



COSUMA 2024 – The Final Message

Dear confreres,

a cordial greeting to all of you who have accompanied us in these two weeks spent in the dearest places of St. Guido M. Conforti for the celebration of the COSUMA 2024 entitled “Leadership in Religious Life.” These have been intense weeks of meetings among us superiors from every district on the service of authority in the Xaverian family with interventions from biblical scholars, theologians, and psychotherapists, listening to each other about our experiences to better grow together with the DG and exercise this service with competence and common sense.

Authority at the service of charism

One of the key points often repeated in our meetings was that of authority understood as service to the Congregation, not as a matter of power or honors but of service to brothers as the Lord showed us in the washing of the feet. It is a journey through complexity, a path that requires discernment, flexibility, and a constant commitment to authenticity and co-responsibility. In this journey, the superior becomes a bridge between people, a facilitator of dialogue, and a mediator of visions in the light of charism. His indeed is a charismatic authority: it is conferred upon him in the name of charism, and one of his most important tasks is to be a charismatic beacon that helps and guides the confreres to grow and walk in fidelity to it.

We have deepened the meaning of authority in a synodal church and become aware of the need for a serious reform process that integrates mission and synodality. This can only be achieved through a radical change that amplifies the moment of listening and transforms authority into a service to the community that walks together, a transformative authority that involves all communities. The synodal church is therefore a model of governance that values sharing among its members (*shared leadership*) in the common search for the best ways to live the charism.

We have realized that the exercise of tomorrow’s authority requires another type of personal and collective conscience, for which new experiences and appropriate structures are necessary to help through inclusive (community) dynamics in the search for God’s will. Fundamental in this regard is the experience of listening to the Spirit that guides the community towards a fuller and more harmonious life.

Authority in the Xaverian tradition

Some key principles that emerge from our documents help to understand the Xaverian way of exercising “*autoritas*.” These are: participation (fosters acceptance of differences with authority that guides without imposing), co-responsibility (collective decision on the means of mission and community life through dialogue), and subsidiarity (safeguards unity in pluralism with local authority guiding by example and word) for the common good.

The one entrusted with the task of authority is a brother who guides brothers and helps them grow spiritually. He performs his role by balancing spiritual discernment, the exercise of psychological insights, and the effort to adapt to people. His activity will thus be motivated by **the principle of fraternity** rather than that of paternity and will consider himself as the first among brothers. He will be able to live as a brother among brothers to the extent that he strives to be a son like Jesus and nurtures in his heart a space where he finds God's taste for the other.

Authority is constantly engaged in **discernment**. The presentation of the problem, listening to everyone, taking the time to examine, and then making the decision are concrete steps that can help this process. As learned from the synodal experience, listening here is understood as mutual listening and listening to the Spirit.

The care of people will be the main concern of authority. But this must start from oneself (granting oneself rest, reading, prayer) so that by promoting one's own well-being, one can better attend to the well-being of the confreres.

Authority is committed to **promoting the community** not as a place but as an experience that favors the formation of warm environments but not shelters.

The work sessions also considered numerous practical points: the *Vademecum*, the programming of the DG's six-year period, the promotion of a culture of child protection, the protection of minors and vulnerable people (*where we commit to appointing a referent and drafting conduct manuals to address and train on these issues*), economy, and postulation. In the session dedicated to postulation, we were presented with a book illustrating the figures of our martyrs in Congo, highlighting the idea that God speaks to us even when we suffer.

At the heart of Xaverianity

The visit to the confreres on the fourth floor, the meeting with the historical group of Friends of the Missionaries (Gams), the visit to the Confortian places, the presence of the Bishop of Parma, the meeting with the laity, and the Eucharist at the beginning of each day in the Confortian Sanctuary constantly reminded us of the deep bond that we as an Institute have with this territory and this Church and relaunches us with enthusiasm in our respective places of service.

We sincerely thank all the confreres of the Mother House and the community of the theology house with whom we met during prayers, adorations, and meals: you have met all our needs. We also thank the DG for the care taken in organizing this COSUMA at the beginning of their mandate.

Finally, let us not forget that our Institute is God's work, not ours, and that its rebirth is linked **to fidelity to the received charism, to the authenticity of life, and to the prophetic role of the religious life of all its members** in which authority is a reality that concerns everyone: each in the service requested by the Congregation!