

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE- CONFIGURATION to the 48th GENERAL CHAPTER

Introduction

The MAPRAES Province/Configuration (Province of Mary Presented in the Temple) was legally constituted in the 2012 General Chapter but began its journey with its 1st Provincial Chapter in 2015. The new entity was the result of the union of eight Provinces.¹

MAPRAES was initially structured as a single Province, divided into Regions (which corresponded to the previous Provinces) with a central government, headed by the Provincial Superior and his Council, and 8 Regional Superiors appointed by the same. This arrangement was superseded in the Chapter of 2019, in which the Regions were replaced by a new system of government², with a single Provincial Council, which governs the Province divided into Areas of Jurisdiction grouping different communities. There are 4 Areas: NORTH (communities in France and Italy), CENTER (Italy, Bulgaria), SOUTH (Italy), and WEST (Portugal-Angola). This organization, which has been in operation for six years now, is gradually bearing fruit, with a broader sense of belonging to the united Province³, greater subsidiarity in the exercise of authority, periodic intervention and guidance of the communities by the Consultors in their Area of responsibility.

The MAPRAES Province

Beyond the internal juridical structure, from the very beginning MAPRAES has sought to follow a path that would enhance its history, charismatic and apostolic heritage, while also addressing the issues of diminishing and aging religious, the need to renew the dynamics of fraternal life, and the search for new apostolic ways and means to respond to new socio-ecclesial realities.

¹ In 2015, the 8 provinces were composed as follows: CFI XI (Italy): religious = 31, average age = 60.41, houses = 6; CORM (Italy): religious = 82, average age = 63.80, houses = 8; DOL (Italy): religious = 65, average age: 61.45, houses = 9; FAT (Portugal - Angola): religious = 31, median age: 51.50, houses = 6; LAT (Italy): religious = 54, mean age: 63.10, houses = 8; MICH (France): religious = 12, median age: 73.10, houses = 3; PIET (Italy - Bulgaria): religious = 99 median age: 66.65, houses = 12; PRAES (Italy - Nigeria): religious = 63, median age: 62.10, houses = 11.

² Whereas in the previous model, each Region had a Regional Superior with delegated power, in the new model everything is managed within the Provincial Council, with four Consultors/Reference Consultor of an Area having the task of constant communication and support within the communities in their area.

³ Currently, 262 religious live and work in Italy, subdivided into 38 houses; in France there are 8 religious working, subdivided into the 3 communities of Champigny sur Marne, Lourdes and Notre Dame du Cros; another 4 religious are housed in rest homes; in Portugal, there are 19 religious in the 3 communities of Barreiro, Barroselas, Santa Maria da Feira; in Angola, there are 10 religious subdivided in the 3 communities of Calumbo, Huambo, Uíge; in Bulgaria, there are 7 religious subdivided: 4 in the community of Belene, and 3 in the mission stations of Svistov and Ruse and Tranciovitsa; 19 MAPRAES religious live in the Generalate; 21 religious are out of the community with various permissions.

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

Internally, the Province is characterized by very different histories and cultures, which need to be discovered, welcomed, shared and integrated into a new common identity. We have presences in urban and metropolitan settings, others in more peripheral and isolated areas; shrines, retreat houses, apostolic communities, parishes, infirmaries for our religious, and a health facility. We have presences in developing and growing areas, such as the Angolan mission, and realities in numerical decline and apostolic transformation, such as the European context, where the presence in Bulgaria, the Congregation's first mission and today a presence in a poor Church on the border between Eastern and Western Europe.

The Provincial Chapter of 2023 redefined some goals and actions for supporting the life and apostolate of our religious and communities. We list them briefly: the growth of community life in its spiritual foundation and fraternal life; the revitalization of vocation promotion with the creation of a team dedicated to it full-time; support for the formation of young people with the presence of properly structured formation communities; an apostolic presence that promotes evangelization in response to the rampant de-Christianization of European society; the support of the growth of the mission in Angola with formative support to young Angolan Passionists; the enhancement and coordination of the lay groups present in our communities; the financial and real estate management of the Province, with a better distribution of economic resources within it. These various action steps are presented each year in a proposal for ongoing formation (Provincial Community Project), organized by the Curia and offered to the entire Province, with opportunities for meeting and updating, specific proposals for categories of our religious, celebratory and spiritual occasions, which are then collected and assumed by each community, which draws up its own annual Community Project.

A particular step taken by the Provincial Chapter of 2023 was the approval of a "Plan for the Charismatic Redevelopment of Our Life and Mission" for the communities of the Italian Area, which led to the identification of shared criteria for reorganizing the projects present in this area, with a view to the future of the Province. In the same Plan, the closure of some communities was also defined, in order to be able to reduce the dispersion of religious and recover personnel and financial resources for active projects. We are aware that this process of upgrading the Italian presences is not yet complete and will need to be further developed and extended to communities and projects in France and Portugal as well. The general objective of this action is to possibly safeguard the projects that are essential for the future of the Province, (houses of formation and for the elderly/sick), typically charismatic presences (historical communities linked to our saints), apostolic activities (parishes, retreat houses, shrines, evangelization projects), considering the socio-ecclesial reality of each nation where we minister.

For years the province has been placing fraternal life at the center of its goals as the basic element on which our apostolic witness stands. The motto that has guided the journey in recent years is: "to be a sign of fraternity according to the

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

charism in a divided world." More and more we are aware that the most important resource for our future are our religious, to whom we must be attentive, showing care and offering formation for their human, relational and spiritual growth. Fraternal life in community requires prayer, presence, listening, communication, care, planning, cooperation and verification. It must welcome and value the history and also the frailties that each religious brings, seeking to integrate them into a shared project. Fraternity is therefore not automatic, but requires time, availability and patient cooperation, enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps also because of this complexity, some religious have experienced fatigue, depression and crisis, going so far as to ask for time off or even to leave the Congregation. In this regard, beyond the individual cases, we feel we can say, that more and more a sort of "vocational trend" is manifesting itself, which leads several religious, after their initial formation and insertion in communities, to a certain "individualism" in which they re-envision themselves and their service "apart from" and "outside" the Congregation. It is not easy to recognize these symptoms, but, while acknowledging the limits and responsibilities of our communities, we cannot fail to consider the opportunism of several religious, who, without open/honest dialog with superiors, ask to leave the Congregation because they are looking for a better place for themselves.

The following are the Province's statistics with some reference numbers to explain what has happened in recent years.

The current situation (July 2024)

- Total professed religious: 349
- Median age: 66.3
- Communities/houses: 50
- Priests: 296
- Religious Brothers: 28 (of whom 6 are permanent deacons)
- Clerical candidates in initial formation: 24 (of whom 6 are transitional deacons)
- Brothers in initial formation: 1
- Novices (Europe): 3
- Novices (Africa): 3 (in Tanzania)

What has occurred during the 9 years of the existence of MAPRAES (2015-2024)

- First professions: 48
- Perpetual professions: 27
- Priestly Ordinations: 25
- Departures from the Congregation: 62
- Deaths: 108

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

The MAPRAES Configuration

Our Province also exists as a Configuration, according to the model of "One juridical entity" as described by No. 95 of the General Regulations - *"To achieve Solidarity in the three areas of Personnel, Formation and Finances, the Configurations are formed either as an aggregation of several autonomous juridical entities (Provinces, Vice-Provinces and Vicariates) or as a single juridical entity with different internal structures (Province with Regions/Zones).*

The Configurations are principally organized to promote dialogue and cooperation between the different parts of the Congregation, and to foster initiatives and common action for the life and mission of the Congregation. Each Province, Vice province and Vicariate will belong to a Configuration. "

As a Configuration, efforts have been made to develop among our members and various communities a sense of solidarity and belonging, promoting greater co-responsibility in an exchange of personnel, formation programs and finances.

From the juridical point of view, having a central government, everything is moderated and confirmed by the Provincial Superior and his Council, but this does not mean that solidarity, as required by the General Regulations, is automatic or free from obstacles. In fact, the historical and charismatic component, collectively and individually, built up over the years in the previous 8 provinces, made up of personalities, mindsets, and customs, is still very much present among the religious, with its positive and negative aspects. This means that in the governing of the communities and in the reorganization of the various services, the Central Authority appeals to the readiness of the religious to enter new and different contexts and projects, often finding resistance, impediments or weaknesses that need to be respected.

In spite of this, the dynamic of solidarity is very useful to promote and inspire within the Province a spirit of co-responsibility and cooperation, which gradually can overcome resistance and fears. Some religious, for some time now, have been repeating with a certain pessimism, that the unity of the Provinces has not produced the fruits that were envisioned, and therefore, in their opinion, it is necessary to return to the former organization. Some other religious, criticize the criteria used by the provincial government to manage planning, pointing out that they do not consider the past, the history of the various areas, complaining of decisions that are abrupt and discontinuous. These feelings of the religious, which must be respected, signal the presence of resistance, partly instinctive or unconscious, connected with the fatigue of change, the uncertainty of the future, the fear of having to accept choices that are not shared. Therefore, the call to "be represented," with one's identity, history, heritage, and culture always returns in the various decisions of the Province, expressing an attitude that tends to be defensive and conservative. These attitudes somewhat reduce the strength of solidarity within and outside the Configuration and can only be developed and changed by a slow and gradual

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

sensitization of people, about their vision of the future, for themselves and for the Congregation. For this, not only juridical or managerial decisions are sufficient, but a personal adherence, a change of mindset, a willingness to go beyond the known and the already experienced is what is required on the part of the religious. The fruits of the MAPRAES Configuration must be seen, therefore, within a medium to long term time frame, because the real goal is to be able to reorganize our charismatic and apostolic presence in the territories of our competence, that will allow us to guarantee in the future (within 10-15 years) a reduced but significant presence of the Congregation. However, a different reality is the Angola mission which is instead gradually growing and will have Passionist life in Africa as its future context.

Coming, now, to the verification of our ability to live Solidarity in the three areas of Personnel, Formation and Finances, I will try to present, not so much the choices made by the central government, but above all the adherence and movement that is being created within the communities and by individual religious.

First, **Solidarity in Personnel:** this is a necessary action within our Configuration that has found significant expressions of willingness and generosity from the religious, but also great resistance and many obstacles. As a percentage, we have managed to involve more or less 30 percent of the religious in the Configuration in this action. The figure is not high, partly because many of our religious are already elderly and sick, although this is not the only reason. The reduction of religious and their reduced operational capacity oblige us to reorganize present projects, removing resources from one part, to insert them in another. This causes some complaints and polemical judgment on the part of those who feel excluded. An element that is often a source of misunderstanding, is "the newness" that is instilled in various planning and communities arousing, on the one hand, enthusiasm and openness and on the other hand some criticism about the lack of continuity with previous models.

We feel that this is still an evolving journey, which will take time and we trust that the grievances or just observations can be transformed into greater co-responsibility. In the Configuration we are promoting initiatives that foster knowledge and appreciation of the religious, as well as of the various communities and their histories and peculiarities.

Concerning Solidarity in personnel with other Configurations or Provinces, we need to better study the possibilities of collaboration with them, knowing that in "our territory" there are religious from other entities. At the moment, we note the presence of religious from Congo (SALV) in Italy and France, where there is also the historical presence of the English-speaking parish of St. Joseph (PATR) in the heart of Paris. We believe it is important to promote greater knowledge and cooperation with these religious coming from other configurations and working in "our territory," with a view to mutual support, on spiritual and pastoral levels.

We also note the collaboration that our religious, Fr. Antonio Curto and Fr. Patricio Manosalvas Rizzo, have offered since 2015 to pastoral activities in the Holy

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

Cross Province (CRUC) of the United States. Fr. Antonio returned permanently to Italy last March, while Fr. Patricio continues his pastoral service in the parish of Birmingham (Alabama).

We have made a request to some Provinces which have more young religious to send us some of their religious to collaborate in some of our projects, especially in "founding houses" and in the shrines of our saints, which are a patrimony of the Congregation, or, in some specific presences, such as the mission in Bulgaria or the mission in Angola. The REPAC Province has offered us collaboration of a young priest, who will soon join our communities. In the Angola mission, on the other hand, Fr. Francisco Chamero has been present for several years. We thank his Province (SCOR) for allowing him to bring his missionary experience in support of the work of our religious. We believe that this interprovincial and intercultural dimension, in part laborious and complex, is a necessary element for a future vision of our Congregation.

Regarding **Solidarity in Formation**. Our Configuration, even before its unification, had several shared formation stages and over time the "formation chain" was stabilized, redefining step by step the various steps of growth. In this new articulated organization, formation turns out to be entrusted not only to those responsible (Postulancy Director, Novice Master, Director of Students, Vocation Director) but also to the communities that, in different ways, welcome and guide the religious after the completion of theological studies. This post-theological itinerary proposes to the religious who have completed their theological studies, to be inserted in communities where they will live the final stages of their initial formation. They, in the community, live like everyone else, but they are guided by a religious who is responsible to guide them, while asking all the religious to support these young religious fraternally through prayer and in the apostolate. Although not all communities receive a young religious after theological studies, this program is helping many of our communities discover co-responsibility in formation, experiencing the joy of supporting the future of the Congregation through the young people entrusted to them.

We also do not want to forget solidarity in "ongoing formation," which is promoted within the Configuration, with spiritual and cultural events, fraternity and study days, retreats and recreational moments, offering the collaboration of many religious who make their skills and experience available.

Regarding Solidarity in formation with other Configurations, this is operative in our Angolan mission, where the presence of many young religious in initial formation has gradually required that we structure the various formation stages (the aspirancy, the postulancy, theological studies) making use during the novitiate year of the collaboration with the GEMM Vice-Province of Tanzania. Although the future goal might be to have all formation done in their own country, we believe that this inter-

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

configurational sharing offers our young Angolans an African vision of the Congregation, opening possibilities for future collaboration.

In this area of Solidarity in Formation we thank the Province of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (EXALT) for allowing Fr. Giovanni Cipriani to assume the role of Director of the Passionist Theological Students in Huambo, giving us time to prepare a few Angolan religious who may in the future succeed him in this service.

At the general level, as a Configuration, we propose to consider the creation, in Europe and Africa, of international Passionist theologates to offer our young people a more international and intercultural outlook.

At the level of **Solidarity in Finances**, our Configuration has tried to reorganize the management of capital from the previous entities, and to channel it for the common good. In this process, there has been a certain hesitancy in overcoming some particular visions, with fear and resistance, because today's resources are the result of a long process of savings, Providence and wise management, and there are fears that they may "get lost" in a generic centralization. We admit that the economic history of the old entities has been very diverse in method, organizational style and results, in some cases positive and prosperous, and in others, more modest and uncertain.

There has also been the added problem of the size and complexity of the Configuration's financial and real estate assets, which are spread across different European and African nations, with diversified legislation. It is precisely this latter legal dimension that is making the management of our assets more complex and "technical," complicating and lengthening the time for unified reorganization.

From a practical point of view, the Configuration has created Common Funds, at the Provincial and regional levels, supported by the resources of the old Provinces, aimed at supporting provincial initiatives and ensuring help where there is a need. There are also cases of horizontal solidarity between communities, which with the consent of the central government, support specific projects by sharing their resources. What is still lacking is a sense of full economic co-responsibility that makes one feel in a shared way a "common good," for better or worse.

Our goal is to make each community grow so that it is autonomous and self-sufficient, with its own apostolic ministry and the resources that Providence offers. At the same time, to offer all religious a sense of serenity that they are part of an institution that will be able to guarantee support and assistance in the expansion projects and for individual needs with a focus also on the poor and needy of today.

A specific problem in Financial Solidarity is that of the destination of the structures that are no longer used by the Communities. Not only in Italy but also elsewhere there is difficulty in appraising these structures due to the complexity of the regulations that constrain their transfer or renovation, with a view to their reuse

REPORT OF THE MAPRAES PROVINCE-CONFIGURATION

for other purposes. This real estate situation affects the whole Church in Europe, with structures that are used more infrequently and not always easily evaluated.

Lastly, we do not rule out implementing greater Financial Solidarity with the Congregation or other provincial entities, although we already note that there were several donations for specific projects, especially in support of our presences in poor and missionary areas.

We then wish to highlight that, due to internal difficulties and the lack of appreciation of closed facilities, the MAPRAES Configuration struggles to pay each year the percentages of the communion of goods that are required of it by the General Curia. In this regard, we take the liberty of requesting a verification of the criteria used to calculate the quotas for the communion of goods, referring not only to the numerical consistency of the Provinces or Configurations, or their location in the macroeconomic context, but also to the real economic resources that each of them possesses.

Rome, 31 July 2024

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