

Webmaster (WM): Fr. John, you just returned from the General Chapter in Rome, having been elected assistant general. Congratulations!

Fr. John (FJ): Thank you. I look forward to my new responsibilities and the opportunity to serve my brothers in this capacity, on a world-wide scale now.

WM: Fr. John, could you tell us what a general chapter is?

FJ: The word “chapter” is somewhat unusual in this context. It signifies a meeting and specifically a meeting of the members of a religious community. Its origins can be found in monastic life. Monks would come together to read a chapter of the rule that governed their life. Eventually, the room where this took place became known as the “Chapter Room.” It was in this room that important discussions would occur. Eventually, these meetings themselves were simply called chapters. In religious communities today such meetings, or chapters, take place at the level of each community once a year (local chapter), at the level of the province every three years (provincial chapter), and at the level of the entire congregation once every six years and are therefore known as ‘general’ chapters.

WM: Who attends such a general chapter?

FJ: In addition to the ex officio members, that is to say, the Superior General and his assistants and the various provincials, there are elected delegates from each province depending on the

size of the province. There were 43 delegates in total this year from more than 15 countries. There were also invited guests. This year the Superior General invited an Assumptionist from Vietnam, a country where te congregation has experienced significant growth in the last six years, and, for the second time, lay men and women, twelve of them in all, representing lay associates throughout the world who are interested in sharing our Assumptionist way of life in a more public manner. Of course, the Chapter could not function without a wide variety of support staff for communications, translations, liturgy, secretarial assistance, and practical matters. In all, we were well over 60.

WM: What is the purpose of the chapter?

FJ: The chapter really has two purposes: (1) to evaluate the life of the congregation over the past six years and to set priorities for the next six years; (2) to elect or re-elect the General Council, i.e. the international leadership team, the Superior General and his assistants (who are eligible for two six-year terms).



Fr. Benoît Grière, newly elected Superior General, with his immediate past predecessors Fr. Claude Maréchal (left) and Fr. Richard Lamoureux (right)

WM: Speaking of the elections, who is on the general council with you?

FJ: The new Superior General, replacing an American, Fr. Richard Lamoureux, who had spent twelve years in the position, is Fr. Benoît Grière, from the Province of France. Fr. Benoît, a medical doctor by training who worked for many years in Africa, recently served as provincial of the largest province in the congregation, France, which includes over 250 members in some 13 countries. The vicar general, Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo, a scripture professor, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the only assistant to be re-elected from the previous team. The new General Treasurer, Brother Didier Remiot, also a Frenchman, holds an M.A. Degree in aeronautical engineering from M.I.T. and spent many years in the aeronautical industry before

assuming major responsibilities at Bayard Press, the Assumptionist international publishing house, headquartered in Paris. The final member of the team, and the youngest, is Fr. Marcelo Marciel, a Chilean, who had been pastor of a large parish in Rengo, Chile.

WM: You mentioned that the first task of the general chapter is to review the past six years and set priorities for the next six. How does this work in practice?

FJ: What is important to remember is that the members of a religious community are called upon to update the guiding insights and intuitions of the founder, often known as the "charism" of the a congregation. In the past 10 years or so, we have had the opportunity to celebrate both the sesquicentennial of the congregation's founding (1850-2000) and the bicentennial of the birth of the founder, Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-2010). Both of these celebrations served to re-ignite interest in and study of the his thought, way of life, and path of holiness.

WM: How exactly do you go about re-defining the charism?

FJ: What we tried to do, in fact, was, first of all, to identify the major challenges (some, in the Assumptionist world, might call them "the great causes of God and man") which we are facing in today's world and then, to say, what does it mean for us to be Assumptionists vis-à-vis these challenges? How does one take the basic insights and intuitions of a man who lived 200 years ago in a specific time and place, and faced with specific challenges, and translate them to the world in which we live now?

WM: What were some of the challenges you identified in this regard?

FJ: It would impossible to give you an exhaustive list of all the issues that were cited, but there were some major ones, among them, (1) globalization; (2) the world financial crisis; (3) the secularization of the Western world and, wherever capitalism and consumerism reign, the consequent religious indifference and ignorance; (4) the rise of Islam; (5) the threat of terrorism and violence; (6) massive migrations of peoples; (7) ecological threats; (8) the sexual abuse crisis within the Church itself.



