

Decisions of the 35th General Chapter

Rome 2012

**Congregation of the
Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
Sisters**

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PROMULGATION

Rome, 23rd of November, 2012

Dear Sisters:

It gives me great joy to address you, and to present the decisions of the 35th General Chapter of the Congregation, which took place in Rome, from the 30th August to 27th September 2012, and to communicate officially that they are now in effect.

I thought it significant to do this on the feast of the Good Mother, our Foundress, because her way of thinking and her passion for life, "*are a need for the Heart of God*" was the inspiring motto of this Chapter and was with us throughout the time.

It is true that the decisions that I present to you have been taken within the General Chapter. But it is also true that in their preparation, we have all been involved, through active participation in pre-Chapter documents, with reflection in our communities and the contributions that we sent. The final fruits of this Congregational event brings together the feelings of all the sisters, and is something to which we are all committed.

The motto that has inspired the preparation and progress of this chapter: "*a need for the Heart of God*", together with the central theme "*the mission of the Congregation in the world today*", were the keystones for our prayer, and throughout the process of search and discernment. This whole experience, leads us to proclaim with deep joy, "*The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad.*" (Psalm 125). We made decisions in an atmosphere of prayer, discernment, joy and peace. These feelings and ways of

thinking have left us with the certainty that the Lord loves us dearly, and that even today, our charism is a need for his heart, in the Church and in the world.

We began our chapter with a seminar on the mission that we experienced together with our brothers. We allowed ourselves be affected by the suffering of the today's world, we were challenged by our spirit of reparation and motivated to discern "new doors" that are opening before us, wherein the Lord wants us to enter to continue proclaiming his love.

During our chapter sessions, and in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment, we looked at our Congregational reality and we saw our vulnerability, our strengths, and our perceptions with regard to the future. We feel called to a personal, community, and Congregational renewal, we want to recreate our mystic and to give greater enthusiasm and vitality to our ss.cc mission. Heirs of a charism that has much to contribute to the lives of many, we strongly emphasized the richness of internationality and interculturality. We could not close our eyes, ears or heart to the need to grow in a sense of unity and belonging to a single Congregation, with all that that entails.

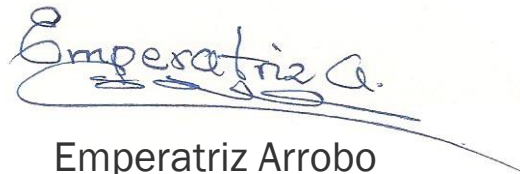
The Chapter has made the decision to initiate reorganization within the entire Congregation that will lead to a new face of the Congregation. Uniting our forces, strengthening our communities and assisting, above all, the common mission, are some of the challenges that we can visualize today. Others will come to light along the way.

From this moment, we are all involved in this task, because it is we who make up the Congregation, and the life it has, will depend on the life that each one of us is able to generate.

I invite you to welcome these decisions with a great sense of faith and communion, and a deep desire to commit ourselves that all may have life and have it to the full.

May the Sacred Hearts take us by the hand, in all that we experience as a Congregation over the next six years.

United in the Sacred Hearts

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Emperatriz A." with a decorative flourish underneath.

Emperatriz Arrobo
Superior general

I. THE NEW FACE OF THE CONGREGATION

*“See, I set before you on this day life and good, evil and death.
I command you to love the Lord your God and follow his ways.
Observe his commandments, his norms and his laws
and you will live and increase,
and the Lord your God will give you his blessing
in the land you are going to possess....
... I set before you life or death, blessing and curse, therefore
choose life, so that you and your descendants may live,
love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and be one with him.”
(Dt 30, 15 - 16. 19 - 20)*

This decision stems from the need, manifested by the capitulants, to address the issue of the reconfiguration of the Congregation as a *central theme for the 35th General Chapter*.

Aware that we share one common mission which unifies us, the capitular assembly clearly expressed the need to be attentive to and to respond to the new calls that God is making to the Congregation today.

As disciples of Jesus we listen once more to his word: *"I came that they may have life and have it to the full."* (Jn 10, 10) We want to welcome this life and share it with the world.

Our ss.cc charism has much to say to today's world: a divided and broken world, in need of the image of a merciful and compassionate God. Many are the places where poverty and suffering abound, where reparation and compassion are needed. Our secular society often alienated from Christ, needs to experience the love and the closeness of our "Good God".

We are responsible for ensuring the continuity and future of the treasure that we have been entrusted with in our ss.cc spirituality, so that it may continue to be of service to the church and our sisters and brothers. We are invited to live in an attitude of ongoing conversion so as to discern God's plan for us as revealed, among those who are suffering, the poor or those who do not know the Good News. We are asked to open ourselves up to new ways of organizing ourselves, and to commitments yet unknown, so as to respond to the more urgent needs of today's world. Once more we are asked to leave the known, what is sure... *"Leave your country... for the land I will show you."* (Gn 12, 1)

We are part of the same body. We belong to one international and multicultural Congregation, which gives us our identity and sense of belonging that goes beyond our countries and continents. *"Our unity, despite different backgrounds, ages, personalities and mentalities, reveals the presence of God's saving Love in our midst."* (Const. 50). We have a common mission that we must revitalize and recreate together.

We are women who are consecrated to the Love of God and called to live in communion. We want to experience a religious life that is more meaningful and a real witness, rooted in God and his Kingdom.

We have seen the global reality of the Congregation and have recognized our weak points and our richness. Certain situations are calling for urgent renewal to revitalize our vocation and to strengthen the ss.cc mission.

The most important of which are:

- Aging and the significant decrease in the number of sisters in recent years: few vocations, departures, deaths.
- A certain vulnerability in missionary communities, in our life together, and in some areas of mission such as Youth and Vocation Ministry, Initial Formation etc,

- A weakening in the sense of being one body and of interdependence, which can result in isolation and a lack of solidarity.
- Too many structures in areas such as animation, administration, establishments, relative to the number of sisters in the Congregation.
- A need to welcome young sisters, who bring newness to ss.cc Religious Life.
- There is a significant number of elderly sisters who need support, and care so that they can continue giving life to the end.
- The need to form leaders.

Through the depth of reflection and communion experienced, we reached a strong consensus about the need to give “a new face to the Congregation”. This new face will be defined by a new organization, and an appropriate leadership for this model. In order to create a greater awareness of this reality, courses of action have also been drawn up for the next six years.

1.1 ORGANIZATION FOR THE NEW FACE OF THE CONGREGATION

“If there is no unity, God’s plan will not be fulfilled in you and if God’s plan is not fulfilled in you, you will never be saints.” GF

“Try to keep fervour, joy, goodness, simplicity, unity, this tender love that forms part of the happiness in religious life. Support the weak, encourage the strong.” GM

As a result of the analysis of our reality and in keeping with the new direction we want to take as we face the future, a process of reconfiguration is proposed for the whole Congregation.

The goal of the process is to have a single entity, organized in geographic regions and in areas of life and mission, with one single Pastoral Plan for the whole Congregation.

This structure will be animated, supported and administered by the General government and the coordinators or those responsible for geographic regions and/ or areas of life and mission.

The model of participation and communication will be in dialogue, inclusive and co-responsible.

This organization has to be carried out through a gradual **PROCESS** that is discerned, inclusive, participative, humane and supported by experts when necessary.

ACTIONS

1. Draw up a process so that the reconfiguration can move forward. This will be approved at the Council of the Congregation, and will be implemented, so that the next General Chapter can evaluate its progress.
2. Draw up an Apostolic Plan for the whole Congregation based on our common vision and mission which will be presented at the 36th General Chapter.
3. Review all our establishments and have an internal reorganization of all the structures we have at present.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF THE REORGANIZATION

1. The **Mission**, giving priority to the new needs and cries of our world.
2. A **common vision** that brings the charism up to date and gives greater witness to our ss.cc religious life.
3. Our **identity and belonging** to an international and intercultural Congregation.
4. **The reality of our Congregation**, with its fragilities and possibilities as well as **the reality of the world**.

1.2 LEADERSHIP FOR THE NEW FACE OF THE CONGREGATION

*“Do you understand what I have done?
You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.
If I, then the master and Lord,
have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet
I have given you an example,
That you also should do as I have done to you.”
(Jn 13, 12b-15)*

To initiate the reorganization of the Congregation, we need a leadership team with vision who will lead the reflection and implement the process based on a renewed concept of religious life; who will encourage and support full participation, in tune with the rhythms of different groups; who will be there to guide, strengthen and give support every step of the way; who will exercise authority and animation modeled on Jesus, and founded on respect, appreciation of others, active listening, discernment and co-responsibility.

All the sisters must understand and experience this leadership within the framework of authority-obedience proper to religious life itself.

Faithful to an attitude of profound listening to the Spirit, we accept the mediation of the ‘service of authority’ in our lives. The way of understanding authority and the service of animation is contained in the document "Guidelines for the service of authority and co-responsibility" approved by the previous General Chapter of 2006. This document is fully up to date and we invite you to look at it again and live it.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR ALL LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

We ask the sisters who exercise any type of service of leadership within the Congregation, to enter into a process of **personal conversion to accept and to take on the process of reorganization.**

It is time to pay special attention to the faith life of the sisters, inviting them **to read reality and events through the eyes of a believer**, cultivating a vision of a future with hope lived through our vocation and mission. It is time to retrieve and encourage consistent spiritual support, as a tool to help one's own life and that of the sisters and communities in the journey towards greater authenticity. It is time to encourage growth in our identity and belonging based on elements of our ss.cc charism and spirituality, so as to strengthen the sense of being one body.

At this time, leadership should be exercised from, in and for communion and discernment, seeking forms of co-responsibility, dialogue, participation and delegation, being attentive to different understandings, incorporating different ways of thinking and encouraging reconciliation and acceptance of what is other.

We ask that attention be given to good communication and dialogue with clarity and transparency: to the sharing of complete and adequate information which takes into account confidentiality and privacy. This good communication must be offered to and asked of all the sisters.

Recognizing that leadership is not always easy and aware that we are not experts in everything, it is good to look for the help of external specialists when the situation requires it.

We invite:

Local leadership:

1. To take advantage of meetings and community settings to deepen our sense of being Congregation, our charismatic experience and the acceptance and knowledge of our reality.
2. To support the process of assimilating reorganization, encouraging the expression of fear and resistance that make reconciliation possible.
3. To adapt or propose ways to strengthen the steps taken.

Intermediate leadership

1. To work in co-ordination and communion with others who have responsibility and with the General Government.
2. To work as a team, knowing that we need each other.
3. To encourage a reflection on our religious life and common mission, with the participation of all the sisters and using all existing means: assemblies, meetings of zones and other types of meetings.

Leadership at general level

1. To draw up and put into effect the reorganization process, establishing a time line, ways of participating, the necessary evaluations and the inclusion of all groups, ensuring that no one is excluded.
2. To be attentive to dialogue, working as a team and communion. If necessary seek advice and support to make it possible.
3. Encourage and support all parts of the process, integrating adequately the local and the universal, that which is different and that which we hold in common, etc.

1.3 WAYS OF RAISING AWARENESS AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE NEW FACE OF THE CONGREGATION

APOSTOLIC SERVICE

1. Evaluate our communities and establishments using common criteria for the whole Congregation, **and move forward in our commitment to respond to the cries of the poor in our world.** We do this in continuity with the 34th General Chapter 2006, in which we felt called to *“be more present in the margins, in those places where the Good News needs to be urgently proclaimed, helping to create a new world in which there is a place for everyone.”*
2. Progressively hand over the administration of our **Educational establishments** to professional lay people formed in the charism of the Congregation. This means that the sisters are free to dedicate themselves to pastoral care as our education centres are also places for evangelization.
3. **Given our option for and commitment to Youth and Vocation Ministry:**
 - Prepare sisters for pastoral work directly with young people.
 - Ensure our presence in places where there are young people, using existing or searching for new ways of being present. We will establish communities in proximity to these places that are welcoming and open, with sisters who give witness to gospel values.
 - Agree that this ministry is the task of all, directly or indirectly, and therefore we have to support, encourage and accept the implications and consequences of this task.

ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY

1. Organize a form of economic solidarity so as to bring about a sharing of goods in the whole Congregation. To do this we will:
 - Create a new model.
 - Use the help of experts.
 - Look again at the Orientations for the Administration of Temporal Goods, Rome 2000.

ONGOING FORMATION

1. Initiate a process of renewal and updating of ss.cc Religious Life which will put fresh heart into us and give greater meaning to our life and Mission.
2. Encourage the formation of “Leaders” at all levels and areas to facilitate the process of reorganization. Propose some common topics, criteria and orientations for the whole Congregation.
3. Strengthen internationality as far as possible through an intercultural formation, the learning of languages, international experiences and meetings.

INITIAL FORMATION

1. Establish a basis for reaching a greater unification of criteria, requirements, plans, programmes, houses... at all stages, keeping in mind the General Orientations for Initial Formation (2000).
2. It is essential to guarantee:
 - A solid religious, theological and professional formation.
 - The learning of languages.

- The preparation of sisters and of communities for the accompaniment of sisters in formation, integrating elements of the ss.cc charism with the values of the cultures that they bring with them.

COMMUNITY LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN COMMUNITY

1. Support the creation of communities in Mission, who give witness to the Gospel and to our ss.cc life.
2. Live the spirit of Reparation within communities, and offer it as an element of our evangelization.
3. Deepen the meaning of ss.cc community life in the face of the challenges of today's world and of the Church.
4. Strengthen those communities that are most vulnerable.

II. OTHER DECISIONS OF THE 35TH GENERAL CHAPTER

INTER-CHAPTER SEMINAR ON MISSION

Aware that "**communion between brothers and sisters** is not an option to be taken by the General Chapters, but an essential part of our charism" (Gen. Chapter 2006), according to our Constitutions Art. 1 and 8, we began the General Chapters of 2012 of the brothers and sisters with three day joint seminar on Mission, a topic that served as a point of reference for Chapters.

Together we listened to the history of our mission and shared the experience of the Congregation today in the different continents. It was easy to relate to and share in an attitude of listening and mutual acceptance. We felt the presence of the Spirit, but also found that there was a mutual lack of knowledge, misunderstanding and even some prejudices among us.

Beginning with a reflection on the mission of the Church in a changing world, on reality and experience of life, we dreamed together about the future.

Some aspects of this experience have resonated with us. They are:

- The need to get to know each other better and accept our differences.
- The need to dialogue and recognize our weak points and possibilities.
- The need to experience our complementarity as men and women.
- The need to know how to lose in order to gain, the need to allow ourselves to be touched by human suffering so as to respond with our charism of reparation.

- The need to take risks and to be available for the common mission.

This experience threw light on our work, and helped us to focus on the mission. **As sisters, we were left with the following challenges:**

- To encourage friendly relationships that could be a starting point to think together about new common paths,
- Where possible, to create opportunities to discern together the "new doors" that God is opening up in our world today.
- To encourage communion between brothers / sisters at all levels.
- As brothers and sisters, to search for ways to make our ss.cc. charism, spirituality and mission, more visible (Const. Art. No. 8).

CONSTITUTIONS

The Chapter decided to begin to revise the Constitutions and Statutes at the same time as the work of the reorganization of the Congregation. It asked that special attention be given to the enrichment of the theology of Religious Life and to the development of elements of our spirituality and charism in keeping with the new face of the Congregation.

THE SITUATION OF SISTERS WITH SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES

IN COMMUNITY LIFE

At the specific request of some Provinces and / or Governments of the Congregation, the chapter dealt with the delicate and painful situation that exists in several communities in the Congregation, whereby there are sisters with serious difficulties in living community life. Their behavior presents an obstacle to communion, and is the cause of conflicts that provoke pain, fear,

abuse and lack of freedom in other sisters. We refer to situations that are repeated and that waste energy that could be used for the life of the mission.

We are aware that the sisters with these difficulties often carry their own problem painfully; but we also know the suffering they generate in others sisters within the community who suffer this situation in silence. Mercy, charity and compassion are essential elements of our charism, and it is from there that we want to respond to both by saying something about this reality.

We are sure that in every situation, a long process has already been put in place in the search for ways of healing the wounds of the sisters who have difficulties in relating. All the possible means to treat their woundedness has been offered to them. But this has not always achieved the expected result.

The General Chapter asks that superiors, at different levels, address these situations in a spirit of unity and communion, trying to understand the sisters with problems, as well as avoiding hurt to others. Canon Law offers guidelines to find ways to resolve this before going down the road of imposed excommunication, which would have to be discerned in each case.

THE SECULAR BRANCH

The General Chapters of 2006 asked the two General Governments that *"in communion with the ss.cc. laity, they continue the reflection on the place of the Secular Branch within the heart of our congregation, and the nature of the commitment of the laity called to live our ss.cc. charism, but in a way that is different from that of religious life."* In October 2008, the two General Governments issued a Declaration on the Secular Branch,

offering elements to give a response to the question about the "place" of the Secular Branch within the Congregation.

Over these years there has been a slight development in the communities of the Secular Branch in various parts of the world. There is a large diversity of styles, but everywhere there is a desire to live the secular vocation inspired by the ss.cc spirit, and to participate in some way in the mission of the Congregation.

On several occasions, requests for help to facilitate the birth or the growth of Secular Branch communities have come to the General Governments, but they lacked a flexible structure that would enable them to give a response to the expectations for help at general level.

The General Chapters wish to offer a structure of spiritual animation for the Secular Branch at a general level, which would help to nourish communion (through a common language and exchange of information) and to throw light on the work of support at provincial and local level.

The general guidelines given by the Chapters of 2000 and 2006 are still in place.

DECISION

The General Chapters of 2012 ask the General Governments of brothers and sisters to initiate a team of spiritual animators for the Secular Branch at a general level.

This Team will have as its function:

- To be attentive to the development of the Secular Branch throughout the whole world.
- To inform and make the whole Congregation aware of the reality of the Secular Branch.

- To offer instruments of spiritual animation and ongoing formation to the members of the Secular Branch and to the religious who accompany them.

The Team

- Will be formed of brothers and sisters appointed by both General Governments.
- In all their proceedings, they must maintain an ongoing interaction with the members of the Secular Branch.

III. ELECTION OF THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT

The election of the members of the General Government took place on September 17 and 18, 2012, according to the Constitutions and the Procedures approved beforehand by the General Chapter.

The following were elected for a term of six years:

Emperatriz Arrobo, Superior general.

Aurora Laguarda, Vicar general.

Mary McCloskey, General councillor.

Gregoria Marín, General councillor.

Alicia Mamani, General councillor.

Rome, 23rd of November, 2012