early March 2024, to allow for a new consultative process.
- ❖ Have all electronic voting emailed to the GC Secretary.
- ❖ Have voting on Councilors after the appointment of the Provincial Superior

The Superior General Input

Fr. Alain Mayama reiterated GC mandate to confirm the Spiritan vocation, to support Spiritans in this mission, and to listen.

He underscored the need to focus on the life and mission of the Congregation as this is most essential for the Church, and that Superiors are “mediations”, with the authority to animate a circumscription, helping confreres accomplish the mission of the Church.

The mode of governance in the Congregation has changed over time, with three transitions currently unfolding: demographic, structural, and financial.

- ❖ These call for a rethinking of leadership and governance, requiring a critical examination of candidates’ profile, including aspects such as approachability, welcoming spirit, Spiritan identity, and international mission experience, among other important considerations.
- ❖ The Congregation being 77% African, fidelity to the procedures of identifying leaders, honesty in discerning the process, justice and respect for the legacy received from our founders are critical components since it is about the people’s lives.

He also underscored the need for those in administration to share a common vision, considering the three components of leadership: collaboration, co-responsibility, and co-subsidiarity.

The SG shared about the challenges around the election of Superiors of circumscriptions, including cliques based on ethnicity, procurement of votes through campaigns, vested interests rather than leadership qualities, and a mood of tension among confreres. He also highlighted the challenge of part-time Superiors in circumscriptions with few members, some of them preferring Parish ministry.

Referring to SRL 165.1 and 165.2, he said the GC has the mandate to confirm a Superior-elect, which calls to mind other aspects of discernment that are beyond the voters' control.

Questions and clarifications.

- ❖ On whether a new preparatory committee is to be constituted to oversee the new consultations for a Provincial Superior, Fr. Jeff proposed that the team involved in the previous election continues. He, however, left it to the Chapter delegates to decide.
- ❖ On adherence to the number of candidates in line with SRL 165, the SG said the mandate for selecting candidates from among those with the highest votes is a GC mandate.
- ❖ On having in place clear elections guidelines, the GC members are working on a document for all circumscriptions, in addition to SRL stipulations and the Directory for the organization of the Congregation 2016.
- ❖ On profile of eligible candidates to avoid a back and forth:
 - ✓ Fr. Jeff proposed some guidelines from the GC, to be locally adapted
 - ✓ Leadership challenge being a cross-cutting matter across circumscriptions, some capacity-building initiatives could be put in place.
- ❖ On whether to start the consultative process anew or from the sub-secreto stage, there was consensus that the latter be adopted.
- ❖ On possibility to vote for multiple names, there was consensus that that each eligible voters submits three names of his preferred candidate.
- ❖ On whether all voting can be directly emailed to the GC Secretary in this election, this Chapter is to discuss.
- ❖ On whether the mode of voting can change from consultative to Chapter delegates, this can be a Chapter decision, to be confirmed by the GC.
- ❖ On selection of Councilors:
 - ✓ The process will begin after the GC appoints a Provincial Superior.
 - ✓ SRL. 170.2, 3 is critical
 - ✓ It can be part of the Chapter deliberations.
 - ✓ A delegate expressed opposition to the argument that gathering for a General Assembly early next year is expensive, arguing that the "planned" occasional meeting can offer an opportunity for the selection of Councilors.

Other observations:

A delegate underscored need to focus on the quality of the chapter rather than elections; those elected have to implement chapter decisions, hence the latter is crucial. The SG supported this view, underscoring the need to place emphasis on the mission, and that whoever is elected has to implement that mission.

Fr. SG challenged confreres to read documents of the Congregation, even as the GC could do better in information dissemination.

When overseeing a process, make a point of seeking clarifications, and looking out for documentation.

Fr. Henry Omwoyo who chaired the previous preparatory committee thanked members for their cooperation in striving for fairness and justice.

The Provincial Superior and the Bursar presented their reports.