

The SSS specific mission for today's world
The Rule of Life illuminated by the 36th General Chapter Final Message

We don't have a mission, but we are a mission. It's important to note here that mission is not an action that comes from our good will, from our own efforts. Mission is a gift and therefore a participation in God's mission (*Missio Dei*), a participatory action in the Lord's mystery of love.

The Final Message of the 36th General Chapter, in defining service as mission, reminds us: "service is our creative participation in the Incarnation of Christ as an offering to the Father for the life of the world" (M36GC, 2024, p. 4). The privileged place or image of mission-participation is the Upper Room, because it is in the Upper Room that the community of disciples discovers bread broken and shared for life in the world, and servants, in the solemn action of stooping down to wash the feet of their brothers and sisters, as the Master and Lord teaches.

Called to the Cenacle, as an active participation in the Lord's mission, we begin our journey in this text, with the aim of understanding our specific missionary choices at the root of the RoL, read and reread in the light of the signs of the times contemplated in the General Chapters. This is where our question arises: how does the final message of the 36th General Chapter shed light on the specific SSS missionary options?

The RoL, no. 3, tells us: "Following in the footsteps of Father Eymard, our mission is to respond to the hungers of the human family with the riches of God's love, manifested in the Eucharist". In a few affirmative words, the aim of our RoL no. 3 is to show that the Congregation continues the Founder's mission in the light of our times.

The RoL goes on to explain how the continuity of the mission we received from the Founder can be brought to life in our own time.

Numbers 33-45 of the RoL describe, in a very well-structured presentation, the Congregation's mission as a Church at the service of the world.

The first three numbers on mission (33-35) indicate the fundamental elements, the foundations of the SSS's Eucharistic mission, namely: the Founder as a model (no. 33), the Eucharist as a key to reading all of reality (no. 34) and the ecclesiality as the matrix context of our existence.

This *Fundamenta*, for us SSS, has a very clear intentionality. In other words, the Founder, the Eucharist and the Church must be assumed in the light of very objective characteristics. The following paragraphs emphasize the tone of the fundamental elements of our mission: we must be prophetic (no. 36), socially committed (no. 37) and promoters of unity amid conflicts and divisions (no. 38).

The foundations that support our mission (the Founder, the Eucharist and the Church), dressed in the colors of prophecy, social commitment and unity, lead us to the following numbers: 39-45. These numbers in the RoL indicate specific activities of particular importance to the SSS mission.

These are the service of the Word (no. 39), the liturgy (no. 40), parishes and communities (no. 41), the Church in urban centers, centers of formation and spirituality (no. 42), the association of priests and laity (no. 43), the service of priests (no. 44), the press and social communication (no. 45).

This list of missionary services is an attempt by the original legislator to establish certain limits for greater clarity as to the identity of the specific mission, but it does not represent an exhaustive list or insurmountable limits.

Our General Chapters have the sacred function of always relaunching our specific mission inscribed in the RoL. The 34th General Chapter in Rome (2011), with the aim of making a deeper reading of the signs of the times and rekindling the mission in the light of our tradition, "implicitly desired" (35GC, Acts, 2017, 149) the International Commission of Mission (ICM), which, in turn, was formally set up by the Superior General at the 2nd Meeting of the

Ordinary General Council (ID.). This commission held two international meetings: ICM, Brazil, 2010 and ICM, Rome, 2012.

At the 35th General Chapter in Chicago, USA (2017), the capitulars decided to discontinue the work of the ICM, creating mission commissions in the various Geographical Conferences (35GC, Acts, 2017, 241)

However, the 36th General Chapter in Vietnam (2023) decided to re-found the ICM, with the following indication: "We propose to (re) establish SSS International Mission Commission under the General Council to guide our Geographical Conferences, Provinces and Regions to read the signs of the time, orient and deepen in our Eucharistic Mission indicated in our Rule of Life" (36GC, Acts, 2023, 323).

Based on the desire of the capitulars, the general objective of the ICM can be elaborated as follows: "**It will collaborate** with the General Council to **guide** our Geographical Conferences, our SSS Provinces and our Region to **read the** signs of the times, to **guide and deepen** the specific SSS in our Eucharistic Mission **indicated** in the Rule of Life."

The verbs that make up the general objective define action and identity in the realization of the specific mission of the SSS. The ICM is called to *collaborate, guide, read, orient and deepen, as* the Rule of Life *indicates*, what we consider to be a sacred task.

First and foremost, the ICM has the function of collaborating with the General Council. Based on the experience and specialized knowledge of each member, it offers its best so that the General Council can fulfil its duty of international leadership in the specific mission of the SSS.

Collaboration has the sacred task of guiding the Conferences, Provinces and Regions. By guidance, we mean the pedagogical task of indicating common paths, concrete options for greater synergy in the Congregation and, above all, a deep sense of generosity in all its dimensions (human, financial, among others).

This journey of communion (pedagogical task) is based on a careful reading of the "signs of the times".¹ By reading the signs of the times, we can begin a safe journey towards communion and the fulfilment of our specific mission.

The mandate of the ICM finds a valuable key to understanding the signs of the times in the Final Message of the 36th General Chapter. In this sense, 'From the Cenacle to the world' offers essential themes for understanding today's world.

Thus, with a firm foundation (Founder, Eucharist and Church), characterized by prophecy, social commitment and unity, our concrete choices must be inspired by love for our common home (*Laudato Si'*), care for the poorest (*Fratelli Tutti*), internationality, preference for the charismatic family and constant concern for formation.

The initial question returns: how does the final message of the 36th General Chapter shed light on the specific SSS missionary options? With the title "Called to the Cenacle", a place of participatory mission, the Chapter Message reveals central themes that involve our current specific mission of creative novelty.

At this point, it is important to clarify that the purpose of this text is not to present concrete creative options, but rather to offer reflective elements in a dynamic dialogue between the RoL, the 36th General Chapter and its Final Message.

¹ The expression "signs of the times", a central category for understanding the Church's specific mission, was introduced into Christian thought and the way the Church understands its relationship with time by John XXIII, the Pope who convened the Council. It is an expression that was deepened by the Second Vatican Council, and which refers to the signs that the Spirit gives through time with a view to the self-awareness of history. The world is a place through which God speaks to the Church herself, and not just a recipient of what the Church has to say. In this sense, the signs of the times for the Congregation appear above all in its lifestyle and mission, in the way its members feel and think. That's why the result of the options and concrete objectives presented is born out of the reading of the reality inscribed in the research of the 13 provinces/regions, as well as the critical reading of reality made by the commission.

By way of conclusion, we can consider that the theoretical and practical panorama presented converges towards a possibly important response about the concrete options of a specific Eucharistic mission.

Of course, every choice is limited, but if we accept everything, it means we will have nothing. Therefore, choices made within tradition and current preferences can offer a path to congregational synergy, producing a deep sense of identity and communion.

8 May 2025 - original in English

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