



CONGREGATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Rule of Life

JHS



nniversary



FEBRUARY 2024



The year of the 40th anniversary of the Rule of Life

1984, 1st August, 2024

Dear brothers in the Eucharistic Lord,

As we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the approval of our Rule of Life this year, the theological commission of previous mandate had made a proposal to publish four special bulletins on diversified reflections on our Rule of Life. The motive of this effort is to deepen our knowledge and love for our Rule of Life.

In this first bulletin on Rule of Life, we have five articles. These were the reflections presented at the 36th General Chapter on the reflection day as videotaped message. Fr. Anthony McSweeney, Fr. Andre Guitton and Fr. Camille Gagnon lived and witnessed the passage and the approval of this new Rule of Life. Their reflections give us few glimpses of the history of the present Rule of Life as well as challenge us with the invitation present in this Rule of Life such as a call for renewal, conversion and to read the signs of the times. Fr. Abraham Faye and Fr. Arokia Sebastian Peter, who were formed by this present Rule of Life share their experiences and their views on the Rule of Life. We thank them for their reflections.

The cover of this bulletin is specially designed by Fr. Martino Bui Van Hoang Phuc, sss. We see an image of book inside the number 40 is the symbol of Rule of Life. There is a path leading to a forest, a mountain and to the rising sun. It is interpreted as the Rule of Life is the guiding path leading us to wisdom, world and to the Eucharistic Lord thus it is an invitation for us to make a journey.

Special thanks to Fr. Joseph Binh for coordinating and Mrs. Valerie to bring out this issue.

May these reflections on Rule of Life enrich and encourage us to love and to live our Rule of Life faithfully.

Fraternally,



Fr Philip Benzy ROMICIAN, sss
Superior general



Fr. André Guitton, sss

SSS Community of
Paris-Av. Friedland
France



BRIEF CV

Father André was born on 14 September 1927 in Saint Martin des Tilleuls, France. He made his first profession on 29 September 1947 and was ordained a priest on 25 October 1953 in Rome, where he studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Over the years he served as provincial vicar, provincial superior and provincial treasurer of the Province of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, until 2014.

He specialises in the study of the Founder and his work, and published a biography of him in 2012 entitled "Pierre-Julien Eymard, L'Apôtre de l'Eucharistie".

Father André shared with us his contribution as a testimony to the term *renewal*. For him, it is very important that the term describes the changes in society and in the Church, what Pope John XXIII called "*aggiornamento*". It's a call for us to re-evaluate the Founder's charism in the light of the Second Vatican Council.



Dear Colleagues,

It is at the request of Father Eugênio, our Superior General, that I am taking the liberty of sending you a fraternal communication on this day of prayer and reflection that opens this 36th General Chapter. I have been asked to share with you something about my experience of the Rule of Life, as it was elaborated in the chapter of renewal of 1969 and

1971, then in the chapters of 1975 and 1981, until its approval by the Holy See in 1984. As far as I'm concerned, it's not a question of rehashing the history of this period, which is of great importance for our Congregation. The *Acts* of these various Chapters have been published and remain the reference for all historical work. Father Anthony McSweeney has made an excellent presentation of them in his Commentary on the Rule of Life. My contribution can only be a testimony.

First of all, a brief historical reminder. In *the History of Christianity* by Mayeur and others, *the 13th volume* covering the period from 1958 to the present day (2000) is subtitled *Crises and Renewal*. In fact, 1960 marked a profound change in society at every level, with the advent of the consumer society, economic growth, the development of the means of communication, the rise of electronics, the emergence of 'Third World' nations, the political autonomy of formerly colonised peoples, the globalisation of trade, etc., against a backdrop of confrontation - the Cold War - between the liberal Western system and the Marxist Soviet regime. It was also a period of crisis, of demands for individual freedoms and challenges to institutions.

For the Church, the death of Pius XII in 1958 and the accession of Pope John XXIII also marked the transition to a new era. On 25 January 1959, John XXIII convened an Ecumenical Council: it was no longer a question of ad hoc reforms, but of in-depth reflection on the mystery of the Church and its relationship to the world. Meeting on 11 October 1962, the Council continued its work in 1963 under the pontificate of Paul VI and ended on 8 December 1965. At the end, it published 16 documents, including 4 constitutions, on the Church, the Word of God, the Sacred Liturgy and the Church in the modern world. The messages addressed to the world at the close of the Council on 8 December 1965 reflect this new face of the Church in the face of earthly realities. It was a time of extraordinary grace - and also of trials. It is significant that the same term 'Renewal' is used to describe the changes in society and those in the Church (John XXIII spoke of *aggiornamento* - an updating).

At the time, the Congregation was experiencing strong growth, with a significant influx of young people. The progress of the Council was followed by a large number of Religious with great attention, not only for the novelties it brought, but above all for the new way of looking at the world, not to condemn it, but to welcome humanity as it is and to proclaim the Gospel. In this context, the mystery of the Eucharist found all its dimensions.

The Council took into account the exegetical, patristic and theological work of the liturgical movement. The Eucharistic celebration is the source and summit of the Church's life and mission. Worship derives from it and leads to it. For our Institute, the Instruction of the Congregation for Worship *Eucharisticum mysterium* (25 May 1967) has been a very valuable guide. It should be noted that Father Michel-Jean took part in drawing it up.

At the level of the Congregation, publishing work and historical research have enabled us to better understand Father Eymard in his time. Eugenio Núñez of important texts by the Founder. These include the edition of *La grande Retraite de Rome en 1865*, that of the *Retraite aux Religieux de Paris en 1867*, and the edition of the *Textus Constitutionum Congregationis Sanctissimi Sacramenti, 1965-1968* in 4 fascicules. In 1968, Father Lauréat Saint-Pierre published a well-documented thesis, *L'Heure du Cénacle dans la vie et les œuvres de Pierre-Julien Eymard*, in which he retraced Father Eymard's spiritual journey. In 1969, Father Donald Cave published his thesis on *Eymard, the years 1845-1851*, in which he methodically explored the spiritual development of Marist Father Eymard. This work has contributed greatly to our understanding of Fr Eymard through the different stages of his life and, in particular, his development as Founder and editor of the Constitutions. (Volume VII of the OC, which groups together all the documents relating to the Constitutions, has 767 pages).

The 27th General Chapter held in 1969, the Chapter of renewal, marked an important stage in the history of the Congregation. A special commission had prepared an amended text of the Constitutions following Vatican II. It became clear that it was not a question of

amending a text, but of re-evaluating the charism of the Founder in the light of Vatican II. Hence the need for a preparatory phase, with the examination in communities of four texts approved by the Chapter on the charism of the Founder in his time - and today -, a renewed approach to the Eucharistic mystery, and finally a redrafting of the General Statutes.

It was the work of the second session in 1971 to draw up the *Rule of Life*: it is the fruit of reflection and the writing of a new version of the Constitutions in the light of Vatican II. It was adopted almost unanimously. In new language, number 1 immediately recalls our ideal. Number 2 refers to the life of our holy Founder, with a broader vision than that of the 1895 Constitutions. Number 3 was at the centre of all the controversies and went through many versions. It opens as follows *Living by the sacrament given for the life of the world, we place ourselves at the service of Christ and mankind to build a new world based on justice and love. - Sacrament of the liberation of man, the Eucharist denounces... - Sacrament of the unity of the world, it compromises us in the struggle...* It became like the emblematic number of the renewal.

The 28th General Chapter of 1975 ratified the 1971 text, considering that the period of experimentation was insufficient and required more time. This was the work of the 29th General Chapter of 1981. This took place in Rome from 22 June to 19 July 1981, with the primary aim of proceeding, after 10 years of experimentation, to a definitive drafting of the *Rule of Life*. Number 3 was the subject of a special study, entrusted to a special pre-Chapter commission. During the Chapter, Fr Verhoeven spoke on 6 July 1981: Number 3, he noted, is very important because it describes the mission of the Congregation. In part, its wording reflects the mentality of May 1968: it moves directly from the Eucharist to the world. Thus, it emphasises the "denunciation" of an unjust world, whereas the Eucharist "announces" the death-resurrection of the Lord. The text omits the mediation of the Church. The wording should be inspired by the biblical and classical language of the Eucharist. In fact, this issue was completely rewritten.

After lengthy debates, the definitive version of the Rule of Life was approved almost unanimously on 18 July 1981. This was a very important moment in the history of the Congregation.

All that remained was approval by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS), whose President was Cardinal Pironio and whose Secretary was Mgr Meyer. Submitted to the SCRIS on 28 November 1981, the dossier was the subject of numerous interventions before receiving final approval on 24 November 1984, backdated to 1st August 1984, the anniversary of the death of the Father Founder. It was to the credit of Father Anthony McSweeney, elected Superior General, that, with the support of his Council, he led a battle in which the intransigence of the secretary blocked any discussion. There was a change of personnel at SCRIS: Cardinal Pironio, having reached the age limit, left his post, as did Bishop Meyer. Bishop Meyer was replaced by Bishop Francisco Errazuriz. From then on, there were no more difficulties.

The reception of this new version of the *Rule of Life* varied greatly, depending on the situation in each community. For many, it was with enthusiasm: the Congregation was part of the renewal being promoted in the Church and was accompanying it. For example, the Rouen community, led by a dynamic team, became a reference point for liturgical and pastoral renewal in the diocese. On the other hand, there was also a split with the vice-province of Brazil, which was overcome. During this period, Fr Verhoeven and his Council, which was renewed in 1975, made a strong commitment to providing special support to communities that were still following a more traditional vision.

One of the difficulties raised by Mgr Meyer was the social dimension of the Eucharist inserted into the text of *the Rule of Life*: for him, it was a concession to the zeitgeist - everyone was talking about 'the Church of the poor' - which had nothing to do with our Eucharistic mission. Father McSweeney had no trouble countering that Father Eymard had begun his work precisely with the ragpickers of the Paris suburbs... On this point, I think of Father Eymard's conference to the

Servants on 26 November 1861 entitled: *Les œuvres de zèle* (PS 381; XVI,282). For him, the Eucharist was not limited to adoration. By chance, he lived in Paris, in a very poor neighbourhood, and he chose to announce the richness of the Eucharist to disadvantaged young people, apprentices or ragpickers who lived on the margins of the Church. *That's our mission - a beautiful mission*, he says. Look at the parable of the guests at the feast, where everyone is invited: the first chosen exclude themselves, the king sends his servants to invite all those who have lost their way in life; there is still room. *Take the wretched and let them in. That's where the Eucharist began*. And he adds: *On the first day, we had the First Communion of the poor. What happened from the beginning is probably our mission*. It's not a question of copying what Father Eymard did in his time, but of asking ourselves what is possible, what our attitude is towards the poor and the victims of so much distress.

I mentioned the history of the development of our *Rule of Life*. It was more than 50 years ago, and it will soon be 40 years since it was approved by the Holy See. It's a long time ago for many of the participants in this 36th General Chapter, which is in the process of *updating* its projects. The Rule of Life offers us two important criteria:

- No. 36, in which she notes the continual growth of the Church's life and mission, particularly with regard to the mystery of the Eucharist;
- and no. 37, which invites us to read the "signs of the times" carefully.

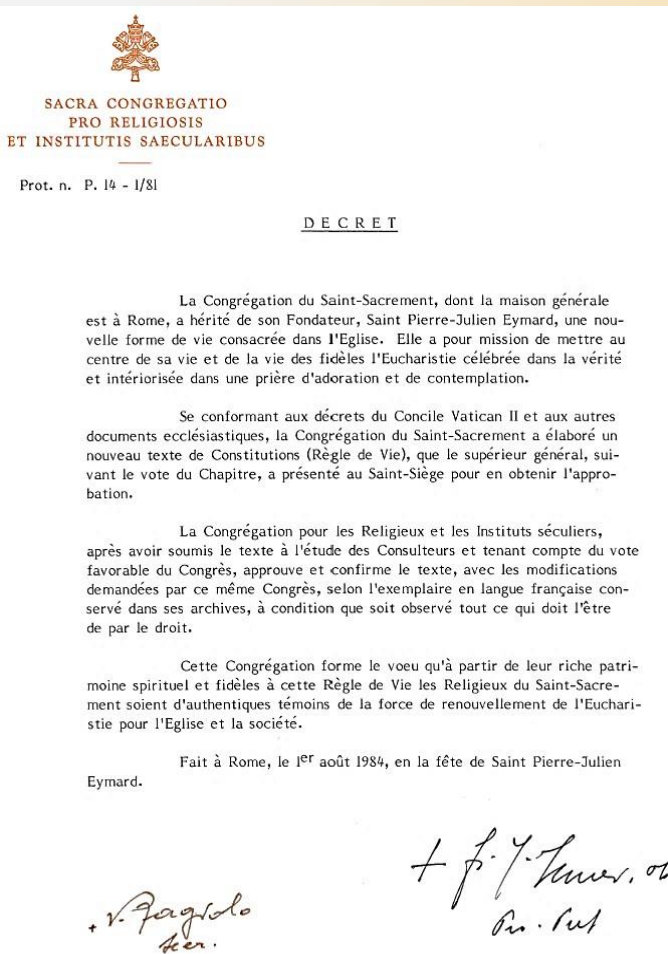
Pope Francis has outlined lines of action in his documents *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato si*. Let's think about safeguarding creation, the 'common home', fraternity, synodality and other themes. How can they be integrated into a changing and, in some regions, deeply secularised world?

I end with a final reference to our Father Founder. At the end of his Retreat at Saint-Maurice in 1868, which is both his *Magnificat* and his *Nunc dimittis*, he notes his resolutions: *Make of adoration the very*

center of my life. Prepare my adoration as one prepares a meal, an important address. The soul of my adorations: the gift of self; the virtue that glorifies his Eucharistic self-abasement. In this last retreat, he reminds us of the source from which he never ceased to quench his thirst. Let us not forget what is essential.

May St Pierre-Julien accompany you in your important work. Our hearts go out to all of you, united in prayer. Thank you.

Paris, September 6th 2023



Fr. Anthony McSweeney, sss

**SSS Community of
Melbourne
Australia**



BRIEF CV

Father Anthony was born on 12 February 1936 in Wedderburn, Australia. He made his first profession on 27 February 1962 and was ordained a priest on 16 August 1969 in Rome, where he studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

In the 1970s he was involved in the formation of novices and scholastics in the Province of the Holy Spirit.

Elected Superior General, he moved to the General Curia in Rome for two terms from 1981 to 1993. Two years later, he set up the Centre Eucharistia, which he directed until 2007.

The following year he returned permanently to Australia, where he resumed his training ministry until 2017.

For his part, Father Anthony mentions *four challenges* that were decisive in the process of revising the *Rule of Life*. These are rooted in a dynamic of conversion understood from different angles : intellectual conversion, moral conversion (behaviour), psychological conversion, religious conversion. The aim of all this conversion is to make a proper and creative adaptation of the *Rule of Life*.



Thank you, Fr Eugenio, for your kind invitation to share my experience of the Rule of Life with you all, and greetings to you, my brothers here present.

Since you are on retreat today, I have chosen to reflect on the challenges of conversion (RoL 9), especially as we experienced them in almost twenty years of re-thinking our identity after Vatican II. The fruits are in our wonderful Rule of Life.

We can approach conversion using four different lenses: conversion of the mind or intellectual conversion, of our behaviour or moral conversion, as well as psychic and religious conversion.

INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Intellectual conversion involves both a willingness to seek the truth and the courage to accept and affirm it in word and deed, whatever the cost.

If our first task was to understand and assimilate the Council's vision, an even greater challenge for us was to reinterpret our charism in line with it.

The years 1968 and 1969 brought us two excellent resources with the work of Laureat Saint-Pierre and Donald Cave. Well-researched and convincingly argued, they offered us a surprising insight into our Founder, especially in his revisions of his own texts of the Constitutions – revisions that altered nothing less than the very central focus, from adoration to communion. For the first time we could see that he was moving in the direction that would lead to Vatican II.

This new understanding met considerable resistance at first. While many of us were thrilled at discovering that Eymard himself had had the insight and courage to correct his own understanding, bringing him closer to us than anyone had thought, others saw it as a betrayal of our heritage. Some dismissed it without a second thought.

Letting go of hitherto unquestioned ideas in the presence of new facts, especially when it touches the core understanding of our life and

mission, called for courage. Eymard himself had written that “Truth must be the inflexible and invariable rule of the Society and of each member, even though humiliation, loss of temporal gain, or failure of an enterprise were to result.”

That was the challenge we all faced over those twenty or so years.

For myself, I was elected to the General Council in 1976. I was privileged to be part of a fine team under the excellent leadership of Harrie Verhoeven. It was given to us to bring the process to its conclusion, with the unanimous approval of the Rule of Life by the members of the 1981 General Chapter. What a moment that was!

Elected to my surprise by the same Chapter to succeed Harrie it was my task to present the newly approved Rule to the Holy See for final approbation.

At the same time, I was asked to give priority to visiting our communities around the world. I took the opportunity to meet each religious personally. I listened to their stories and their concerns – and sometimes even met their families (as you will remember, Eugenio, in Uberaba). It was a precious opportunity to get to know them and their world as well as their lives, their gifts and struggles, their aspirations.

The biggest challenge for me in those first years was to stand firm in the face of the unexplained but prolonged refusal, by Archbishop Meyer, Secretary of the Congregation of Religious, to grant approval to our Rule¹. I enjoyed the full support of my Council and of our Provincials through that difficult time. Finally, three years later, Meyer retired and was replaced by Archbishop Hamer. Approval was then granted almost immediately².

¹ I presented the Rule in the name of the Congregation on the 28th November 1981. I have written about this matter in my Commentary on the Rule of Life.

² The date was the 24th November 1984.

In his teaching about the crucial importance of truth, Eymard never failed to link truth and loving care for others (charity). This brings us to our second lens,

MORAL CONVERSION

Moral conversion concerns our behaviour, our actions. This was one of the greatest challenges of those years in which our provinces and communities were often painfully divided. How maintain an attitude of mutual respect and charity, of brotherhood, in the midst of often angry expressions of disagreement over questions of identity, of our very reason for being together?

Not infrequently the gulf dividing us seemed unbridgeable. Some were disillusioned at the questioning of what they had given their lives for, and left us. Others remained but were angry or bitter. In certain cases, of course, the problem was rooted in an inability to grasp the reasons for change; here the reaction was more often one of bewildered resignation rather than hostility or grumpiness.

Personality factors inevitably played their part here, which brings me to our third lens,

PSYCHIC CONVERSION

Our responses to such situations are obviously conditioned by our personality or psychological makeup. An unwelcome truth gives rise to feelings of fear and insecurity which easily provoke a defensive stance accompanied by anger, hostility, depression or withdrawal...

Such responses are prone to make intellectual and moral conversion exceedingly difficult. Eymard's struggles to engage with his own personality issues, with what he calls his "old self", have much to teach us here.

For years I have studied the notes he wrote during his retreats, especially his three-month long retreat in Rome in 1865. Not at all easy reading, they record in painful detail his relentless self-scrutiny and pitiless self-accusations, as he tries to deal, for example, with his reaction to news of harsh criticism of himself by de Cuers. Not only did violent anger erupt at once; it would continue to boil up again without warning for days.

Despite his repeated attempts to accept de Cuers with understanding and charity, he became frustrated at the failure of his strenuous efforts to control his feelings. He had to learn that there is a limit to what we can change in our reactions, in our personality, and so to what our attempts to achieve psychic conversion based on force of will can achieve. This brings us to the fourth and (ideally) synthesising lens:

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Whereas today we recognise the need for a spiritual director (or even a counsellor or therapist) Eymard unwisely did not have one. The only effective resources available to him, then, were penance and prayer nourished by the reading of Scripture (usually in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament).

During his long retreat in Rome he set aside three periods for prayer each day, recording his thoughts and experiences in his diary.

After detailing what he saw as his ineradicable faults, he declares at one stage the need for “a change of command, of leadership, of principle”, going on to affirm that “a revolution is in order, one of sheer power that resorts to fire and chains, and brings on the death of the ‘old self’”.

After asking himself “how to proceed”, he answers, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and clothe you with power from on high.” Then a complete change of tone occurs. No longer do we hear the language of

force, of overpowering will. Instead, he writes, “I took the resolution to read the Word of God with a very deep respect and to pronounce with affection the liturgical prayers of holy church.”³

In one of his moments of intuitive insight Eymard was seeing that what the will cannot achieve by force has to be dealt with by humble acceptance and trustful abandonment to God.

Similarly, with his understanding of the Eucharist. Meditating on the Cenacle texts and Saint Paul in Galatians, he began to see with luminous clarity that the central focus of his Congregation must not be gazing adoringly at a host in a monstrance but a faith-filled reception of communion during the Mass. Here, he realized, was the real centre, since “*only* in communion do we find an intimate knowledge of the Lord.”⁴

It was an intellectual conversion, not understood by his companions, a striking revision of what he had always taken for granted as the central focus of his mission. He then sought ways to correct the already printed copies of his Constitutions so as to embody his new insight.

We see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in him especially in the apostolic activities of his final years. Burdened by health issues, financial losses and, worse perhaps, the loss of esteem on the part of certain bishops, as well as hurtful criticism from his companions, Eymard strove tirelessly, for example, to bring life to the street children of the Paris slums whom he recruited and prepared for First Communion.

Energised by his compassionate love, but with few resources, he yet found helpers and money for the task. “These wild natures, so coarse and rough”, he wrote, “gradually become attentive, grateful, good and virtuous ... Their hearts open up and we find there generous and gentle feelings... They are sure that they are known and loved.”

³ 24th February, idem, p. 157.

⁴ 28th March, 1867.

Let us now return to today. The dramas occasioned by the drafting of the new Rule are long past. The ongoing challenge for us today is that of faithful adherence to it and creative adaptation of our ministry in response to the signs of the times.

CONCLUSION

The fourfold process of conversion I have sketched here is no less relevant for each and all of us today as we confront the emerging issues of our time. For us SSS the challenge will be less about the Eucharist itself as about those who celebrate – both priests and the gathered people of God.

We have all been appalled and humiliated by the horrors of the clergy abuse crisis and its shameful cover-up in country after country. While mandatory clerical celibacy is being questioned, the access of women to all ministerial roles is a matter that can no longer be ignored.

As for the people, it is not only about who is there (and that is diminishing in many parts of the world), but especially about the extent to which they are a true community, capable of attracting others to Jesus Christ. We are being asked to review our criteria as to who is to be accepted and who is to be denied access to communion.

Socially, if polarising political divisions and the emergence of authoritarian leaders are an increasing concern, it is surely the complex issues of gender identity – once altogether taboo – that are now on the agenda.

These are some of the challenges that our communities and future multi-cultural General Councils will have to grapple with. Long-held convictions and embedded cultural traditions will surely be severely challenged. We can meet them fruitfully only if we are deeply committed, both personally and collectively, to this arduous process of discernment and ongoing conversion that I have sketched here.

Thank you for listening. I assure you all of my prayerful good wishes as you pass this day in communion with the Lord and then proceed with the work of the Chapter.

Melbourne, August 31st 2023



Fr. Abraham Faye, sss

**SSS Community of
Dakar-St Joseph de Médina
Senegal**



BRIEF CV

Father Abraham was born on 18 August 1974 in Thiès, Senegal. He made his first profession on 8 September 2002 and was ordained a priest on 29 June 2007.

In the priestly ministry, he spent 5 years in parish pastoral ministry and 11 years in the formation ministry, including as novice master.

He has been a provincial consultor since 2018 in the Province of Our Lady of Africa.

For Father Abraham, the Rule of Life 102 is like the creed of the Congregation. This number is in no way to be considered as a simple article of the Rule of Life, but a living expression of our sss identity. Father Eymard's gratuitous love and "gift of self" are open to centres of interest such as the poor and communion in the gratuity of service.



To you, dear brothers in the Eucharistic vocation, and most especially to all those taking part in the 36th General Chapter, I greet you all and tell you how happy I am to be with you, Religious of the Blessed Sacrament.

Personally, the basis of my experience in the Rule of Life that I would like to share with you is summarised in number 102 which is the Formula of Profession. This formula, which an elder in the Congregation of illustrious memory liked to call the “CREDO of the Congregation”. Since my first profession and throughout the time I was in charge of formation in the novitiate, and even to this day, I often refer to this number 102 in my prayers and my commitments. This number helps me to always refocus, to adjust myself in relation to my mission and also in relation to my sss identity. As a novice master for 8 years, this same number for me also served as the basis and foundation for everything in the Rule of Life, which is condensed in the first 5 numbers.

The frequent reference to this number 102 gave me the grace not to consider it as just a simple formula to be said, but rather it became for me the fruit, the intelligent and even affective expression of a journey, of an experience lived during the novitiate and which continues in my Eucharistic vocation. During my novitiate, my frequent references to this issue reflected my conviction that this text should remain a beacon of light for us throughout our lives. This number is and always remains for me the strongest and most explicit link that unites me to all my other brothers in the Congregation. This number 102 is the expression of my decision to follow Christ with all the sss brothers of the Congregation.

My attraction to and sensitivity towards number 102 lies in the fact that it constantly reminds me that the expression of my Eucharistic vocation, of my spirituality, is the “GIFT OF SELF”. “I intend to respond to God's gift with the gift of myself”. In this sense, number 4 of the Rule of Life entitled “The Spirit of the Congregation” states that “we cannot live the Eucharist unless we are animated by the spirit which led Christ to give his life for the world”. This number 4 allows us, in our formation, to ask ourselves the question: What led Christ to give himself in the Eucharist? So it follows that if we want to live a Eucharistic life, we must do everything out of LOVE like Christ. As I used to say to the young novice confreres, you're not a true sss if you don't want to devote yourself to the poor and the weak. In this sense, as a master, I always wanted and worked to sensitise and bring the

novices into contact with suffering and poverty, in order to awaken in them a sensitivity to human distress.

To have a gratuitous love for everyone, which for us must be recognised by two signs inspired by the Eucharist, the first of which is LIBERALITY. What does this mean? While we are inclined to calculate and measure, to ask for as much as possible while giving the minimum, free love in the light of the “gift of self” has no other rules than overabundance, an overflowing measure. As the Gospel says, give your cloak when someone asks for your tunic, walk two kilometres with someone who asks for one, give your necessities to someone who asks for something extra. The second sign of the gratuitous love that the “gift of self” inspires in us is COMMUNION, because gratuitous love manifests itself in communion with the suffering of those who suffer and with the happiness of those who are happy. As St Paul said: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” Romans 12:15.

This aspect of gratuity is of great importance in training, in my opinion. We have to accompany the candidates so that they are capable of voluntarily welcoming the person who needs to express their suffering. But we also know that it's not easy to share freely in the joy of others without envy or jealousy. So it's a good idea to train young people to integrate and assimilate this gratuitous love, which is embodied in the attitudes and behaviour of everyday life. For example, accepting and accepting failure is a guarantee of the authenticity of this love, because it reveals the gratuitousness of action. The person who remains serene in the face of failure instead of becoming disillusioned, who bounces back instead of withdrawing, who continues to serve instead of giving up, is demonstrating the gratuitousness of his or her love.

“SSS Religious: together, faithful witnesses of the eucharistic mission”. Our task today is to work together to make our Eucharistic mission more explicit. We know that the future of each congregation and the future of each member of the congregation are connected to each other. The congregation will be alive if the members live their vocation to the full and if they are able to contribute their abilities and their contributions through reflection and commitment. In return,

religious will be nourished in their vocation by the richness of the congregation's charism.

For me, the mission that we have, that must mobilise us and commit us, is that of making all Christians, all baptised Christians, recognise that they have a Eucharistic vocation. It is therefore up to us, through our witness to Eucharistic life, to rise to this challenge. This mission of which we want and are called to be faithful witnesses, our Rule of Life tells us in number 3, has a starting point which is a concrete, living experience and that is CELEBRATION. The theme of our chapter is therefore a reminder, following on from number 3 of our Rule of Life, that our mission is expressed not only through our works but also, and in a relevant way, through the witness of our lives.

“... the Eucharist may be celebrated in truth”: we have the onerous and noble task of helping Christians to make the Eucharist the centre of their lives, so that the Eucharist can change and transform people's lives.

“... that the faithful may grow in their communion with the Lord through eucharistic adoration”: through the witness of our life of prayer, which is also called to become a spirit of prayer, we propose adoration as a means of changing people's lives.

“... that they may commit themselves to the renewal of their Christian communities and collaborate in liberating individuals and society from the forces of evil”: if by our lives we help the people of God to live well the demands of the Eucharist, naturally we will have Christians committed to their Christian communities who will also work to free the world and mankind from evil.

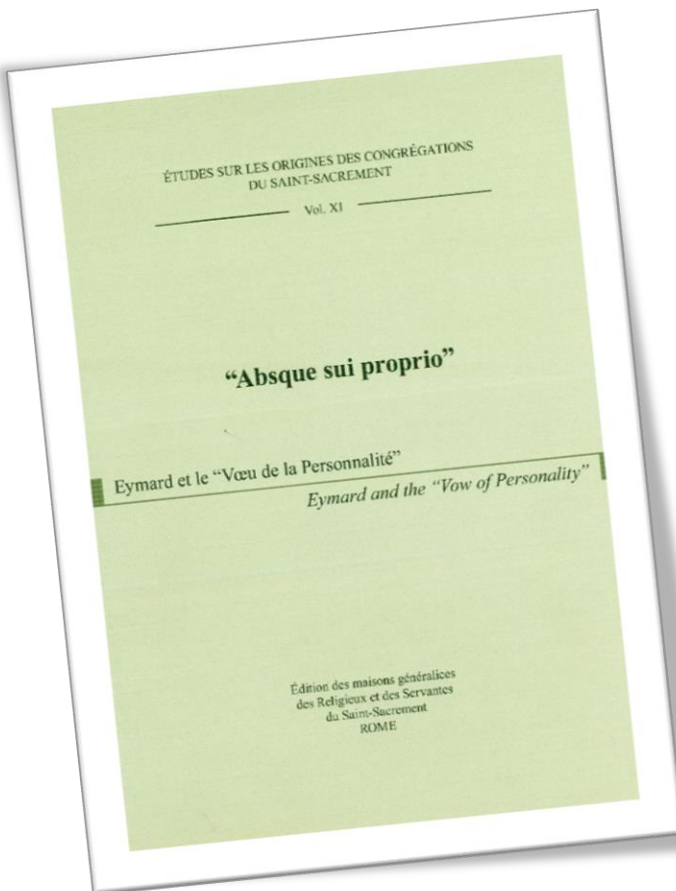
For me, in the light of the theme of this 36th General Chapter, it is urgent and necessary in formation to rediscover the place of the Eucharistic celebration, to model formation on the Eucharistic celebration. As we know, the Eucharist, and more precisely its celebration, is the source of our spirituality. This celebration is the way to become a prophetic community because it gives us a lifestyle for our mission and witness. Let's not forget that the Eucharist is a school where we learn to de-privatise the spiritual life, as Anne Lecu used to

say. The Eucharist exists and is celebrated only to unfold in our lives, and it also invites us to live what we have celebrated. So let's do it!

SSS Religious: together let us put our whole lives into the Eucharist and let us put the Eucharist into our lives to bear faithful witness to our vocation.

Thank you very much!

Dakar, September 12th 2023



Fr. Arokia Sebastian Peter, sss

**SSS Community of
Siolim
India**



BRIEF CV

Father Arokia was born on 20 April 1975 in Coimbatore, India. He made his first profession on 1^{er} May 2013 and was ordained a priest on 3 July 2020 in Salem. He has been a provincial consultor since 2022 in the Province of Kristu Jyoti.

Father Arokia shares his experience based on the summary of the Congregation's acronym SSS: Spirit - Sacrament - Service.



Dear Fr General and His Team, Capitulars of the chapter
and My dear friends in the Eucharistic Lord,

On this day of prayer and reflection, we are called to reflect on the central theme of the Chapter: **SSS Religious: together, faithful witnesses of the Eucharistic mission**. I am indeed feel glad and privileged to share my experience with the Rule of Life. I shall emphasize more on the aspects of the Eucharistic mission, in view of my three years of intense priestly life based on this dimension.

I would like to summarize my reflection based on the experience with the Rule of Life in 3S or triple SSS.

The first 'S' stands for "SPIRIT"

the second 'S' stands for "SACRAMENTS"

and the third 'S' stands for "SERVICE".

SPIRIT

The word Spirit here means the ‘Spirit’ of God that animates us to practice the ‘Spirit’ of our congregation. Rule of Life (I.4) says that *“We cannot live the Eucharist unless we are animated by the spirit which led Christ to give his life for the world”*. Therefore, it is very important for us to allow the Spirit of God to prompt us, in order to listen to the promptings of the spirit you need to spend some quite time in personal prayer which I have experienced in the prayer before the Blessed sacrament.

Spirit is indeed the breath of God and that reminds me of my struggle for breath during Covid 19 pandemic. During the second wave of covid, I was tested positive and was admitted in a hospital in Delhi. My lungs were affected and I had oxygen support for a few days. During those days of fear, anxiety and loneliness, it was the Spirit of God and the Eucharistic presence of the Lord that gave me strength, courage and hope.

I was reminded of the beautiful story that we find in the book of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. He made a golden statue and commanded that all people must bow down before the golden statue and worship it. People, out of fear, obeyed what he said. But there were three young men. They were firm in their conviction to worship only their True God and would never bow before an idol. The angry king ordered that the three youth men be thrown into the fiery furnace and the fire of the furnace was increased seven times hotter than the usual. After few minutes, when the king looked into the furnace, he saw not just three men but four men and they were all unharmed in the furnace and the Word of God says the fourth man had the appearance of a god or the Son of God. So God is with us not just in our good times but also in our bad times and that was my experience too as I spent my days in Covid-19 pandemic.

It is only when we are open to the summons of the Spirit, we can pay attention to the needs of the human family and make our communities places of prayer, reconciliation and service. And so let us be open to the Spirit of God that we may follow the spirit of the congregation.

SACRAMENTS

“Formed by the Sacrament of the New Covenant, which frees us from the domination of sin, we commit ourselves to building up the Body of Christ”, says the Rule of Life no (I.3).

The central theme of the chapter is **“SSS Religious: together, faithful witnesses of the Eucharistic Mission”**.

Our ideal is to live the mystery of the Eucharist fully and to make known its meaning, so that Christ’s reign may come to the glory of God and be revealed to the world. (I.1)

We seek to understand all human reality in the light of the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the life of the Church. We discern in this sacrament a call to share in the life and mission of the Lord, and we give priority to activities that manifest the riches and demands of the Eucharistic mystery in all its dimensions. (cf. General Statutes 34.02)

So, the sacrament of the Eucharist must urge us to build up the Body of Christ by making ourselves available for the celebration of the sacraments in the parishes as well.

While our mission extends to the whole Church it is carried out within the pastoral program of a diocese or region. We need to work in close union with bishops, priests and laity, eager to offer our own particular contribution of spiritual life and apostolic initiative.

While living my first two years of priesthood and serving as the minister at Catholic Bishops Conference of India in Delhi, I tried to be available for the parish in all ways possible. I made myself available for the celebration of the Eucharist, listening to confessions of the people in the parish. After a year, I could hear parish fathers and people telling me that I was like one of the assistants in the parish as they have seen very often serving at the parish. Their appreciation and gratitude encouraged me to grow in my pastoral work especially in celebration of the sacraments. So I try my best, never to say ‘No’ to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

SERVICE

When our Eucharistic Lord proclaimed the New Covenant by the gift of his Body and Blood to his disciples, it was out of love that the Lord gave himself up. Sharing in this gift of himself to us, we place ourselves at the service of the Kingdom. (I.4)

Code of Canon law, 607, states that religious life is a call to be the sign of the kingdom of God.

As mentioned in Rule of life (I.2), our Founder was convinced that a life cannot be fully Eucharistic unless it is consecrated to both God and our fellow human beings, and so he left us with an example of contemplation and apostolic activities. His intense life of adoration, his mission centred on the Eucharist and his constant efforts to lead the people to adoration of the Lord in the setting of solemn exposition, his activity in the service of all, with a preference for priests and the poor, indeed his whole life, witnesses to the gift of himself to Christ.

Firstly, we need to place ourselves at the service of parishes and communities: We need to make our parishes into authentic communities shaped by the Eucharist, which is the source and submit of their life. They shall be: places of proclamation, places of prayer, places of sharing and fellowship, places of freedom and human development and moreover, the living of the Gospel, Eucharistic adoration and festive celebration. (IV.41)

Secondly, we need to place ourselves at the service of priests: We recognize the importance of the mission of priests. We seek to share with them a life of faith, prayer and friendship and exchange pastoral plans and experiences. We place ourselves at their service by offering hospitality, animation and formation, encouraged in this by the example of Father Eymard who used to say, “I would leave everything for priests.” (IV.44)

Thirdly, we need to place ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters:

Our rule of life admonishes us saying, *“We become witnesses of Christ by making ourselves servants of our brothers and sisters. The Lord calls us to live his Passover day by day in this way”*. (II.7)

It further says, *“To celebrate the “Supper of the Lord” in truth is to place ourselves at the service of others, as the Lord Jesus showed by washing the feet of his disciples.”* (IV.27)

United in the Spirit with those who are poor and weak, we need to oppose everything which degrades human dignity and we proclaim a more just and brotherly world as we await the coming of the Lord. (I.3)

I conclude my sharing with the words of St. Theresa of Avila, *“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”*



May St. Peter Julian Eymard and Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament intercede for us and may the blessings of the Almighty God be with us always!

Siolim, August 31st 2023

Fr. Camille Gagnon, sss

**SSS Community of
Lima
Peru**



BRIEF CV

Father Camille was born on 7 May 1946 in Armagh, Quebec. He made his first profession on 8 September 1965 and was ordained a priest in Montreal on 9 October 1971.

He was consultor and then vicar provincial from 1981 to 1987 in the Province of Saint John the Baptist.

He then left for a mission in Peru, a territory that at the time belonged to the province of Canada. In 2003 he was elected regional consultor of the Colombia-Peru-Puerto Rico Region and in 2011 regional vicar. After becoming a province in 2012, he was elected provincial superior of the Province of Saint John XXIII in 2014 for two terms until 2022.

He is currently superior of the SSS community in Lima.

In his sharing, Father Camille recounted his experience in three main parts: the Constitutions, his experience in Peru and the strong points that accompanied him in his mission, in great docility to the Spirit of the Lord.



First of all, I would like to greet the members of this General Chapter gathered in Vietnam, and in particular all those whom I have had the pleasure of knowing during these fifty-seven years of life in the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, that is to say during the entire process of renewal of the Constitutions requested by the Second Vatican Council, by participating in the Chapters of 1971 and 1981

during which our Rule of Life was elaborated and refined, and also throughout my journey as a religious of the Most Blessed Sacrament, for 23 years in the Province of Saint John the Baptist in Quebec, then for 35 years in Lima, Peru.

I've been asked to talk about my 'experience of the Rule of Life', with an emphasis on the historical aspect. I will do this in three parts or three jumps.

THE FIRST JUMP: FROM THE CONSTITUTIONS TO THE RED BOOK

I have in my files a formation session on the Rule of Life entitled: "From the Constitutions to the Rule of Life" given on several occasions to the scholastics of the Province of Saint John XXIII. To illustrate this itinerary, I'm putting five books on the table: Volume VI of the Founder's Writings on the various drafts of the Constitutions, the book of Constitutions and the Customary that I got to know in the novitiate, the Red Book containing the Acts of the First Session of the Renovation of the Constitutions in 1969, the Green Book containing the Acts of the 1971 Chapter and finally the text of the Rule of Life as approved by the Holy See.

I want to talk to you about the Red Book.

We are in the 1960s and 1970s. These were the years of the Second Vatican Council. These were the years of the war in Vietnam and the protests against that war by proposing Flower Power. These were the years of the student revolutions of May 68, first in France and then in several other countries. These were the years of the Cultural Revolution in China and the publication of Mao's Red Book. These were the years of military repression in South America under military regimes in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. In Africa, independence movements were gaining ground.

The Church is also on the move. Dom Elder Camara is making the voice of the poor heard. The liturgical reform shook the way people

prayed. Mgr Lefebvre opposed Rome. Paul VI's encyclical on contraception marked a break with many of the faithful.

Tensions are rising in the Congregation. On the one hand, this attachment to the heritage expressed by the solemn and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and on the other, these new voices for a fraternal Eucharist on the side of the poor and also a call to live a Eucharist that I would call 'integral' by including: community, sharing, prayer, and the poor.

This was the context in which I lived between 1965 and 1971. It was also in this turbulent context that the preparatory meetings were held for the 1969 Chapter for the renewal of the Constitutions in 1969. It was an exceptional Chapter in terms of the number of participants and its duration. It was also an exceptional Chapter session which refused to write the new Constitutions and chose instead to listen to the orientations of the Council, the renewal of Eucharistic theology and the needs of the world. And also to listen to the Founder who, in a way, was rediscovered thanks to Fr Lauréat Saint-Pierre who published in 1968: "L'Heure du Cénacle dans la vie et les œuvres de Pierre-Julien Eymard" (The Hour of the Cenacle in the life and works of Pierre-Julien Eymard).

The Acts of this first session of the Chapter for the renewal of the Constitutions have been published. Each religious received a copy. It was the Red Book.

I remember very well that afternoon on my way back from university. I got to my room and there was this Red Book on the door. I read the first few pages... then, in the joyful excitement that filled me, I rushed to my room-mate and told him all my surprise and joy at having such a result from the Chapter. These are the fundamental orientations that we find in the current Rule of Life.

My joy was so strong that I still burn with it. I could never have imagined receiving such hope, such openness, such a project.

THE SEQUEL TO THE RED BOOK: THE GREEN BOOK

Between 1969 and 1971, an international commission drew up a proposal to be submitted to the second session of the Chapter.

I received this proposal at the international meeting of the scholastics of the Congregation in Düren, Germany in July 1971. The few participants were disappointed by this proposal, which looked like the old Constitutions with a new make-up but which did not contain the breath of the Red Book.

It had been decided at the 1969 session to open participation in the second capitular session to three scholastics and two brothers. So at the meeting in Duren these three scholastic capitulars were elected: Ben Jansen, Donald Pelotte and myself. I was twenty-five years old.

In my opinion, the result of this Chapter is a miracle. We went from a feeling of frustration that lasted two weeks to a feeling of elation for the result that was the Rule of Life. In the history of the Congregation, we will remember the exceptional contribution of Fathers André Guitton, Jean Yves Garneau and Harrie Verhoeven, who, at a furious pace, provided the Capitulars with the drafting of the numbers of the Rule based on the fundamental options voted by the assembly.

We had a Rule of Life ‘ad experimentum’ presented in the Green Book.

THE WORK OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Then the General Council, under the leadership of Fr Harrie Verhoeven, began a wide-ranging campaign in the Congregation to present this Rule of Life.

This work lasted nine years, until the 1981 Chapter. It had been decided that the 1975 Chapter would not deal with the Rule of Life in order to continue the work of animation and consultation. And perhaps more than anything else, to allow this new form of sacramental life sown by the Red Book and the result of the 1971 Chapter to germinate and take root.

THE 1981 GENERAL CHAPTER

This was the Chapter of results: the result of the animation of the General Council, the result of very broad consultations of all religious, communities, provinces and regions.

I was the delegate.

It was also the fruit of a particularly well-organised, efficient and participative revision process. The current Rule of Life was approved in 1984, after a number of changes requested by Rome.

THE SECOND JUMP: FROM QUEBEC TO PERU

Back in 1971, at the time of the Red Book and the Rule of Life ‘ad experimentum’, I was living in a small community in a working-class area of Montreal. For health reasons and also to take on a work of animation in the Province I had to take another path... which would lead me to Peru.

At that time, the Province of Saint John the Baptist had over 170 members and a dozen communities. The Provincial asked me to share in the canonical visits. I was to go to Brazzaville. But circumstances meant that I ended up in Lima, Peru, at Christmas 1980.

I never imagined myself working outside Quebec. I was doing well there, especially with the *Centre Parole et Pain* project and working on the *Prêtre et Pasteur* magazine. And at the time I was headmaster of a secondary school, a former minor seminary, the *Mont Saint Sacrement*.

What's more, I was dreaming of another project. In Montreal, apart from the new monastery, there was the old one, unused and disused. I dreamt of opening the ‘Capharnaüm’ house there as a meeting place and a place for the Bread of Life discourse. A welcome centre for all. A fire destroyed the building... and my dream.

But I was still worried about living with the most disadvantaged.

I arrived in Peru for this visit. The confreres also invited me to take part in the ELAS meeting of SSS religious from South America in Cali.

This was my 'road to Damascus'. I knew that it was there that I would find the space to live a Eucharist of communion and liberation.

One day Fr McSweeney asked me what my options were. And I replied: "A social Eucharist, not a devotional one", even though I can say that I have always celebrated and prayed with devotion.

Number 3 of the Rule of Life was my beacon.

THE THIRD JUMP: INTO THE FUTURE

I'm well aware, and so are you, that I'm at the end of my tether.

I've had an intense life both in Quebec and in Peru: in parish pastoral work, in diocesan animation work, in my work as councillor and provincial in the Province of Saint John XXIII and Saint John the Baptist, and also in various commitments to develop social projects.

I've had the privilege of identifying myself as a religious of the Blessed Sacrament in these working-class communities in search of justice, development, faith and communion according to the Rule of Life.

In this formation "From the Constitutions to the Rule of Life", after the presentation of the RED BOOK, I ask the participants to repeat the exercise experienced by the capitulars in 1969, that is, to look again at today's world, the history of the Congregation and Jesus' offer: "I am the Bread of Life", and to answer this question: How can the Eucharist give life to this world?

It's up to you, during this Chapter, to give the answer for today.

However, I would like to leave you with one concern.

In recent years, I have accompanied three groups of young Colombian confreres in this experience offered at La Mure "In the footsteps of the Founder". In Paris, Fr André Guitton showed us the notebook in which

some 750 young people, accompanied by Fr Eymard, made their First Communion. I remain more and more convinced that we are not entirely faithful to Pierre-Julien Eymard, who presented the “First Communion of Young Workers” to the Archbishop of Paris as the Congregation's main work.

Perhaps that's why I feel more in communion with him in these working-class areas of San Juan de Lurigancho in Lima.

On that note, I'll leave you to get on with your chapter work.


With all my friendship.


Lima, August 31st 2023





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