

THE REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

In the year 2024, from August 28th to September 1st at 7:00 AM, the first conference of lay associates of the Redemptorists in the Vice-Province of West Africa was held in the conference hall of the Saint Gerard Formation House. The theme of this conference is: "Getting to Know Each Other Better as Members of the Redemptorist Family." "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133).

DAY ONE

The first day of the conference began with the registration of participants, followed by the unfolding of various agenda points for Day 1, including prayers, various welcome addresses by Redemptorist leaders, presentations from the associate groups, an introduction of Father Ibrahim, and the opening Mass of the conference. After the prayers, the conference officially began with the welcome addresses.

In his welcome address, Father Olivier Sawadogo, Vice Provincial of the Vice-Province of West Africa, thanked the participants, his confreres, and the journalists for their presence. He stated that this conference is in line with the vision of the General Chapter, which reflects the ministry of the laity, and is also an opportunity to promote Redemptorist spirituality. He reminded the participants of the conference's objectives, which include:

- Ensuring the sharing of the charism with all Redemptorists.
- Providing the lay associates with a space for reflection.
- Creating bonds between brothers and sisters at various stages of the mission.
- Equipping the ministry with a competent body for the effectiveness of the Redemptorist mission in West Africa.

As for Father Rogério Gomes, the Superior General, before officially opening the conference, he emphasized that this gathering goes beyond a simple meeting. For him, it is a moment of communion, sharing, and strengthening the ties that unite all members of this great charismatic family. He added that this reflects the desire to walk together with the Congregation, drawing from its charism and spirituality. He highlighted some fundamental elements to consolidate the group's journey, including: reinforcing the Redemptorist identity and sharing experiences; renewing and deepening the Congregation's charism and returning to its spiritual sources; revisiting the essence of the Redemptorist mission and how it is reflected in their lives and activities; building fraternal bonds; and promoting harmony in diversity.

Father Noël Koutré SOTTIMA, Coordinator of the COREAM, noted in his address that since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has continuously emphasized the need for Religious

to collaborate closely with the laity in the missionary work of Evangelization. He affirmed that many Congregations, such as theirs—the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer—have understood this. That is why the last three General Chapters have strongly emphasized collaboration with the laity, whom we affectionately call "Lay Partners." He added that two documents, namely the Directory and the Ratio Formationis for Lay Partners, have been published to clearly define the relationship that should exist between Redemptorists and Lay Partners. He therefore invited his confreres to place particular emphasis on the formation of Lay Partners, as the better we are trained, the more effective we will be. He concluded by saying that this Conference is an opportunity for exchange and mutual knowledge among the different groups and associations that are part of the Redemptorist Family.

Finally, Father Nicolas Ayouba, General Counselor, said that to make this conference experience a success, patience is required. Being the first of its kind, there will be challenges, but we must be patient and attentive to one another. Among the topics on the agenda, it is important to emphasize the word "family," as everything we experience should be done in this spirit: the charismatic family that the Superior General spoke of in his speech.

He added that united by the same charism and spirituality, we are members of the same community, which we call the charismatic family. The themes on the agenda, as mentioned by the Superior General... (text cuts off)... invites us to deepen our understanding of these topics to become knowledgeable experts.

In the welcome address of Father Désiré Zanté, Vice Provincial of Southern Europe, he emphasized that evangelization cannot be accomplished alone. He noted that it always happens in collaboration with others—not only with those to whom we are sent and whom we must love, but especially with the One who sends us. Therefore, it is essential that this mission is carried out in a spirit of communion and effective collaboration. The mission is always lived in partnership. Drawing inspiration from Christ himself, who chose his collaborators, he invites us to also work in service of the Gospel through collaboration and cooperation. Thus, for every word and concrete action to be undertaken, there will be lay collaborators—men, women, youth, and children—to accompany us in spreading the message of the Good News according to the footsteps of the Redeemer.

Anne Walsh, President of the General Commission for Partnership in Mission, added that there are many ways to be a Redemptorist partner in the mission, such as proclaiming the Good News through our way of life and its explicit announcement. For her, it was St. Alphonsus who initiated this since 1732, starting with a small group of collaborators who shared the same ideas. This has since grown into a thriving charismatic family that today serves the abandoned poor on five continents and in more than 80 countries, spreading the

Good News. She mentioned that many mission partners are involved in parish ministry and the preaching of popular missions. She added that the work of the General Commission for Partnership in Mission is to bring together all these forms of partnership and mission, to facilitate better communication and shared discernment on missionary engagement. She concluded by saying that the mission belongs to Christ, continued in and through his Church. Through witness, example, and the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, the Redemptorist family aims to bring people into contact and communion with Christ the Redeemer. That is our mission.

Finally, Mrs. Judith Agu, President of the Shared Mission, COREAM, was particularly delighted with the holding of this conference despite the economic situation on our continent. She invited everyone to make this conference a time of prayer, meditation, and especially the sharing of experiences. She added that the unity of the congregation is found in the unity of the love we share. She was impressed by the level of commitment to promoting partnership in the mission.

This was followed by a break, after which the various lay partners each took turns giving a brief presentation of their movement. They each shared their history, spirituality, and activities, highlighting some challenges and future prospects. The groups included:

- The Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Gerard from Fada N’Gourma,
- The Disciples of Christ the Redeemer from Bobo-Dioulasso,
- The Fraternity of Lay Associates with the Redemptorists (FLAR) from Ouagadougou,
- The Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from Côte d’Ivoire (Tiébissou, Treichville, Yopougon, Daloa),
- The Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from Togo,
- The Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from Burkina Faso: Ouagadougou (Kossoghin, Kossodo), Ouahigouya, Fada N’Gourma, Tibga,
- The Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help from Niger,
- The League of Saint Gerard in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso),
- The League of Saint Alphonsus in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso),
- Friends of the Redemptorists.

The first day's work concluded with a presentation by Father Ibrahim Gerard on the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: Charism and Spirituality, Community and Missionary Identity.

In his presentation, he highlighted the elements of the Redemptorist mission, namely the mission, charism, style, organization, and vision. Regarding the mission, he explained that it aligns with the spirituality of proclaiming redemption that overflows to the poor and continuing the mission of Christ the Redeemer. Regarding the charism, he highlighted that it involves responding to the urgencies of our time by dedicating one's life to proclaiming the Good News to the poor. Speaking about the Redemptorist way of life, he added that a religious, whether priest or brother, takes vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience with an authentic desire to dedicate their life in community through prayer and work. Regarding the organization of the congregation, he noted that the supreme governing body is the General Chapter, which is held every six years in ordinary circumstances, although an extraordinary chapter can also be convened.

He concluded by sharing the vision of the Redemptorists, which is to be missionaries of hope following in the footsteps of Christ the Redeemer.

An opening Mass for the conference, held in honor of the Most Holy Redeemer, began at 6:00 PM, bringing the first day to a close.

DAY TWO

The second day of the conference also began with the offices before being punctuated by three presentations on the following themes: Presentation of the Action Plan for Lay Partners of COREAM; Presentation of the Directory for Shared Mission: Place and Role; and The Role of Youth in the Congregation.

First, regarding the first theme, it was developed by Mrs. Carine Drabo, President of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Kossoghin. During her presentation, she recalled that important decisions are made during the General Chapter. The General Government bases its strategic plan on these decisions, which serves as a foundation for the COREAM Commission for Shared Mission in developing its action plan. This action plan also serves as the basis on which sectoral-level lay partners establish their activity programs.

She added that this action plan was adopted in Nigeria during the first physical gathering of lay partners and confreres for the six-year term from July 28 to August 2, 2023. She mentioned that the topics addressed in this action plan are numerous and multifaceted, with concrete actions to be carried out at specific times. These topics, numbering eleven

(11), are centered on the annual themes set by the General Government, and other related themes are also developed.

She concluded her presentation by discussing the related themes connected with the adopted missionary priorities and the strategies for implementation within COREAM. She emphasized that missionary priorities refer to the targets on which both Redemptorists and lay partners should focus their evangelization efforts.

Following the presentation, participants asked clarifying questions, provided contributions, and made suggestions. From these discussions, we noted concerns that deserve to be taken seriously by the Redemptorist Fathers in the process of accompanying lay partners. Among these concerns was the question of harmonizing prayers within the NDPS groups.

Next was a presentation by Father Blaise Savadogo on the role of youth in the congregation. He indicated that this theme raises the issue of the presence and involvement of youth in the Alphonsian Family today and confirms our conviction that the participation of young people brings new energy and fresh perspectives, while strengthening intergenerational bonds. He asserted that involving young people in religious activities and events is essential for ensuring a vibrant and inclusive future in our religious family, which is undergoing restructuring.

However, he mentioned that young people face many challenges when trying to integrate into the Congregation. These difficulties often include social and cultural obstacles that can limit their active participation. He urged participants to understand these challenges better to accompany the youth more effectively on their spiritual and vocational journey.

He then proposed some solutions to promote the integration of youth within the congregation, including strategies for support and accompaniment, encouraging open dialogue to better understand their concerns, creating initiatives that promote active participation to strengthen their sense of belonging, forming youth groups to foster inclusion, and encouraging spiritual formation and discussions.

In conclusion, he stated that the role of youth in the congregation is Multidimensional and essential for the vitality of the Congregation, their engagement enriches not only their own spiritual experience but also that of the entire congregation.

Finally, the third theme of the day was presented by Father Nicolas Ayouba. He focused on the presentation of the directory for the shared mission: its place and role. His talk elaborated on the origin, structure, and content of this Directory.

Speaking about its origin, he informed the participants that it dates back to the 25th General Chapter (2016) of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. He emphasized that this chapter strongly affirmed the shared mission to which Redemptorist missionaries,

along with Lay Missionaries and Redemptorist Associates, are called in a spirit of partnership in and for the mission. He also mentioned that the Chapter recognizes in Lay Redemptorists "the richness of the Redemptorist Charism," which the Lord gives to the laity so that a prophetic word and presence may exist in the world. As a result, he confirmed that a permanent office for the shared mission with the laity will be created at the General Government level, and a Commission for the shared mission will be established in each Conference.

Regarding the structure of the directory, he noted that it is composed of four chapters. The first chapter explains how one of the signs of our time is the growth of evangelical relationships between laity and professed religious from many institutes. This chapter also reviews the trajectory of recent Redemptorist documents in which the theology and practice of the shared mission are developed. The second chapter, he stated, addresses the diversity of forms that make up the large Redemptorist family. In addition to professed members, it includes Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer, Lay/Associate Redemptorists, various types of Lay Collaborators, and Oblates. This chapter also provides clear descriptions of the responsibilities and roles of professed Redemptorists and laity in partnership within the mission. Furthermore, he mentioned that the third chapter deals with the issue of the formation of Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer, Lay/Associate Redemptorists, Lay Collaborators, Oblates, and professed Redemptorists. This topic will be further elaborated in the *Ratio Formationis* for partners in the mission (upcoming).

Finally, he announced that the fourth chapter provides a clear description of the structures that support the shared mission at the local, Unit, Conference, and Generalate levels.

In conclusion, he asserted that the primary objective of the Directory is to give the Redemptorist family a clear and precise view of the partnership in the Mission. This is why he invited his confreres to experiment with it within their congregation. As for the groups, he urged them to clarify their situation in relation to this Directory and to commit firmly to promoting its guidelines. He concluded his presentation by inviting both professed confreres and laity to submit amendments to this Document before the end of June 2025, in order to incorporate them into the Mid-Sexennial Assemblies.

The activities of the second day concluded with a Mass in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

DAY THREE

The third day of the conference also began with the offices, followed by the day's agenda.

Thus, Father Noël Sottima presented the *Ratio Formationis*. He explained that its purpose is to respond to Decision 11 of the XXV General Chapter and is a continuation of the General Directory for the Shared Mission (promulgated on March 15, 2020).

According to him, this *Ratio Formationis* is a response to Decision 11 of the XXV General Chapter, and it is offered as a support and guide for the Units and Conferences in developing guidelines and programs for the formation of Partners in the Mission. Each Unit will develop and adapt its own guidelines and programs according to its local realities.

He mentioned the fundamental and general objectives, as well as the core values in the formation for partnership in the mission.

The issue of the formation of lay collaborators and lay missionaries was also discussed. He explained that lay collaborators are men and women of different statuses in life who share the life, mission, and ministry of the Redemptorists in various ways.

As for Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer (hereafter referred to as LMTSR or simply Lay Missionary), it is a category established by the XXI General Chapter as an "active
Translation:

A collaborator who participates in the apostolic life of the Redemptorist Congregation."

Thus, Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer, as he emphasized, represent the most complete expression of collaboration and participation (that is, association) of the laity in the apostolic life of the Congregation (Communicanda 4, No. 39). As the secular form of life closest to the Congregation, Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer (LMTSR) are associated with the apostolic life of the Congregation through a process of initial and ongoing formation.

He concluded his presentation by explaining the continuous and ongoing formation programs for lay collaborators, Lay Missionaries, and professed members.

The second theme of the day was presented by Father Pascal SORGHO and focused on the empowerment of groups. He reviewed several types of empowerment, namely: legal and administrative empowerment, spiritual empowerment, leadership empowerment, personnel empowerment, and economic and financial empowerment.

Regarding legal and administrative empowerment, he showed that it is necessary to have certain legal documents and meet specific conditions, which include: official documents (Statutes and Internal Regulations); having a leadership team in accordance with the group's Statutes and Internal Regulations; obtaining recognition by ecclesiastical authorities (parish, parish priest, and other priests); and obtaining recognition by the Redemptorist Missionaries.

Speaking of spiritual empowerment, he indicated that it is essential to possess and know the prayers specific to the Congregation: prayers to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Gerard, and prayers in the Confraternities of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; be characterized by a life of prayer; have regular and ordinary spiritual meetings according to the group's orientation: Confraternities of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (knowledge of the Icon, prayers to Our Lady of Perpetual Help); Saint Alphonsus or Saint Gerard: life and spirituality, mission accomplished by Alphonsus or Gerard.

He mentioned that there is a need for harmonization and compilation of various texts to help groups and individuals thoroughly absorb and live the spirit of each group.

Regarding leadership empowerment, he recalled that from the earliest days of the Congregation, St. Alphonsus, by initiating the "Evening Chapels," gave responsibilities to lay people to continue the life of prayer and animation in the absence of missionaries.

He showed that groups thrive through the dynamism of their leaders. This vitality may depend on the youth or seniority of the groups. However, groups often face serious difficulties related to leadership issues. To address this, he suggested having a leadership team with well-defined responsibilities; avoiding personal influences and not relinquishing control; and knowing how to guide different age groups: children, youth, and adults.

Speaking of personnel empowerment, he insisted that groups should be consistent and not be content with just 5-10 members. It is necessary to promote the group to attract others. Good examples and the visibility of positive activities carried out will draw more people to the group.

Finally, he stated that financial empowerment, leadership, and financial viability will enable the groups to support and sustain our mission in the world today. Therefore, it is essential that the shared mission with the laity and the promotion of our missionary vocation be a priority in every Unit and community.

Lastly, Father Siméon B. Chabi presented the theme of the legal framework for the partnership of laity with Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the Church: the case of the Redemptorists.

According to him, the legal issue that arises from this presentation is understanding the place of lay partners in the Redemptorist family to outline legal responses. He structured his discussion around three points: the place of the laity in the Church, the place of the laity in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the place of lay partners in our family.

He discussed the issue of legal recognition, provided some terminological clarifications regarding lay partners, and addressed some current canonical references.

Before concluding his presentation, he mentioned that in the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes, there are six principles necessary for living the charism fruitfully, both in the lives of the confreres and in that of ****Translation:****

...those who share the mission. However, before these six principles, the one that upholds all the others, both among the Redemptorists and in the Church, is communion.

A Mass in honor of Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori brought the third day's work to a close.

DAY FOUR

On the fourth day of the conference, the closing ceremony took place, highlighted by thank-you speeches.

One by one, Father Pascal Tiendrébeogo, coordinator of lay partners for the Vice Province of West Africa, Father Noël Sottima, Coordinator of COREAM, Mrs. Judith Agu, President of the Shared Mission, COREAM, Father Nicolas Ayouba, General Counselor, and Father Olivier Sawadogo, Vice Provincial of the Vice Province of West Africa, delivered their words of gratitude to the participants.

Each of them congratulated the organizers, the Redemptorist Fathers, and the associated groups for the successful holding and, above all, the success of the first conference of lay partners associated with the Redemptorists. They unanimously advised the conference participants to avoid conflicts between groups, be innovative, and work towards establishing mutual respect and love among the associated groups, as love is the most attractive force in life.

They all expressed the hope that such initiatives would continue in the coming years to keep alive the flame of fraternity among the members of one large family—the Redemptorist family.

At the end of the event, certificates of recognition were given to all participants. The afternoon was reserved for a guided tour of the Nativity scene at the Kossodo parish, and the day concluded with a musical concert.

On the fifth day, a Mass of Thanksgiving was held, during which the members of the Fraternity of Lay Associates of the Redemptorists (FLAR) made their first commitment.

Session Secretaries:

- Drabo Carine. Bado Béatrice. Soma Marc Hervé