

## CMI CONSTITUTION RETREAT 2019

### “Learning, Loving, and Living the CMI Way of Life”

Dear Rev. Fathers and Brothers,

Prayerful Greetings from CMI Prior General’s House, Chavara Hills, Kakkanad!

The prime responsibility of every CMI is to keep alive and growing the **SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT** initiated in 1831 by our founding fathers out of their intense God experience. The founding fathers were truly *Men of God* and committed their life to *intense prayer and deep recollection and the building up and renewal of the Church* and we are called upon to continue their legacy (C1). Our beloved founder, Saint Kuriakose Elias has written with conviction that our congregation is not man made, but God has nurtured it with genuine care and helped it to grow. Our founding fathers envisaged monasteries as the mirrors of virtues and assembly of holy people and the members shall work for the salvation of Christian brethren, doing all what God wants us to do (Common Circular 1869).

God has blessed us over the last 188 years with His loving providential care to become what we are today and it is time for us to sing *magnificat* with Mother Mary for the Mighty One has done great things for us (Luke 1:49). Being anointed by the power of the Spirit, we continue to stand together and march together as one community to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. We have a long array of accomplishments and achievements and all the more today we are a very much wanted community across the globe. Our missionary momentum has already reached 34 countries and we have decided to move to countries like Iraq, Ethiopia and Uganda this year. Over the years, we have really grown in all respects and have never been tired of making efforts on our way forward. It has been God’s doing.

At the same time, we have to face a serious question: “Have we become what we ought to be?” Our Lord provokes the present CMI family with a challenge: “*But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first*” (Revelation 2:4-5). Have we abandoned what our first Fathers had? What have we lost on the way over 188 years? It calls for a sincere soul-searching and

examination of conscience to realize what we ought to be. It is the acceptable time for discernment. An effective discernment process can be made through the analysis of 4 criteria: (1) fidelity to humanity and to our times, (2) fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, (3) fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world, and (4) fidelity to religious life and to the charism of one's own institute. CMI Constitution becomes a mirror to see who we are and what we are expected to be. A retreat on the CMI Constitution will grant us better vision for self-awareness and identity and the right discernment to fulfil our mission faithfully.

The present Constitution was evolved out of prayer, reflection, hard work, discernment, experiments, and determination of our members. CMI Constitution underwent several major changes from 1855 to 1983. The first Constitution was given to us by Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli in 1855 and, subsequently, we had new Constitutions in 1866, 1877, 1802, 1906, 1958 and the last definitively approved text was given on 25 July 1983. Later, amendments were made in 1997, 2003, 2011, and 2014. Our Constitution is not a constant and static document, but a living document as it can be changed according to the signs of the times and the needs of the present society and its future through a process of amendment and with the permission of the Holy See. After the Golden Jubilee of Vatican II and its documents, it is time to revisit our Constitution to make it relevant to the present times as we have found new theology and spirituality for religious life as per the documents of Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. After living our Constitution, promulgated on 19 March 1984, for almost 35 years, it is also a time to critically look at our life and mission as per the Constitutions. Fortunately, in recent years, especially during and after the canonization of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, we have been trying to learn the life and spirituality of the founding fathers, especially of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara and it is a fact that we have come to know things better and we have more written resources on their spirituality. Our congregation has made great progress in serving the Universal Church in the global arena in the light of our previous General Synaxes. Hence, a study and reflection of our Constitutions will inspire our members to contribute significantly to the forthcoming General Synaxis, to make amendments in order to re-found our Congregation in the present context, envisioning the future challenges. But the focus of CMI Constitution Retreat 2019 is primarily individual and community conversion and to re-dedicate ourselves for the greater mission of the Church and its renewal following the legacy of the founding fathers.

CMI Constitution Retreat aims at "Learning, Loving, and Living the CMI Way of Life." The preparatory sessions were grace-filled and all felt the intervention of the Lord in our proceedings. The presence of the members from different age groups and generations created a rare emotional bond and community spirit. The Lord wants us to take and read the Constitution and see us in the mirror of CMI Constitutions and rate the quality of CMI existence and way of life. If there is a gap between the ideal of the Constitutions and the reality of our lives, it is the time for a change and course correction. Constitution Retreat shall be an acceptable time to reenergize ourselves in the Spirit of our founding fathers as they were full of zeal like Elijah and other Carmelite saints. Vatican II reminds us to return to the roots in order to give lasting fruits to the Church in the present times through our

prophetic witnessing as sign of the Kingdom of God. It is to make our houses and institutions expressions of the apostolic dedication of our community rather than being looked upon as ends in themselves. The important question is what role we as a religious congregation is going to play in the Church today and tomorrow. We have to ask ourselves, "Are we involved in the Church today like our founding fathers or are we in our little world of our comfort zones?" CMI Constitution Retreat is the intervention of the Lord in our history to reflect upon our call in CMI family and to reshape our life as per the legacy and charism of our founding fathers.

In order to facilitate the Constitution Retreat, the following proposals are given based on the consultations held in the General Council, Core Committee, and during Animators' Team Training:

**Sources:** We shall use the following sources for the preparation of the talks: (1) The Bible, (2) Writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, (3) CMI Constitutions and Directory, (4) Context of CMI Life and Mission, (5) Relevant passages from the vision, resolutions, and action plans from the General Synaxes that were held after 1984 along with other relevant CMI sources, and (6) Recent Church teachings.

**Duration:** Although the CMI Directory (Article 10) prescribes that the Annual Retreat should be six full days, taking into consideration the current practices as well as the practical difficulties of pastoral ministry on Sundays, it was suggested that the Constitution Retreat shall be five full days, along with the eve of the retreat and the concluding day's morning liturgy.

**Holy Hour and *Lectio Divina*:** During the Holy Hour or Eucharistic Adoration, *Lectio Divina* shall be adopted; passages from the CMI Constitution and relevant passages from the writings of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara could be used for the purpose. It was advised that singing too many hymns and long commentaries be avoided. The Provincial Council shall have the freedom to devise the exact modality of *lectio divina* suitable to the context and nature of participants of the retreat.

**Reading from the Constitution during the Holy Qurbana:** In addition, along with the two readings in the Holy Qurbana, one more reading from the CMI Constitutions may be considered.

**Local Preparation:** (1) Reading of the Constitutions and Directory shall be facilitated in local communities and in Zonal Gatherings; (2) In order to make the retreat more effective, it was suggested that the literature prepared on the themes for the Constitution Retreat could be made available (at least in part) to the Provinces so that reading and reflection on them could be held either in the local communities or in the zonal gathering, as prescribed by the General Council.

**Spiritual Preparation:** Prior to the Constitution Retreat, a prayer shall be recited in the communities of the Province interceding for its success (A nine-day novena to Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara on days leading up to the retreat will be an ideal spiritual preparation for the retreat.) It will be a good practice, if those who would guide and

participate in the retreat are remembered in prayer. Intercessory prayers, especially by the candidates in our formation houses, especially of the aspirants' houses and novitiates, shall be arranged. If possible, we could also enlist the prayer support from outsiders, including religious sisters and lay people.

**Responsibility:** Organization of the retreat shall be done by the Provincial.

**Presence of the Provincial:** The Constitution Retreat aims at deepening the understanding and appreciation of our Constitutions as well as enhancing the quality of our community living. This will be better served if the Provincials will be present during the entire retreat, also to facilitate personal interaction with members of the Province.

**College-Going Scholastics and Regents:** College-Going Scholastics and Regents in the Provinces shall join the retreats arranged in the provinces along with priests. They are also welcome to attend the retreats organized in CSR (July 9-15, December 1-7) and at Chavara Hills (September 9-15). For the scholastics in the major study houses, the respective rectors will take responsibility in planning the retreat.

**Retreat Team:** It was proposed that retreats shall be conducted by a team of three or more members of whom one shall be the *Retreat Master*, who shall be present throughout the retreat, and the rest forming the team. The Retreat Master, preferably, shall be a member from another Province; one of the whole team, at least, shall be from the Province.

**Schedule of Retreats:** When all the provinces finalize the dates, a collated list of retreats will be made available to the members through their Major Superiors.

I am sure that all members of CMI family will take CMI Constitution Retreat as a privilege and blessing in order to remain faithful to our call and mission. The Major Superiors and Local Superiors shall ensure that every member gets time to attend the Constitution Retreat as it is their right to learn, love, and live CMI Constitution, the CMI *way of life*.

May all CMIs be guided by the original vision and passion of our founding fathers during the days of retreat! Let us listen to the voice of the founding fathers and mend our ways to be called as their worthy followers. May the Spirit that guided our founders accompany us and inspire us for a faithful CMI way of life!

Praying for the intercession of our Immaculate Mother of Carmel and Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,

Fr. Paul Achandy CMI  
Prior General