

# “Reconfiguration: Taking stock of the storeroom of our souls”

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I want to begin this reflection on reconfiguration with a short quote from Scripture that I find it most appropriate for what we are about to discuss today. It is from Matthew’s Gospel.

**“Jesus said, ‘Every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old’”** (Mt. 13:52).

This short quotation in Matthew occurs at the end of a chapter filled with parables. In fact, it is so brief that it may appear out of place with the previous parables of the ‘mustard seed’ the ‘sower and seed’, and the ‘weeds and the wheat’. However, I believe it is a perfect description of our topic today: namely; the reality of reconfiguration. The New American Bible, the Catholic edition in the USA that serves as the official translation for scripture and the lectionary, has an interesting heading above this passage: *“Treasures New and Old”*. Perfect!

In my opening address, I mentioned how our strategic communications plan focuses on a theme each year until the 2016 General Assembly. As you know, this year we are highlighting **reconfiguration**. So in my talks, seasonal circulars, and visits to provinces, I have kept this theme before confreres to remind them of its importance not just as a strategy, but as a tool for personal, communal, and provincial renewal. It will foster inter-provincial cooperation and collaboration, but that is a secondary gain that I will say more about later.

From our “Lines of Action”, and subsequently in the strategic plan for communications, we defined reconfiguration as “a pathway to creativity in our ministries”. That last phrase is not a ‘thrown-away’ line, but a central idea to this project: namely, that reconfiguration does not just involve change, upheaval, and loss, but it points us towards renewal, opening our minds and hearts to new challenges. Here are some of the applicable strategies from the “Lines of Action”:

- *To explore locally, province-wide, and Visitors' conferences reconfiguration both as an 'intra' and "inter" provincial sense, and its importance for the future of the CM;*
- *To cultivate a vital and concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation that goes beyond the local and provincial communities;*
- *To create spaces for inter-provincial collaboration administratively, and to share human and financial resources;*
- *To foster personal availability and mobility to participate in new missionary projects;*
- *To review our ministries and the structures of our community life to enhance their missionary dimension;*
- *To go to the most distant (Ad Gentes) and to draw near to the most withdrawn.*

As you read and reflect on these strategies, notice their variety and adaptability. They are meant to assist you as you assess the 'big picture' for the future of your provinces, local communities, and confreres. The suggested strategies invite us to reflect on where we are as provinces, local communities, and as individuals, and how we can go forward together. For those present at the last General Assembly, the mindset behind these strategies for reconfiguration was not that of bureaucrats realigning provinces, pruning away apostolates, or cutting budgets. No, it was that of the Gospel householder who prudently integrates the best of the old and the new.

Some of the ideas expressed in the above strategies tell the true meaning of reconfiguration that you as Gospel householders should heed:

- *A concrete sense of belonging to the Congregation;*
- *Fostering personal availability and mobility for participation in new missionary projects;*
- *Sharing human and financial resources;*
- *And reviewing our ministries and structures of community life to enhance their missionary dimension.*

As you can plainly see, the focus here is on fusing the abilities and energy of confreres, provinces, and works for a greater good; namely to be in service to our charism and the Church.

Yet, I know that the word reconfiguration can seem an odd, burdensome term. Its origin is from the world of computer technical jargon, a place I do not often venture. And given the past negative words (at least in English) often employed to describe it in religious and

secular circles, perhaps the word ‘reconfiguration’ is at least a neutral, if not user-friendly term. But to truly understand its import, we must acknowledge and examine its inner and outer dimensions.

The ‘outer dimension’ of reconfiguration is plainly evident: it involves change, moving from an established, comfortable pattern of doing things, be it community life or the apostolate, to venture out into new, unfamiliar ways of living and ministering. Whether it is the union of local apostolates or community houses, or merging regions and provinces, reconfiguration is an unsettling proposition. It forces us as individuals and as community to come to grips with changes that often close a door definitively on a part of our past. A first reaction is often fear, loss, or uncertainty. And when these feelings grow stronger, they can indicate an inner struggle.

This is where each one of you enter the picture. As leaders called to serve your confreres and the Congregation, you are not only the teachers spoken of in today’s scripture passage: you are ‘householders’. It is your role to assess and inventory your own ‘storeroom’, be it a local community, apostolate, region, or province. You realize that what you handle is not just property, but persons; not only a apostolate, but a faithful apostle to a work; not only a new location, but an enduring vocation; in other words, as the ‘householder’ it is your responsibility to honor the established order, while helping your confreres to embrace new ways of living community life and contributing to the Mission of the Congregation. But to be a ‘Gospel-based householder’ you must first be willing to be instructed in the ‘kingdom of heaven’.

That is why I entitled my talk today ***“Reconfiguration: taking stock of the storeroom of our souls”***. We must be sensitive to the concerns and needs of confreres, especially our elders, as we make changes that, while unsettling in the short term, will bear “fruit that endures” in the long term. To do this properly, we need to listen and learn from one another – to candidly share our plans, experiences, challenges, and yes, even the drawbacks we have undergone in moving toward reconfiguration. As the ‘householders’ of the Congregation, it is your difficult, but indispensable responsibility to make sure that confreres are always informed, invited, and included into the process of reconfiguration. It is not easy, nor simple, but when done well it yields a renewed and strengthened community with a deeper sense of identity and purpose.

This entire day is devoted to the topic of reconfiguration, focusing on its various aspects and approaches in provinces and regions. I urge you to reflect seriously and to dialogue earnestly on this topic. As an example of this, look to the shape and contour of the lives of Saints Vincent and Louise, people who accepted the challenge of reconfiguration first in their own lives, and then repeatedly, in the unfolding of Providence in many unexpected ways, as they sought to serve the poor

in Christ and Christ in the poor. I have often thought that perhaps the most appropriate quotation on this topic might be a phrase St. Vincent used to describe the foundation of the Congregation: "Who would ever have thought that all that was to develop into what it is today?" (Vol. XI, 4-5).

The scriptural passage I quoted from Matthew at the start of this talk occurs after the parables of the mustard seed, the "smallest of all seeds, yet when full-grown is largest of all plants" (Mt. 13:32), the small batch of yeast once mixed with wheat was leavened (v. 33), the "treasure buried in a field" (v. 44), and the "pearl of great price" (v. 46). In these simple, homespun tales of Jesus called parables, we find lessons for Christian living and new ways of thinking. Taken to their fullest, the parables are a paradigm for life together as a community of dear friends in service of the charism of St. Vincent.

Let our discussion today on reconfiguration be not only about parables but possibilities, so that we may all embrace the Mission entrusted to us by Jesus and St. Vincent.