



# MSFS

## Live your charism

I have chosen you. Jn 15:16



### MONTHLY RECOLLECTION

In preparation for the Celebration  
of the General Chapter 2025

Recollection 3/12. January 2024

THEME:

### **Missionary Dynamism**

AIM:

**To sustain the spirit of Missionary Dynamism of  
the successive MSFS generations**

## SITUATING THE THEME

### **1. Vitality of the Mission**

Identity and Mission are core to our religious life. Identity refers to and addresses the question, "What we are?" and Mission, the question, "What do we do?". These are crucial. As MSFS Religious Missionaries, our identity is to be the spiritual sons and adherents of the spirit and spirituality of our Patron, St Francis de Sales and our Founder, Servant of God Peter Mermier. If identity is the "spirit" that breathes life into our religious life, the mission is the "flesh" that actualizes and concretely manifests that life-breathing spirit.

### **2. Mission is Fidelity**

Mission essentially is a threefold fidelity: to the very nature of the Church, as Vatican II clearly affirms that the Church is missionary by its very nature; to the mission of Christ who was primarily a missionary par excellence; and to the very essence and core of our beloved Congregation of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales which is essentially missionary (cf Const # 13: 12; also Const # 4: 8).

# WORD OF GOD

## 1. Missionary Dynamism in the OT

### 1.1 As a “Covenantal” Response and Cooperation

In the OT, through the initial pages of the history of salvation, we find missionary dynamism in terms of God’s call and human response, and God’s plan and human cooperation. This also includes a “covenantal” relationship. However, these call and the covenant always carry with them a task entrusted, a plan envisioned and to be accomplished. Thereby, missionary dynamism becomes the concrete way or mode of living out, the testimony and measuring gauge for the fidelity to God’s call, covenant, and plan. This is what we see in all the calls, whether it is Abraham, Jacob, Moses, or Joshua.

### 1.2 As a “Prophetic” Project

The missionary dynamism in the OT takes a definitive turn with the emergence and prominence of the prophets. The prophets become the vociferous and uncompromising mouthpieces of God’s message. Accordingly, the missionary dynamism becomes synonymous with the prophetic tone of doom and hope. Their missionary dynamism is geared to the eventual restoration of consecration and commitment.

## 2. Missionary Dynamism in the Light of the NT

### 2.1 Missionary Dynamism of Jesus Himself

#### 2.1.1 The Mission Manifesto of Jesus

The text Luke 4.18-19 can be taken as the indicator of the missionary dynamism of Jesus. “Mission, commission, emission, remission, and redemption” – these can be the key ideas. This is the summary of the whole life and mission of Jesus. Jesus is on mission. He is commissioned by the Father. He emits the Spirit. His mission consists of the remission of sins leading to redemption. Being sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit, Jesus is entrusted with a specific mission. This is exactly the mission of salvation and redemption: “For in Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1.7). “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1.13-14).

#### 2.1.2 “Being busy” with the Father’s business (cf. Luke 2.49)

To be busy with the Father’s business is all that mattered for Jesus always and everywhere: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (Jn 4.34); “You will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him” (Jn 8.28-29).

#### 2.1.3 Missionary Dynamism: An Apostolic Deposit of Faith

The missionary dynamism that followed after Jesus through the apostles and later Christians was nothing but the sharing and continuation of the same mission of the Lord. It is to bring liberation and wholeness to the whole of humanity and the whole of creation and proclaim the Father’s unconditional love for all without any discrimination. (cf Lk 4.18ff.; Rom 8.21-22; 1 Tim 2.4; Rev 5.9). They committed themselves to bear witness to Jesus Christ meaningfully and effectively by being docile to the working of the Holy Spirit.

# PATRIMONY AND HERITAGE AS MSFS

## 1. Missionary Dynamism in the Light of St Francis de Sales

### 1.1 In tune with the alert and discerning spirit of the Patron

“Therefore, our Founder wants us to become more like Christ after the example of St. Francis de Sales, our Patron. His patient charity, alertness and total surrender to and identification with the will of God, intense love of God and humans, apostolic zeal, profound humility and simplicity, joyful holiness, confident optimism, firm gentleness, welcoming attitude and hospitality, and his open-mindedness and fellow-feeling challenge us to follow his example”.

### 1.2 Chablais Experience: Missionary fervour beyond compare

#### 1.2.1 A Volunteer with Guts!

“When Chablais fell to the Calvinist faith, and when all the other priests declined to go for the mission, Francis de Sales would get up and say to his bishop in the meeting: “My Lord if you think that I am capable and will command me, I am ready to obey and will go most willingly”.

#### 1.2.2 An unswerving perseverance to the core!

The Chablais mission was a real way of the cross for Francis de Sales. There were no miracles. There were no bright prospects. There were hardly any supporters. Francis and his cousin had only a small group of Catholics as their sole congregation. He was slandered as an idolater and a false prophet. They shunned all listening. A series of difficulties followed one after another. Attempts were made on his life. There was a night when he was chased by wolves and had to shelter himself on a tree the whole night, frozen by cold, and was left half-dead.







### **1.2.3 An Unsinking Trust and Undaunted Zeal**

No doubt that his mission was surmounted by trials and tribulations. But nothing could deter his spirit. He was never found disheartened or lamenting or complaining about his troubles. He always sustained a gentle and composed disposition. He always held himself in God's presence with saintly gravity and openness of mind. He was fully confident that one day God would fructify his struggles. Accordingly, the whole of Chablais was converted to the Catholic faith in a span of five years.

## **2. Missionary Dynamism in the Light of our Founder, Fr Mermier**

### **2.1 Missionary Movements in the Journey of the Founder (In reference to the MSFS Sourcebook)**

#### **2.1.1 The Ninth Experience: The Visit to Rome -the Eternal City (1842-1843)**

*We find here the groundwork for approval of the Congregation by the Holy See in Rome; and Witness to the indefatigable courage and perseverance of the Founder.*

The interview with Cardinal Ostini, the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, was not very encouraging. The replies of Fr Mermier that he had only one house, that the total number of members was eleven, and that the missionaries were working in only one diocese led to a blunt reply by the Cardinal that no approval would be given.

Fr Mermier, although disappointed by the reply and refusal, continued to explain about the work that is being done by the confreres. Touched by the simplicity and sincerity of heart, the Cardinal “was quick to recognise a true apostle, inspired by unfailing faith and a glowing zeal”. The Congregation of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales was temporarily approved by the Holy See on 2 June 1843. On 2 May 1845, the Propaganda entrusted the vast mission of Vizagapatnam, India to the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales. The letter of commission arrived at Annecy on 10 May 1845, the eve of the Feast of the Pentecost.

### **2.1.2 The Tenth Experience: Sending Missionaries to India (1845)**

When the letter of Commissioning arrived, Fr Mermier, with joy and excitement, chose a team of six confreres to go to India. They were Fr Jacques Martin, Fr Lavorel, Fr Jean-Marie Tissot, Fr Jean Thevenet, Br Pierre Carton, and Br Sulpice Fontanel. They boarded at Bordeaux the ship *Courrier de l’Inde* on 5 June 1845. After about three months of travel via the Cape of Good Hope, they landed at Pondicherry on 8 September 1845. In every appointment and commissioning of a confrere by a legitimate superior, these words emerging from the heart of the Founder, Fr Mermier, should ring in confidence, courage, joy, and hope to dare to go forward to break the frontiers of the Lord’s Mission: “*Go missionary go, go prophet go.*”

### **2.1.3 The Eleventh Experience: The Education of the Young as Mission to the Youth (1848-1856)**

This focuses on the crux of education. The holy Founder emphatically affirms: *The heart of education is the education of the heart...Be a father and mother to the children...Be gentle and firm...*

In 1848, Bishop Rendu of Annecy offered to the missionaries of St Francis de Sales the management of the College of Evian. Again in 1856, at the request of Bishop Rendu of Annecy, Fr Mermier accepted the management of the College of Melan. Fr Mermier guided the confreres to be educators of heart and not merely educators of mind. The history of the Congregation as it took up missions abroad revealed the value of the ministry of education in the context of missionary work. It was found very useful as a means of reaching out to children and youth and promoting vocations to religious life and priesthood.

### **2.1.4 The Twelfth Experience: “Noon of life,” Sunset, and Dawn into Eternity (1848-1862)**

This phase comprises key components such as *Parish of Pougny...The initial stroke...Death of Fr Martin in India...Blindness...Resignation to God’s will...New dawn into eternity...*

After the revolution of 1848, Fr Mermier moved to the French territory of Gex and was given the charge of the Parish of Pougny. The Parish was in a very bad shape. The burden of the parish of Pougny was too heavy. Fr Mermier suffered a minor stroke. This forced him to request the Bishop to take back the parish of Pougny. Fr Mermier returned to La Feuillette at Annecy. From Pougny, he began his ascent to Calvary, the dark night of the soul.

Meanwhile, Fr Mermier received the sad news of the death of Fr Jacques Martin, the superior of the Indian Mission. That was a huge blow to Fr Mermier. Fr Mermier gives expression to what is going on within himself when he writes: “I needed this lesson. How good God is! I was a proud man and he humbles me. I was always on the go, ever outside myself, always active, and he forces me to take it easy, he binds me to inactivity, and he turns me in on himself”.

Fr Mermier was at peace but his health declined with increasing blindness. That was a trial in faith and patience. It was his dark night of the soul, the harsh noon of his life. Unable to celebrate Mass, he went for Communion each day.

On 10 August 1862, Fr Mermier had a fall. He had a fracture on his right leg, and his condition gradually deteriorated. On 30 September 1862, our holy Founder breathed his last and entered into eternity. The words of Bishop Magnin of Annecy, the Bishop of the time, in his eulogy at the funeral of Fr Mermier, sums up the holy, missionary, Salesian, and daring life of our Founder:

“Allow me to tell you how happy I am to see here your very worthy leader, your venerable and holy superior, this man of faith who had founded, directed and sustained your dear Congregation in such a flourishing state from its very start. He allowed the Spirit and Breath of God to have dominion over everything and everywhere; who by him has done such great things ... a living model of all priestly virtues”.

## **2.2 Intensity of the Missionary Passion of the Founder**

### **2.2.1 Zeal for mission – zeal for souls**

As known well, in the testing years that preceded the founding of the Congregation, back in October 1832, facing the departure of the band of missionaries, remarkable was his attestation: “My resolve is unshakable, my longings are the same. I want mission work”.

### **2.2.2 A uniquely Innovative missionary method: Preaching Parish Missions**

The felt need for further faith-formation triggered in Mermier the inspiration of preaching parish missions. For him, it was a God-given opportunity that would provide the people with simple and practical catechesis. It would offer solid religious instruction, through an intense atmosphere for recollection and examination of conscience.





### **3. Missionary Dynamism in the light of early Missionaries**

The life and the mission of the early missionaries were nothing but a continuation and authentication of the same sanctity and fidelity of the holy Patron and Founder. Some of the components were:

- 3.1 Missionary zeal in self-sacrifice
- 3.2 Simplicity of life
- 3.3 Loving the poor and living with the poor
- 3.4 Simplicity of approach and hospitality to everyone
- 3.5 Cordial rapport with the diocesan clergy
- 3.6 Promoting local vocations
- 3.7 In the cause of justice and for the poor
- 3.8 Practice of Salesian virtues

### **4. Missionary Dynamism in the light of our Constitutions**

#### **4.1 The Missionary Dynamics of the Constitutions: Consecration for Mission**

The whole journey of our Constitutions can be said to be steered with a central focus on “Consecration for Mission”. Our vocation is consecration and this consecration is meant for and geared to mission. Thus this consecration for mission is consecrated mission or missionary consecration.

Ministries (cf Const # 13: 12) or Apostolates are the responsive ways or aspects or specifications of the mission of Christ. They are the original focuses and prioritizations of the Founder in concretizing the charism in our Christic mission. They are threefold, namely the Renewal of Christian life (Pastoral care), Implanting Christian presence (Pioneering), and Education of the Young (Integral formation) (cf Const # d: 3). They are the specific ways in which the missionary aspects are carried out and actualized: parish/pastoral ministry, oversees/pioneering and education ministry.



# MISSIONARY DYNAMISM: A “LIVE JOURNEY”

## 1. Missionary Dynamism: A Duty of Discipleship

### 1.1 A disciple is Mission-bound

A faithful disciple is also a zealous apostle of the Lord. The Lord chooses us, not to keep us all for Himself, but to set out on his mission (Luke 10. 1-9). A worthy apostle is always conscious of his mission entrusted by the Master, convinced of it, and committed to it selflessly and generously. He has no interest of his own, except the glory of his Lord

### 1.2 A twofold Mission

What is this Mission? It is “to be with” Him and “to be sent” on His mission (Mk 3. 13-15). It is to be with Him as a disciple in communion and to set out as an apostle on His mission of preaching and healing evil. It is a mission to evangelise and to liberate. Thus, the Lord’s mission is two-fold: preach and heal, a mission in word and deed, a mission of word and action.

### 1.3 A Demanding and Challenging Mission

In the light of the whole life and mission of Jesus and his mission teaching and mandate (cf. Mt 10. 1-15), certainly, one who is sent and set on the mission of Christ is bound to face adversities and afflictions. This Mission is so demanding because it is at odds with the mentality of the world. This mission is challenging, because the task itself is very vast (‘harvest is plentiful’) and the takers are scarce (‘the labourers are few’), and because the context and the field of its operation is hostile (‘being sent as lambs amid wolves’).

### 1.4 Missionary Dynamism: Three Essential Features:

#### Focus – Detachment - Commitment

##### 1.4.1 Focus

To be missionarily dynamic is to be focused. It is to be fully conscious and convinced of one’s aim of his discipleship: “So then I run knowing where I go. I box, but not aimlessly in the air” (1 Cor 9. 26). It is not to be distorted, divided, unclear, or losing sight. Positively it means to be clear of priorities, to be single-minded, attentive, and concentrated.

Alas! How sad it is that often many lose sight of this, and are defocused and deviated. Unnecessary preoccupations take our attention. Not the essentials but the trivials, not the crucials but the petty, consume most of the time and energies.

##### 1.4.2 Detachment

Missionary dynamism without detachment is heavy and wearisome. The more one lacks detachment, the more one will feel suffocated, entangled, distracted, deviated, and distorted. One who is attached is dangerously exposed to becoming dishonest, inauthentic, and egoistic. Detachment essentially implies detachment from the world and the things of the world and from one’s own will. It is a matter of self-discipline toward true self-identity.





### 1.4.3 Commitment

Missionary dynamism without commitment will be without its positive content and effect. Missionary commitment implies courageous and persevering endurance. Commitment is all about doing God's will like Jesus (cf Jn 17.4: "I have glorified you (Father) on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do")

## 2. An Appraisal: A Declining Missionary Fervour

Mission is the duty of every follower of Christ. But today we find many a disciple confused, shallow, afraid, and wavering. A missionary mindset implies a profound readiness for a certain deprivation and discomfort. But instead, we find more comfort-seeking, trying to avoid the risk and sacrifice. One cannot be an effective apostle, without being an authentic disciple. One who does not sit at the feet of the Master as a docile disciple, cannot walk for the Master as a productive apostle.

## 3. The Need of the Hour: Revitalisation of Missionary Dynamism

I humbly believe that these simple reflections can serve the purpose of a gentle reminder and a reawakening. We need regular wake-up calls, alarm-signals so that our spirits do not fall into a slumber of self-righteousness or complacency. However modern or progressive we are, we shall never forget our roots, our basics, our rich heritage and the legacy bequeathed to us. We shall never waver in our authenticity and witness of life, not be slackened in our missionary fervour.



# POINTERS FOR SELF-REFLECTION

1. What is the depth of our love for mission? How consistent is our missionary dynamism?
2. Can we sincerely justify our belonging to a Missionary Congregation without missionary fervour?
3. What are some of the hurdles in the way of our missionary dynamism?
4. Is there primacy to mission in our policy decisions and pastoral plans?
5. Are we unconsciously relativising the essence of mission in our eagerness to amplify it?
6. Is our missionary dynamism solidly built on spiritual primacy?
7. Is institutionalism affecting our missionary dynamism?
8. Does the Chablais experience of St Francis de Sales induce us to a deeper missionary dynamism? If not, Why?
9. How much does the indefatigable missionary fervour of our Founder make an impact on us?
10. Do the struggles, sufferings, perseverance and surrender of our Founder challenge us for a greater missionary commitment?
11. How does the spirit of unreserved missionary detachment and sacrifice of our early missionaries edify and guide us in our missionary endeavours?
12. Can you suggest some ways and means to foster our spirit of missionary dynamism?

## Prayer

*Loving Lord, you are the Missionary par excellence! You are on a relentless and selfless mission of accompanying, guiding and empowering us. We thank you for the marvelous legacy of missionary dynamism that is handed down to us through our missionary Patron St Francis de Sales, our missionary Founder and our numerous missionary missionaries. Help us, o Lord, that We shall never defect from our loyalty to the supreme Master and the Lord in the footsteps of our hallowed Patron and Founder. We make this prayer in the most holy name of Jesus, the Lord. Amen!*

*St. Francis de Sales, Pray for us  
Mother of Compassion, Pray for us  
Servant of God Fr. Peter Mermier, Intercede for us.*

**We must never undervalue any person. The workman loves not that his work should be despised in his presence. Now God is present everywhere, and every person is His work. St. Francis de Sales**

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**Tools and Sources:** References/Allusions/Quotes/Anecdotes from the Scripture, St Francis de Sales, Peter Mermier, Church Fathers, Saints, Church documents, History and MSFS SourceBook