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Holy Christmas 2022
Happy New Year 2023

Dear Brothers,

“The people who walked in the darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light shone” (Is 9:1)

These words of the prophet Isaiah that we will read at Christmas Midnight Mass help us to grasp the profound meaning of this liturgical moment that we are called to experience again this year. They well reflect the difficult historical moment that the world and the Church are experiencing. Of course, they also tell us something about our experience as religious. Darkness, with its load of uncertainties, doubts, violence and death at different levels, seems to inexorably mark the life of our society and in some ways also that of our community as well as of the Church.

In the end whoever wins will not be the darkness but the light which means closeness, encounter, life, justice and joy. For this reason Holy Christmas is the bearer of a great hope which bases its reason to be on God's fidelity to his promises: "Today a Savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord " (Lk 2:11). It is this certainty which has always supported the faith of the Church and given life to her missionary action and at the same time motivates our commitment to religious life and gives a renewed impetus to our ministry at the service of God's people everywhere in the world.

a - Greetings

In the name of the General Council, I wish to each of you who work in every corner of the earth the most beautiful and fraternal wishes for a Holy Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year. In particular, I wish to convey this message of good wishes to our young people in formation, to sick and elderly confreres, and to those who are experiencing the drama of war in Mozambique and Ukraine and to those who work in a climate of high social and political tension, especially in Myanmar and in Haiti. May the same wishes come with intensity and affection to the dear La Salette Laity and to the Sisters of La Salette who share the same enthusiasm for the mission with us in the world. May the light coming from the cave of Bethlehem, piercing the darkness of evil, bring a glimmer of hope, peace and serenity to each and every one.

b - Synodal path

In the wake of the journey to be made together in the spirit of synodality to which Pope Francis calls us, the General Council has given itself a program of animation of the Congregation for the years that separate us from the General Chapter 2024 which is articulated and developed around three verbs - *meet*, *listen and share* - which speak of dynamism and courage in living the present and of the challenge in facing the future.

We have already reflected throughout this year on the verb "**to meet**" which invited us to go out of ourselves, to open the door of our home and of our heart to the brother who shares with us the same community life and the same mission, as well as to those we would meet on the street or in ministry. Another verb that embodies the idea of taking the initiative and taking the first step towards the other. In a word, it was a strong invitation to make each of us the "good and authentic Samaritans" of our time. Furthermore, it sounded like a strong call to be religious and an "outgoing" community ... to become artisans of peace and dialogue.

The second verb of this triad is "**to listen**". It will accompany us in reflection throughout the new year that is about to begin. For it to take concrete shape, it requires an attitude of humility on our part, the ability to silence our feelings and to be silent, wishing only to get to know the other better.

It also requires a particular dose of willingness to meet and an effort to put ourselves in the brother's shoes by opening ourselves to his reasons without uttering any judgment towards him but rather holding out his hand to support him in his difficulties and to share his expectations and projects. In fact, dialogue arises from attentive, respectful listening, free from any prejudice towards anyone. In this fraternal approach we can make our own the young Solomon's prayer to God at the moment in which he was about to be anointed king of Israel: "Lord, my God, give your servant a heart that hears..." (1 Kings 3:9)

This is an experience that must be lived above all at the level of our personal life, always supported by attentive listening to the Word, and also by community life. If we act in this way we will certainly be able to develop more peaceful and fruitful relationships with others wherever we meet them.

c - A new bishop

On November 11, the feast of St. Martin of Tours, the Holy Father Francis appointed bishop of Ambanja, a diocese in the northwest of the country, our confrere **Fr. Donatien Francis Randriamalala** of the Province of Madagascar. This election is a great reason for joy for our Congregation because we can welcome it and consider it as a gesture of esteem and appreciation from the part of Pope Francis for the missionary work carried out so far by our confreres on the Red Island. The episcopal ordination will take place in Ambanja on January 15, 2023. I will participate at the celebration with Fr. Mémé, General Secretary. We entrust our confrere and his episcopal ministry to the maternal attention of Mary, mother and messenger of divine mercy.

d - Events at the Generalate

In the first days of December, the community of the Generalate experienced two moments of great emotional impact:

- ❖ The departure for Argentina - Monday 5 December - of Fr. Manuel dos Reis Bonfim, general councilor, with the mission of animating the local community as delegate of the Superior General with residence in Cordoba in the central house of the District. While continuing to be a member of the General Council, he will remain in the Latin American country for the time necessary to complete the mission entrusted to him. We wish him a happy stay with the promise to pray that his mission is marked by wisdom and bears the fruits we all hoped for;

- ❖ The return to the Father's house on Wednesday 7th of December, the eve of the the Feast of Immaculate Conception, of Fr. Neil Jones, a member of the USA Province - after a brief and apparently painless illness. He had been in Italy since 2013. His funeral was celebrated in our parish Church in Rome on Friday 9 December and his body will rest forever in the Congregational tomb in the Verano cemetery. Representing the MMA (USA)Province, Fr. Jim Henault, MS participated the Funeral service. May the Lord welcome Fr. Neil, in glory and accompany him to Heaven by the Beautiful Lady of La Salette.

e - La Salette: passing of the baton

On 29 December 2022, at the sanctuary of La Salette/France, the official ceremony of the handover from Fr. Antoni Skalba MS (outgoing Rector) to Fr. Daniel Ramanantsitohaina, MS (New Rector) will take place. Fr. Antoni will be available to his Province (Poland) starting from 1 January 2023. The sincere thanks of the General Council and of the whole Congregation go to him for his presence in the international community and for the valuable ministry carried out at the sanctuary as Rector during the past six years. We wish him a happy return to his homeland and a fruitful service in the new mission that the Superiors will entrust to him.

We express all our gratitude to Fr. Daniel for having accepted the onerous task of animating the pastoral care of welcoming and accompanying pilgrims who climb the holy mountain, in close collaboration with the international community present there. We also express to him the most beautiful and fraternal wishes so that his ministry, carried out under the protection and maternal gaze of the Beautiful Lady, enriches the people of God with all those human and spiritual fruits that the Church and the Congregation expect from our presence at the shrine.

f - Jubilee celebrations

The General Council will travel to the Philippines starting from the middle of January 2023 to until February 15, 2023 for the canonical visit to the Province and also to participate in the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the American La Salette Missionaries in the country which will culminate the solemn mass of thanksgiving presided over by the Superior General on 11 February in the sanctuary of Silang/Cavite. The whole Congregation joins the Province of "Mary, Mother of Hope" in prayers of praise and thanksgiving for all these years of industrious and creative La Salette presence in the country and wishes that in the future the courage and missionary spirit that they animated the choices, life and ministry of the first confreres from the USA since 1948.

May Our Lady of La Salette, our Mother and Patroness, bless and protect everyone.

Merry and Holy Christmas and Happy New Year!

Yours fraternally,

Fr. Silvano Marisa, MS
Superior General