

Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
(Picpus)

LETTERS OF ENRIQUE LOSADA S.S.C.C.

10TH SUPERIOR GENERAL

1994 - 2006



Rome, April 2007

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Prologue

Enrique Losada's mandate as the 10th Superior General coincided with the introduction of e-mail and the Internet into the life of the Congregation. Without doubt, these two powerful means of communication have shortened distances and sped up dialogue; thus they have strengthened bonds within a small Congregation, dispersed throughout the world that wants to maintain unity in a communion of affection and faith.

But computer communications also have their disadvantages. Everything is sped up. There is the risk of reading hurriedly, writing carelessly, losing one's attention due to the saturation of messages, and less reflection on the words. This also happens with the messages that lose importance because they are printed on scraps of paper or saved on hard disks filled with a million other things.

A book, however, continues to be a book: a silent witness, close-by, always accessible, ready to share its content without any sophisticated technical requirements. A book is read, consulted, a reference; it bonds with those who own it. The computer file is often lost, forgotten, corrupted or eaten by a "virus".

For these reasons, we wanted to publish the letters of Enrique Losada in a book, for use within the Congregation and by others who are interested in our life; so that we don't forget and continue to make use of his reflections and his "*doctrine*" as Superior General.

This book does not contain an exhaustive collection of all the Enrique's letters. We have selected the twelve Circular Letters, a few other letters sent to the Congregation that contain a variety of information, and the joint letters of Enrique and Jeanne Cadiou to all of the brothers and sisters. Other letters have been left out: introductions to documents, letters sent to specific groups, communications about specific topics... In order to have a complete *dossier*, you would have to go into the Archives. At any rate, we feel that what we have published here is sufficient to recapture the more important things that Enrique continued to say to us over the past several years.

We have kept the titles of those letters which originally had them. We have taken the liberty of adding titles to some of the other letters when we could identify a sufficiently significant main theme. In this way, we have tried to facilitate the reader's research.

The letters are very different in tone and content. We find broad narrative sections that tell us of the General Government's activities, announcements, commentaries and references about realities and events within the Congregation (such as the presences in Africa and Asia or the Beatification of Fr. Eustáquio); reflections on deeper themes (such as the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life or Spirituality); moments of personal confession; etc. To understand the unity of such a variety of elements is to enter into the mystery of that which keeps us together.

The life of the Congregation is supported by, among other things, the witness and wisdom of our older brothers. This has something to do with the mystery of the Incarnation of a God who wants to embrace us through the flesh and in human history. As they say in Africa: "*A seated elder sees much further than a youngster on his feet.*" This is not to say that Enrique is an "old man", at least not at the time that this compilation is being published.

I am confident that this book will nourish the memory and reflection of the Congregation, and, in this way, help us - as Enrique is fond of saying in citing the Good Father - to be *useful* to the Church and the world.

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ss.cc.
11th Superior General

**Circular Letters
to the Congregation**

I - XII



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, November 23, 1994

I Circular Letter to the Congregation

Dear brothers,

First, a very warm greeting from myself and the whole General Government.

Since November 2 we have been meeting here in Rome beginning to exercise the service of authority which the Congregation has asked of us. From the very start of our work we realized that communication with all of you would be one of our priorities. Precisely for that reason, even though it is not even a month since we began our meetings, we wanted to send you this first letter on this day that we celebrate as the feast of the Good Mother.

Basically what we want to communicate is what we have been doing up to this point and what we expect to do in the future.

First of all, our work so far has been affected by the absence of Mario Illanes. While in Chile taking a well deserved vacation after the General Chapter, it was determined that it would be necessary for him to undergo surgery to remove a tumor in the bladder. The results of the operation were fully satisfactory and the doctors have guaranteed a quick and complete recovery. In December Mario will join the Council. We look forward to his invaluable collaboration.

Inspired by the word of God (1 Cor 1:18-31 and Psalm 23), which we let echo in our hearts at the beginning of our time together, we dedicated the first day to a simple process of getting to know one another. The simple yet deep sharing of each one's life story up to the present brought us closer together and created a mutual openness so that we can begin to create, "*a true community of spirit and of co-responsibility, necessary to animate the community.*" (cf. art. 94 of our Constitutions)

After that we drew up an agenda that included as most important points: the approval of the minutes of Chapter sessions 44-65, which was entrusted to the General Government by the Chapter; the definitive edition of the Chapter documents for their immediate publication; the organization of the General Curia; a plan for the government for the next six years; a meeting with the General Government of the sisters, as well as other concrete matters.

As you can see, from just the list of these points, the agenda is both full and complex. At this point we have given ourselves six weeks to begin this work. The reason for limiting our time right at the beginning is the trip that I will make to the Cook Islands to celebrate the centenary of our mission there. The celebration takes place December 6-19. Richard McNally will accompany me.

The agenda items that we have addressed as of this date are the approval of the outstanding minutes of the Chapter and the completion of the final redaction of the Chapter documents. At present we are deeply involved in the development of a plan for the Government.

Given the importance of the Chapter documents, I would like to comment briefly on the final redaction.

First, let me point out a few things that will help you see how they have been put together. The Chapter entrusted the General Government with the task of redacting the approved texts in a coherent manner and with a consistent style. The Council thought it would be best to entrust the task of doing a first redaction to Julio García, a capitulant from Andalucía and so he was asked to do this at the end of the Chapter before the brothers dispersed. Julio promptly sent us his version. On the basis of that text and with reference to the Chapter minutes we redacted the definitive texts. Considering that the minutes and the Julio's draft were in Spanish, the basic version of the documents is Spanish. From that text the French and English translations will be made. I will come back to the matter of translations later.

Secondly, I would like to offer some reflections on the content of the documents as sort of a preview. Although we hope you will have them in hand fairly soon, in the month of January.

The editorial work that the Chapter asked of us allowed the General Government to reread the different themes treated during the Chapter together. This has provided us with a overall vision of the Chapter, a vision that we share.

This broad perspective leads us to consider the document "*Missionary Communities*" and the one entitled "*Internationality*" as the ones which can have major consequences for the Congregation in the years to come. We also value what was said in the message "*To the sisters and brothers of the Congregation*", which the two Chapters sent together.

The document, "*Missionary Communities*" is first and foremost a call to the brothers to commit themselves to seeing that our communities be "*missionary communities for a world without frontiers*". This means that every community will feel itself impelled by our mission to evangelize (cf. art. 2 & 6 of our Constitutions) going beyond the borders that injustice, ethnocentrism, indifference and exclusion have created in our world. This also means that, as article 40 of our Constitutions says, "*We structure our community life so as to serve our mission and, at the same time, we consider community life to be a fundamental part and the primary witness of our mission.*"

The document recognizes that not all will be able to do the same thing but all can be inspired by this ideal. We will try to incarnate it in a more significant way in some communities.

Basically this text can be seen as a continuation of the process of renewal begun in the General Chapter of 1982 and intensified with our new Constitutions in 1988. This process has allowed us to identify ourselves with our Congregation's mission in the church and the world of today. A further step in this process would be our communities taking up the challenge of being "*missionary communities for a world without frontiers.*"

The document "*Internationality*" urges us to develop this aspect of our Congregation's communal life to its logical consequences. This is described in our Constitutions in articles 60 to 65 under the heading "*An International Community.*" Clearly the fragility of many of our communities in different parts of the world makes us support one another. Perhaps this is truer now than in the relatively recent past. However this moment can be an outstanding opportunity to discover

those important things that our Congregation's international dimension involves: the solidarity that goes beyond race, culture and language and the witness to a world that seeks unity in spite of division.

The message *"To the sisters and brothers of the Congregation"* attempts to express what we experienced when the two Chapters came together. It does not involve juridical decisions but is the expression of something that was very clear for all the capitulants. As sisters and brothers we form one Congregation, with one charism, one mission and one spirituality. While respecting the autonomy of each branch recognized in the Constitutions (cf. art. 8) some are called to begin to meet and to collaborate and others are called to strengthen what is already being done so that we can live our common vocation and mission.

Recognizing these three documents as those having major significance for our Congregation's future we do not mean to say that the other documents are not important. Quite the contrary. The significance of these three is recognized precisely in the importance of the other documents, which are in a certain sense flow from them.

Clearly the call to be *"missionary communities for a world without frontiers"* demands that we have a Congregation-wide missionary policy and some concrete decisions about priorities. These are presented in the document *"Missionary Policy: Priority Mission Projects."* The Chapter adopted the formation initiatives in Africa and the Philippines as priority mission projects for the next six years. The broader context for that decision is found in the document *"Missionary Policy."* That text was given general approval without a discussion of the specific shape of each of its sections, as these are more descriptive than normative. For that reason we thought it best to publish this document as an annex that would give the reasoning behind the decisions. This text had a great influence during the Chapter not only on the priority mission projects but on other points such as *"missionary communities"* and *"internationality"*.

The approbation of the *"Plan of Initial Formation of the Congregation"* resulted in a Chapter document that has meaning in itself. In other words it is the kind of tool that we need always and not just at this historical moment. However it is also clear that the plan attempts to

respond to many of the challenges before the Congregation and which the Chapter confronted.

Likewise the document "*Restructuring*" can be considered a result of the ideals we have chosen for ourselves. We have to incarnate those ideals in a reality which, in the words of the Chapter, is "fragile and promising at the same time." To consider creating significant missionary communities, to give attention to the priority mission projects of the Congregation, to experience the deep meaning of internationality, to face the needs of Initial Formation and the long list of other things that we could add brings us face to face with a Congregation that includes very diverse situations as regards personnel and structures. Because of this we cannot neglect the restructuring such as the Chapter document calls for. The restructuring that we will have to carry out, with the General Government taking the leadership, will involve everyone, will be for the good of all and will be a result of our fidelity to our mission.

The above are some short reflections that came up in our Council meetings as we worked on the Chapter documents.

As I said previously, another matter on our agenda was the composition of the General Curia. So far we have nominated Frans Steenbrink for another term as Econome General. We are grateful to him for his willingness to serve.

We also named Piet Hoedemaekers, a member of the Vice-province of Indonesia, as the new Secretary General. Alfred Bell, after generous service to the Congregation in that position, will return to his educational ministry in the German Province. We would also like to express our thanks to Piet for his generosity and to Alfred for his great dedication during these years as Secretary General.

We will let you know of other eventual changes in the Curia and Generalate when they happen. In that regard I would like to remind all the brothers of the service that such persons render. It is a service that is very important for the functioning of the General Government. For that reason I thank them for their generosity in accepting and I would ask that others who might be more reluctant have the same generosity.

Certain services do not require that the individuals live in Rome. For example, if we want a Communication Center that facilitates communication within the Congregation, which even if not large is nevertheless complex given its diversity and dispersion, it may be necessary to include in such a structure brothers, who do not have to live in Rome but who collaborate from their respective Provinces.

There is also the question of translations. The internationality of our Congregation demands that communications and services at the general level be in so many languages that it could be difficult to meet such a demand without overburdening the Curia. Added to that is the necessity of communicating in our world where information is expected to be immediate. So you can see why we have decided that the Government will take responsibility for communications in three languages: French, Spanish and English. These seem to be the ones which are most accessible to the vast majority of the brothers. This does not mean that Provinces or Regions can not continue to provide versions in other languages through their own means. Some are already doing this and others could begin.

Even so, it is not always easy to insure translation from the General House in three languages in a way that is quick and economical. For that reason, we are also thinking of asking the help of different brothers who could provide this service in their Provinces.

The above gives you some idea of what we have been doing up to this point. We continue to work on the development of a plan for the Government for the next six years. article 136 of our Constitutions, which is a job description of the General Government, and the documents of the Chapter have provided direction in the development of the plan.

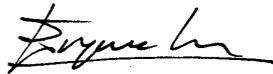
Finally, we await the arrival of the members of the sisters' General Government in order to have our first joint together. Together we have to respond to the call of the sisters' and brothers' Chapters that we find concrete ways to implement article 8 of our Constitutions.

When we decided to write this letter to you as soon as was possible, we were aware that it would take time to translate it and send it to different parts of the world. This would mean that even if sent a month in advance we should be thinking of Christmas.

Christmas is a special day for all Christians and for all people of good will because we celebrate that light is born. This light illumines the human condition and opens it up to always surprising possibilities of beauty, justice, peace and goodness. Jesus is this light for us.

Christmas is also important for the Congregation as the day on which we recall the birth of our religious family. The inspiration of our Founders, who made their vows on Christmas Eve, will always be our best incentive to live more faithfully the vocation and mission of the Congregation that they brought into being under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 1995!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', written in a cursive style.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, January 21, 1995

II Circular Letter to the Congregation

Dear brothers,

Cordial best wishes in my name and that of the General Government, to all of you for 1995 that has just begun.

As I said in the first letter which we sent you on November 23, the feast of the Good Mother, we believe that communication is essential to the service of authority at the general level. So I am writing to you again in the name of the whole Government.

The primary reason for this letter is to keep in contact with you. But there is also enough news that there is also a concrete reason for wanting to write.

I would like to tell you a few things about the health of Mario Illanes, the Vicar General. In the last letter I told you that he would surely be with us during December. This was not possible. After the two operations that he had to undergo, the first to remove a tumor and the second to replace the affected bladder, Mario has recovered rather well. The doctors have assured a total recovery. He will be able to lead a normal life while taking certain precautions. Therefore we hope that Mario will be with us during our next series of council meetings during March here in Rome. I must say that he is already working on council business with the documents we have sent him from here.

Also with regard to personnel, Leopold de Reyes, a member of the Region of Canada, has become part of the General Curia as Secretary for the minutes of the Council and as translator. Given that Piet Hoedemaekers is Secretary General and in charge of the Communication Center, it seemed difficult for him to also do the Council minutes. Consequently, we have made this decision. We thank Leopold for his availability.

In the last letter we told of what the Government had been doing. In this one we want to continue that focusing especially on the Plan of the General Government.

As you already know, when we began our work we finished the redaction of the Chapter documents. We told you that you would have a copy of those texts in hand in January. The publication took longer than we expected, especially because of the problem of translations. At any rate we are confident that you will have them soon.

In the promulgation of the Chapter documents it says that the modification of the article of the Constitutions, proposed by the General Chapter, had been submitted to the Holy See for approval. The approbation was given dated December 14, 1994. Therefore, in a few weeks you will receive an addendum to the text of the Constitutions with the approved modifications. We will include with it the letter of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Our Task as Government

After finishing the work on the Chapter documents, we spent two weeks developing our plan of action for the next six years. We took as our immediate references for that the Constitutions and also the recently approved decisions and orientations of the Chapter.

Before getting down the matter at hand we explored the possibility of seeking the assistance of an expert in the area of planning. However we decided against that for reasons of time, since it could have been difficult to find someone on short notice. It did not seem advisable to postpone the work, since some kind of plan seemed necessary before taking further steps. On the other hand we thought that there was some experience in this area among the members of the Council. However, we have not eliminated the possibility of securing outside help at some point during of our mandate.

To begin we gave ourselves to rereading together article 136 of our Constitutions which establishes the role of the General Government. We can say that there was unanimity in perceiving the mission of the Congregation as what draws us forward in all our undertakings. We believe that in recent years the specific meaning of our mission as

described in our Constitutions has been strengthened. At least at the level of desire, mission seems to take first place in the life of our brothers and communities.

"To animate and challenge the Congregation to be faithful to its mission in the Church and in the world" (art 136.1) is the primary and fundamental aspect of our service as Government. Animation and challenge, both are necessary. Animation without challenge often results in things staying the way they are. Challenge without animation risks being nothing more than a violation of persons.

We believe that there our Constitutions contain great richness that can encourage the Congregation to be faithful to its mission today. The underlying theology of the religious life, the essential elements of our spirituality as religious of the Sacred Hearts, the apostolic understanding of the vows, and communal discernment of mission are points which are brought out in our Constitutions. We must refer to them continually in our work of animation.

We believe that the ideal proposed by our Constitutions is often quite far from our daily life as regards the living of our spirituality, the exercise of communion, the service of authority, the quality of our ministries etc. This shows us the extent to which we need to animate the brothers and communities to deepen their faithfulness to the mission. As the General Chapter says: *"All this involves fundamentally a change of mentality and heart in all the brothers which in great measure ongoing formation and also a series of structural changes would promote and facilitate."* (cf. Chapter Document "Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers" No. 15)

The development of communion and co-responsibility among the various communities of the Congregation (cf. art 136.3) is a subject that the recent General Chapter dealt with amply, especially as regards internationality and restructuring. We must insist on the value of internationality in itself. This does not come up solely because of the weakness of certain of the major communities, but because it is a value we hold as a Congregation. It calls us to live our catholicity in the original sense of the term. It entails communion and is opposed to ethnocentrism, racism, discrimination and national stereotypes. In a world such as ours that is threatened by such dangers, the witness of a

community that goes beyond those boundaries will always be of invaluable importance.

In the article under discussion, the Constitutions ask that the General Government schedule and carry out visits throughout the Congregation (art. 136.4). Commenting on this aspect of our task as Government, we saw that the visits could be a basic element of our ministry. However it is necessary that they be part of a plan so as not to be isolated moments but steps in a process. So, when we schedule of visits, the calendar would not be our first consideration but rather the priorities and needs of planned program.

It seems to us that the General Secretariat and the Communication Center are two basic elements for carrying out our work (cf. art. 136.5). We must commit ourselves as the Government to assuring that they function well and that they have the necessary means.

The Plan of Initial Formation, approved by our General Chapter, gives concrete form to some aspects of paragraph 6 of article 136. During our commentary on this section the concern for vocations was evident. We see this to be a crucial question for the future of some Provinces. It does not seem easy to take a generic approach given the diversity of cultural and ecclesial situations in which the Congregation finds itself.

As we reflected on this point, we came to a certain common understanding. First, it is not a matter of seeking replacements for the works that we have now but of offering our charism so that it might be alive in the Church. For we believe that the church needs our charism.

Secondly, ongoing formation is also of great importance. It allows us to sustain a type of religious life that responds to the Congregation's orientations (type of ministries and presences, style of community life, way of living our consecration...) and that is consistent with what we present to young people in our vocation ministry. This ongoing formation does not consist primarily in intellectual or even spiritual updating. It means putting in place a process of personal growth which affects all aspects of the person.

Thirdly, we believe that the communities must be capable of welcoming young people, whether those want to get to know us or young brothers who are beginning their active life among us.

Lastly, as they say in English, "last but not least", our Constitutions ask us "*to promote the unity of the two branches of the Congregation, above all with initiatives that foster a greater apostolic collaboration.*" (cf. art 136.7) The message of the last Chapter to the brothers and sisters (cf. Chapter Document "To the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts") gives us orientations for the years ahead.

In our discussion, it was first emphasized that according to the Constitutions and Chapter orientations this article does not apply only to the two Superiors General but to the two Governments.

We are conscious of the difficulties that these orientations entail and of which the Chapter itself made mention. However we want to face this question enthusiastically and also realistically. So as not to just be satisfied with beautiful words, it is important to be aware of the reality. That involves not just working at the theoretical level but also at the practical on the basis of inter-communication that is clear and complete. It is also important that all the members of the two governments be able to freely express their point of view on all points to be dealt with.

This discussion was continued during the meetings we have already had with the sisters here in Rome. First the two groups had a time of integration, each of us sharing in their own unique manner their personal story. Next we reviewed the Chapter document together with a view to its publication. This work provided us with a first experience of what we think will be the exercise of collaboration in these next six years.

Since Bill Heffron was in Rome during those days, having been invited by the General Government to study the Philippines Project, we took advantage of the opportunity to have a meeting of the two Governments with him about the project. As of the present moment, we have planned another meeting to further concretize our collaboration.

The feasts of Christmas also allowed the two communities to get together to celebrate the mystery of God-with-us, a celebration that happily for us coincides with the anniversary of the founding of the Congregation. These gatherings have strengthened the bonds between the two communities.

The Plan of the Government

Getting back to our work, once we finished discussing article 136, we then concentrated on developing a government plan for the next six years. Considering what we said above about the Constitutions, we saw the Chapter orientations as giving them more concrete expression. We thought that it would be possible to create our plan beginning with these. You are receiving the result as an annex to this letter.

The methodology that we adopted from the beginning consisted in establishing objectives, actions to realize the stated objectives, people who would accomplish the actions and a timeline in which those objectives would be developed.

The first thing we did was to concentrate on clarifying the objectives. Reading the Chapter Documents and the Constitutions had provided us with such a number of tasks that objectives for the government plan easily emerged. There were many, perhaps too many. So we proceeded to reduce or rather to synthesize the focuses of our activity for the years ahead. Finally we came to one objective that in a certain way summarizes the orientations of the Chapter for the next six years.

The objective is: *"To animate and challenge the Congregation to become 'Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers' in the line of the orientations and decisions of the Chapter Documents: 'Missionary Communities', 'Internationality' and 'To the sisters and brothers of the Congregation'. To realize the 'Priority Mission Projects' of formation in the Philippines and Africa and to assure that 'The Plan of Initial Formation' orients formation in the Congregation. For all of this to be possible, to study, develop and bring to realization a plan to restructure the Congregation."*

There are clearly diverse elements in this objective. However, we believe it important that they be united and articulated together. It is very clear to us that animating and challenging the Congregation so that it moves in the direction of being *"Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers"* demands a definite *"Missionary Policy"* as well as serious *"Initial Formation"* at this moment in the Congregation's history. It is also certain that all of this is going to demand of us a *"Restructuring"* given the concrete state of our provincial and regional communities.

We believe that it would not be good to think of restructuring as an end in itself, nor even as a lesser evil as we face the aging of some of our major communities. Even though, that may be a reason that we cannot ignore. What is important is that the Government plan, which affects all the brothers, is inspired by the conviction that our Congregation's mission has value for the church and the world today. Therefore, the primary objective will be to respond to the demands involved in that mission which the Chapter has just concretized in its orientations and decisions.

On the other hand, the missionary policy of the Congregation contains priorities. However these priorities cannot be considered in isolation. They must be seen within the wider context of a Congregation that believes it is called, in its entirety, to be *a missionary community for a world without frontiers*.

In that context, initial formation becomes a key element for facing the future of the Congregation in the different countries and cultures where we have candidates at present.

Meeting this objective calls for action steps, which we have grouped under various headings according to the different elements that come into play in the objective: *animation and challenge* (in order to become missionary communities for a world without frontiers), *missionary policy and initial formation and restructuring*.

As you can see, in the first area, *animation and challenge*, the action steps primarily involve information and conscientizing, agreements in order to do that, interchange, collaboration, review and beginning that which is necessary.

In the second, *missionary policy and initial formation*, the action steps are meant to implement those policies by developing the available resources.

In the third, *restructuring*, there are two kinds of action steps. The first seek to determine the possibilities that we have at present or will have in the future. The second type is meant to implement the changes so that these possibilities can become reality.

The time for meeting this objective is evidently the next six years. However, planning demands that we establish a time-line. To speak of

six years and nothing more would be too vague. So we have set times for each of the actions.

There are long term actions: information, communication, formation etc. These are not accomplished once and for all. There are medium term actions: those that involve different stages related to a final result. An example of that would actions related to restructuring. Finally, there are short term actions: those which respond to precise questions or urgent needs which cannot be put off. Organizing the center of communications would be an example of the first. Responding to the needs of the Philippines Project would be an example of the second.

We believe that the date of the Enlarged General Council, when the General Government and all the Major Superiors meet between General Chapters, could be a key moment in these next six years. That seems to be a point in time in function of which we can schedule other things.

This is a plan of the General Government, but naturally it involves the whole Congregation. Therefore all the brothers will bring it to realization. However to saying only that would be too generic and would not really allow us to move forward. For that reason we have determined agents not so much for each action, for the majority demand a combination of people, but for each of the three areas of action.

In this we have been inspired by the orientations and decisions of the Chapter which distinguished three levels of actors: general, inter-provincial and provincial.

It is no secret to anyone that the Provincial Governments are the key piece in the present structure of the Congregation. In fact, they are the ones who have the greatest influence within their own major communities and also have the greatest possibility of influencing the inter-provincial context. For this reason, the plan of the General Government clearly relies on the collaboration of provincial and inter-provincial structures to realize its objectives. A special appeal is made to the Provincial Governments.

So you have our government plan. We thought it necessary to do present it openly and explicitly. The leadership that the General

Chapter has asked us to exercise in the Congregation supposes that all are aware of the objectives, the means and the goals that we want to achieve. It is hoped that all will feel involved and collaborate, according to the each one's possibilities.

You understand that right now we are trying to set in motion the structures that the General Government depends on to exercise its role. The changes of personnel made in the Mission Secretariat and the Center of Communications mean that they are just beginning to function. This means that, for now, the Generalate news will be coming to you only by way of letters like this. I would like to bring you up to date on a few other matters. In the future you will receive information like this in other forms.

Centenary of the Cook Islands

As I told you in my last letter, in mid-December Richard McNally and I visited the Cook Islands for the centenary celebration of the Congregation's presence there. The celebration was really extraordinary. There were numerous official delegations: the Papal legate, Cardinal Williams, the Apostolic Delegate for the Pacific, Archbishop White, the Archbishop of Guam who is president of CEPAC, the Archbishops of Tahiti and Fiji, the Bishop of the Marquesas, Mgr. Guy Chevalier ss. cc., the Bishops of Wallis-Fortuna and Auckland, representatives of other churches from the islands, the representative of the Queen of England, the Prime Minister, the Vice Prime Minister, the Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, Gait Groot Zevent, the Provincial of Holland, Joseph Bukoski III, the Provincial of Hawaii, Leon Lemouzy, the Vice-provincial of French Polynesia, accompanied by three brothers, Jean-Pierre, Michel and Pascal, Cor Rademaker, author of the book "The Catholic Mission in the Cook Islands, written for the centenary and presented during the celebration.

What was really impressive was the presence of so many faithful from the various islands of the Archipelago including a large group from Tahiti. It was from Tahiti that Father Castanie ss.cc. set out for Rarotonga in 1894. The people took part in the celebration with an indescribable enthusiasm in prayer, dance, song and all the expressions of joy and thanksgiving typical of the *Maori* culture.

It is not easy to describe the welcome and hospitality of the Church of Rarotonga led by its fine shepherd, Bishop Leamy. Throughout those days the entire community did everything it could for us in an unforgettable spirit of service and kindness. As the Apostolic Delegate said in his farewell, we ask the Lord that he renew such generosity with abundant vocations to the different ministries in the Church of the Cook Islands.

Over the past hundred years our brothers, at first coming from Tahiti and since 1940 from the Province of Holland, have made an enormous contribution. Of course at the same time the work was very arduous given the great distances between the fifteen islands of the archipelago.

Early on the work of the lay catechists took on indisputable importance and contributed in great measure to the inculturation of the faith in the Maori culture. The people, Polynesian to the core, over the course of the years have made their own the Catholic faith. One could say that one of the most respected Churches in the Cook Islands at this time is the Catholic Church.

Our brothers found great collaborators in their missionary work in the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, who celebrated during these days the centenary of their presence in the Cook Islands.

Lastly, part of the celebration the consecration of the new cathedral, under the patronage of St. Joseph, in Avarua, the capital of Rarotonga. It was clearly a sign of the vitality of the church that was celebrating its centenary. This new church, beautifully described by Bishop Leamy in his homily as a *Maori* canoe, is in a certain way the symbol of the Church of the Cook Islands continuing to sail the waters of the Pacific carrying within it the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus.

I do not want to fail to take advantage of this opportunity to formally thank in a special way our brothers of the Cook Islands for their warm welcome and wonderful hospitality during those days.

Given the presence in Rarotonga of the Major Superiors of the different ss. cc. communities in the Pacific, we took advantage of the occasion to have a meeting at which our brother, the bishop of the Marquesas, Guy Chevalier, also honored us with his presence. It seems that this was the first time that such a meeting had been held. Everyone

was very satisfied with it. There was a clear desire expressed for collaboration between the points of the triangle that the Congregation forms in the Pacific: Hawaii, French Polynesia and the Cook Islands.

Other Meetings and Trips

During our trip, we had the occasion to meet a good number of the brothers in the Province of U.S.A. -West. They offered us hospitality both going and returning as we passed through Los Angeles. Beyond the informal gatherings in which we experienced the great warmth of the brothers, Richard and I had the occasion to meet with Martin O'Loghlen and Columban Crotty, Provincials of the USA-West and USA-East respectively. In particular we discussed with them the Philippines Project to which especially the western U.S. Province is generously committed. We also presented the Government Plan which by that time we had already completed more or less.

We also want to tell you of the Government's meetings with Juliaan Vanderkerhove and Paul Aerts, Provincial Superior and Provincial Treasurer of Flanders. The reason for the meetings was to study together the presence of the Province in northern Italy as well as in Columbia. The atmosphere of the meetings was very cordial. We shared ideas and projects concerning the future of both areas of the Congregation.

We would also like to report on the meetings we had with the General Treasurer, Frans Steenbrink to study and approve the financial report of the Generalate for 1994 and to approve the budget for 1995. One result of this meeting was the communication that the Provincial and Vice-provincial Governments have received from Frans.

At this time Édouard Brion is attending the meeting of the Provincials of southern Europe which is being held at Montgeron. Manfred, who at the beginning of January participated in the meeting of the European Commission for Youth and Vocation Ministry, will attend the meeting of the Provincials of northern Europe taking place in Louvain.

After a week of Council meetings in Rome from January 16th to 21st, we will again disperse. Édouard leaves for Brazil to attend the Provincial Chapter which begins January 24. After that he will go to

Mexico to visit that Province in the name of the General Government. He will return to Rome around the middle of March.

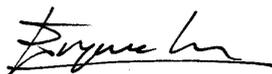
From Louvain Manfred will go to Brussels. He will accompany the brothers of the Province of Southern Belgium in their assembly during which they will study the renewal of their Provincial Project.

Richard, who has succeeded Bill Heffron in the task of coordinating the Philippine Project, will travel to Asia, visiting Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. He will also return to Rome towards the middle of March. At that time we will be able to tell you more clearly of some of the steps that have been taken in order to respond to the needs of the Philippine Project.

Finally, at the beginning of February I will go to Hawaii for their Provincial Chapter. I will stay there for two weeks. These are our plans for now. It is our intention to attend the meeting of the Asia Pacific Assembly in the Philippines in the spring. On our way to Manila we will spread ourselves out visiting the different communities of the Congregation in Asia. In the Fall we will do something similar in Africa. As General Government we think that it is important to see the missionary projects that the General Chapter has established as priorities for the next six years.

I think that is enough for now. We want to express again our best wishes for this year 1995 which we hope will be the year of the Beatification of Damien. May our brother, who incarnates our congregational vocation and mission, be always a model for us in our proclamation of the goodness of God and in our unconditional service of all people, especially the most needy.

Fraternally,



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, April 1, 1995

III Circular Letter to the Congregation

Dear brothers,

My best wishes and those of the whole General Government.

Since January, when I sent you the second Circular Letter, the Communications Center has begun to send to the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Regions news of the most important events and activities of the General Government. Thus, I will not go into the same details in this letter.

The General Government

However, an event like the change of Vicar General could not pass without comment, even though you already received news of that when it took place.

In my last letter I told you that Mario Illanes' health was improving. This was cause for hope that he would reassume his role in the Government in March. He had already begun to work on material that we had sent him. However at the end of January his situation worsened.

On February 7th, while I was in Hawaii attending the Provincial Chapter. I received a fax from José Vicente Odriozola, the Provincial of Chile. In the fax Mario presented his resignation as Vicar General because of the deterioration of his health. The cancer had irreversibly spread to his bones. I had no alternative but to accept his resignation. I was in immediate contact with the members of the General Council. Given the seriousness of the situation, I decided to go to Chile at the end of my visit to Hawaii. There were two reasons for doing that: to visit with Mario and to look for a possible candidate for the General Council with the brothers of Latin America.

Once in Chile and after a moving encounter with Mario, I concentrated my attention on looking for a brother who would be able to fill the vacancy. To this end, the General Government had established some criteria. It seemed clear to us that he should be a brother from Latin America. If possible he should be one of those whom the General Chapter had considered as possible members of the General Government. Finally, without excluding other possibilities, it would be good that he be from the Chilean Province, given the role this Province plays in the Latin American Conference.

In order to ensure the greatest possible participation of the brothers of the Interprovincial Conference of Latin America (CIAL) I asked Juan Luis Schuester, the Provincial of Peru and Coordinator of CIAL and Sérgio Stein, who had been elected Provincial of Brazil at their Provincial Chapter in January, to come to Santiago. Jose Vicente was already with me. I did not ask the Provincial of Mexico to come as Édouard Brion was in Mexico at that time carrying out a visit in the name of the General Government. Nevertheless I was in contact with him to get his advice. In this way, at least the four Provincials who make up the steering committee of the Conference were able to help us find the best candidate to fill the position of General Councilor.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those Provinces and the Provincials for the generosity and the concern for the Congregation which they showed from the beginning. I have to say that their help really was outstanding. At the same time, I would like to especially thank the Provincial Government of Chile for its discernment and the openness of the candidates that were eventually consulted. After studying a number of names, in the end it came down to two: Felipe Barriga and Enrique Moreno, both from the Chilean Province.

Article 134 of our Constitutions clearly establishes the process to be followed in filling a vacancy on the General Council. The government becomes an electoral college. Naturally that could not be done by telephone. On the other hand, it was important to know as soon as possible who would be elected both for the sake of the Province affected and to facilitate the candidate being present at the beginning of the new session of the Council. For that reason I asked the Councilors, always maintaining their freedom of choice, to indicate to me for whom they intended to vote. That way I was able to communicate to

Enrique Moreno that he would be chosen. Enrique accepted with great willingness.

On March 15, all the members of the Government once more in Rome, we proceeded to the election. Enrique, who had already arrived in Rome the week before was called in and he accepted the election. The council was once again complete. The only thing that remained was to fill the vacant post of Vicar General.

After a time of integration with the new General Councilor we moved to the election of the Vicar. Before the election we reflected on the criteria that would guide us. We must recognize that while the text of our Constitutions is sufficiently clear on filling the vacant position of a Councilor, one cannot say the same in the case of the Vicar. However after consultation with an expert and considering that between General Chapters, the General Government is the competent body to interpret the Constitutions, we concluded that we could also apply article 134 in this case.

It seemed clear to us that since the General Chapter was so recent it was possible to know its will as to whom should be chosen from among the present council for Vicar General. Because of that we proceeded to choose Enrique Moreno who had been considered as a candidate for Superior General during the Chapter. Enrique also accepted this position.

With the Provincials of Latin America

Besides allowing me the opportunity to consult them about the new General Councilor, my meeting with the CIAL Provincials in Santiago was also an occasion to study some other matters with which the Conference is dealing at present: the Interprovincial Novitiate, for which Enrique Moreno had been given the responsibility and which he would have to give up to assume the position of General Councilor: the formation of formators which will be the subject of a meeting in July; the meeting of young priests which will take place in Lima in May; the Youth Ministry meeting this past February in Lima and the possible presence of the brothers in Bolivia.

It was also an opportune time for a first presentation of the Plan of the General Government. As we will be doing this with the other conferences, it seemed advisable to organize a meeting of all the

Provincial and Regional Superiors of the CIAL this August. The purpose would be to explain more fully the plan the government has made for the next six years. Enrique Moreno will convoke the meeting and make the presentation.

Distribution of Tasks in the General Government

Since we began our ministry of leadership, the members of the General Government have wanted to fulfill this role in fidelity to what our Constitutions ask, that we be: "a government team... Each one fulfilling his proper role, they work as a genuine government team." (cf. art. 94) This demands a form of communication where there is real interchange and a form of responsibility that is shared. Certainly everyone cannot do everything. That would be ineffective and very costly in terms of personnel and finances.

For this reason we have divided the tasks within the Government which is as follows:

- *Enrique Moreno*: Ongoing Formation, Center of Communications, Provincial Economes of the Latin American Interprovincial Conference, relations with the CIAL.
- *Richard McNally*: Initial Formation, Adjunct to the General Mission Coordinator, Provincial Economes of the English Speaking Interprovincial Conference, relations with ESIC.
- *Manfred Kollig*: Laity, Secular Branch, Youth Ministry, Vocation Ministry, relations with the European Interprovincial Conference.
- *Édouard Brion*: General Coordinator of Missions, Provincial Economes of Europe, relations with the CIE.

I would like to emphasize that the sharing of tasks does not mean that each Councilor will concentrate in his area without concern for the others. This would violate the principle of interchange and communication that is very important to us. It means we share the work. At the same time we are conscious that all the members of the Government have to be concerned about the whole and that in the individual areas we each represent the whole Government.

The General Mission Secretariat

Statute 25 stipulates that in order to carry out its responsibilities concerning the animation and coordination of the missions, the

General Government depends on the services of a General Mission Secretariat which is headed by the General Mission Coordinator.

Statute 26 indicates that it is the role of the General Government to define the composition and the responsibilities of the General Mission Secretariat.

Statute 27 tells us that the General Mission Coordinator is named by the General Government for a certain period which can be renewed indefinitely. It also says that the General Coordinator works in close contact with the General Government.

Taking into consideration these statutes and the orientations and decisions adopted at the thirty-fifth General Chapter concerning mission policy, as well as some suggestions which were made during the Chapter, we arrived at the following configuration for the General Mission Secretariat: the General Mission Coordinator, an adjunct Coordinator for the Philippines project, and a representative of each of the Interprovincial Conferences.

As such the composition of the secretariat is as follows:

- *General Mission Coordinator*: Édouard Brion
- *Adjunct for the Asia Project (Philippines)*: Richard McNally
- *Representing CIE*: Friedhelm Geller
- *Representing CIAL*: Juan Luis Schuester
- *Representing ESIC*: Martin O'Lughlen

At present the responsibilities of the Secretariat are being studied. The Government has prepared a proposal which will be discussed with the other members of the Secretariat.

The Solidarity Network will be managed by the General Mission Secretariat. It will be joined in this task by Frans Steenbrink, the General Econome.

The General Mission Secretariat will hold its first working session May 23 in Rome. After that time they will be in communication with you. With this action 2.1 of the Government Plan has been implemented.

The Communications Center

Statute 86 indicates that a Communications center should be created as an important tool for the General Government in its task of animating the Congregation toward greater unity. Working under the General Government it initiates projects which are deemed necessary.

As already mentioned in my previous letters the General Government considers the task of communication of great importance. We are ready to make it one of our priorities. You already know some of the decisions we have made concerning the center.

Besides taking charge of the General Secretariat, Piet Hoedemaekers has also assumed responsibility for the Communications Center. As you can see from the communications you have been receiving since January, he has begun to function in this role. As we understand the Communications center, it can not be reduced to the work of one person. It calls for a broader involvement.

We thought that the Interprovincial Conferences as well as the General Government should be involved in the Center's functioning to assure "*animation in the service of communion*" (cf. St. 86). At the same time as we wanted a presence from the Government and the Conferences, we also wanted the assistance of people with training and experience in the field of communication. Taking into account those criteria we asked several brothers to work with the Center.

Consequently the Communications Center will be composed of the following: Enrique Moreno, Piet Hoedemaekers, Robert Charlton and a brother from the French Province who will be named in the next few weeks. Their first meeting will take place in Louvain June 2. With this we have implemented action 1.8 of our Government Plan.

Provinces and the challenge to be Missionary Communities

Most of our Provinces originated in the missionary work of our brothers who have gone before us in different places implanting the Congregation. Without a doubt the conditions of the Provinces as they were at their origin have changed. In the beginning the personnel were from other countries but then gradually local people joined. There have also been changes as regards the mission of the Congregation which has taken new form and expression.

The orientations of the recent General Chapter in continuity with the two preceding Chapters are a valuable help in animating and challenging the Provinces as they formulate their Province Plans. This was the case for the Provincial Chapters of Brazil and Hawaii, as well as the Mexican Province during the visit made there. To be present at such times is a task that we want to fulfill in conformity with our government plan (actions 1.1, 1.4, 3.1).

The Province of Brazil

Édouard Brion participated in the Provincial Chapter of Brazil. According to his report, it was a good Chapter, well prepared and carried out. The Chapter took the documents of the 35th General Chapter and tried to look at the reality of the Province in light of them. They arrived at a series of orientations and directives which concern mission and communion, Initial and Ongoing Formation, restructuring and finances.

They elected a new Provincial Government. Sérgio Stein is the Provincial. Henrique Leijen, Waldir Souza, Luis Manuel Álvarez and Geraldo Ribeiro are the councilors.

Though the Santiago meeting allowed me to have contact with Sérgio after his election, we scheduled a meeting of the General Government with him in May in Rome. On my part and that of the General Government I want to offer congratulations for the confidence the brothers have placed in him and our support and collaboration to the whole Provincial Government.

We also express our deep gratitude to Vicente da Rocha Diniz, the former Provincial of Brazil and all those who collaborated in the Provincial Government for their service to the Province and the Congregation.

The Province of Mexico

From Brazil Édouard continued on to Mexico to carry out a visit in the name of the General Government. The Provincial Government had requested such a visit last November. Certain problems there called for our collaboration. The conclusions of the visit reemphasized orientations and measures decided upon by the last General Government and the Chapter of the Province.

These orientations stressed the need to strengthen community life and to renew the Congregation's mission in the Province. This demanded changes affecting various persons.

At the conclusion of the visit José Rodríguez, the Provincial, presented his resignation to the Superior General. He did not consider himself the best person to carry out the orientations adopted by the Provincial Government. He believed that his resignation would facilitate putting the decisions into effect.

Given the importance of the matter and the positive spirit in which José made his offer it seemed best to accept his resignation and to confirm as the new Provincial, Francisco Boluda, the Vicar. I want to thank Jose for his service to the Province and the Congregation during his term as Provincial. We hope that these steps help to realize the objectives that have been set out and result in the renewal of the provincial community. They can count on our support and encouragement.

In the General Council we considered it appropriate that we accompany the Province and Provincial Government of Mexico at this time. Enrique Moreno will take special responsibility for this.

The Province of Hawaii

The Provincial Chapter planned by the brothers in Hawaii for the beginning of February seemed to me an excellent opportunity to be with a part of the community that until then was unknown to me. For that reason I did not hesitate to accept their invitation.

Also from the information that the Provincial, Joseph Bukoski III had sent, it seemed that the Chapter had been well prepared especially during the Province retreat of last November. It was clear that this could be a very important moment as regards the future of the Province.

Being in those beautiful islands allowed me to enter directly into a brilliant chapter of our missionary history. This is the past of the Hawaiian Province. At the same time I was able to share the present reality and the future hopes of our brothers who seek to live the vocation and mission of the Congregation in Hawaii.

The Provincial Chapter did not set out to make decisions. Rather they wanted to set in motion a process of increasing awareness of various aspects of religious life, the Congregation and its mission in order to formulate them in a concrete way for the Province. This will allow them to have a new vision of what they want to do and must do together as a Province.

They are conscious that they are not alone in the process. As such they count on the support of the whole Congregation which has just given expression to its search for fidelity to its life and mission in the General Chapter. Because of this they will take the Chapter documents as a basic element in their process. The General Government is ready to help them. Richard McNally will be responsible for this.

Activities of the Council

As everyone is aware, as a result of the last General Chapter the Philippines Formation Project is a priority mission project. According to action 2.2 of our Plan, this calls for special attention on the part of the General Government. Richard McNally, as coordinator of the project, has been the one most involved.

During most of February and part of March, Richard visited various places in Asia and the Pacific to study the question on location. Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Hawaii and Massachusetts were stops along the way. It is necessary that everyone realize how important it is for us to find personnel especially for the work of formation. At the same time we need financial resources. As the Chapter indicated we have to rely on the whole Congregation for help.

Richard's visits allowed us to have a detailed report which we have been studying in the Council. We see this as preparation for the meeting of the Asian Pacific Assembly (APA) at which the majority of the General Government will be present. APA takes place at the beginning of May in Manila.

On the way to the meeting, Édouard will visit the community in India, Manfred the Vice-province of Japan and I, the Vice-province of Indonesia. We want to take this opportunity to make contact with a reality that according to the decisions of the Chapter is a priority of the Congregation.

I hope that after the meeting of APA we will have a more complete perspective which we will try to share with you as soon as we can. There is some news which I can already tell you. Two brothers of the Polish Province, Robert Kanoza and Piotr Wojciechowski and one for the USA-West, Paul Murtagh, are at present in the Philippines studying on sight the possibility of an eventual commitment to the Project. It is expected also that a sister from the Anglo-Irish Province will join the project in the coming months.

In line with actions 1.4 and 3.1 of the Government Plan, Manfred Kollig visited the Province of Southern Belgium to accompany the Province as they renew their Provincial project. They are revising the project as a result of the changes that have taken place in the Church, society and the Congregation since the time when they first formulated it.

The process began last November and will conclude next September. Its objective is two-fold: to reformulate the Provincial Project and to leave the way open to the restructuring that was asked for by the General Chapter. Paul Lejeune asked the help of the General Government and Manfred has assumed this task. So far the process has been moving ahead positively. There is every hope that it will continue in this direction.

Manfred also participated in the SS.CC. sisters Interprovincial Conference of Europe (CISE) which took place at Picpus. Also, the steering Committee of the European Interprovincial Conference of brothers met with us here in Rome in order to prepare the meeting of the Conference which will be held in June. Considering that during the meeting the Plan of the Government will be discussed, they thought it helpful to meet with us in order to prepare.

During these three weeks of council sessions we were also able to meet with Jan Forma, the Provincial of Poland. The purpose was to study with him the evolution of this young eastern European Province. We also wanted to offer our assistance as General Government. We think our work together was fruitful. As a result we will begin to accompany the Province in its development of a Provincial Project. This will take place during 1995-1996. This type of action is foreseen in 1.4 of our Government Plan.

The Beatification of Damien

The Father Damien Beatification Commission has already communicated with you concerning the preparations which are again under way.

At this point it is no secret to anyone that all the changes and delays of our brother's Beatification have led to a certain loss of enthusiasm. To that can be added other aspects of the church's life that while not directly linked to the person of Damien nevertheless can be seen as mixed up with the celebration.

However I would ask of you all, and myself in the first place, that we concentrate on the profound meaning of this event. It is nothing else than the explicit acknowledgement by the Church of Damien as blessed. He was an authentic disciple of Jesus, the one who went about doing good and who proclaimed blessed the poor, those who weep, the poor of heart and those who struggle for justice.

We believe that the source of Damien's greatness was his vocation as he experienced and lived it within the Congregation. We feel deeply that this official acknowledgement of our Brother by the Church is also an acknowledgement of the greatness of our Congregation's charism which gave meaning to the life of Damien.

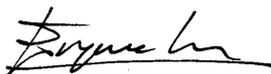
Allow me to conclude these considerations on the Beatification of Damien by quoting some passages from the journal of my trip to Hawaii last February:

"I am over whelmed by the feeling of absolute tranquillity and great solitude. That feeling steadily grows as we approach Kalawao. In this place there is remembrance but also absence: the empty grave, the church of St. Philomena which is used only once a year. Certainly it is well cared for. In its interior one can appreciate the work that Damien did to leave it in its present state. The rectory has disappeared. There are only a few stones and pipes left.... But there is Dutton and who could doubt the lasting memory of Damien. For a moment, Arsene who has been explaining everything to me with great care leaves me to my silence and I offer a prayer for the whole Congregation here before the tomb of the best of us. In the prayer I remember all the brothers and sisters who have been inspired by the example of Damien. They are many and I call to mind specific names. Large fields lead up to the "pali" and reach out to the sea, which is a deep and clear blue. In another time this was the place of life and

death for so many sick who with Damien learned to face their illness and exclusion with dignity. Now all that remains are the two churches, Catholic and Protestant and the graves. At the far end of the field near the cliff a few stones recall the existence of a hospital. From here the view is magnificent. All who come here probably remember this. Two islands, one round, the other pointed enclose a cove to which were brought the sick. Sometimes they were just cast out. The waves beat upon the shore constantly, the cliffs limit the horizon and the deep blue sea opens itself to the beyond." (February 11, 1995, Kalaupapa)

I am completing this letter a few days before Easter. To celebrate liturgically the death and resurrection of the Lord is to celebrate once more that the impossible is indeed possible. The triumph of Jesus, transcending the human judgement that led him to the cross is the cry of God in history that tells us that life is worth the effort and that all those who live and die as he, will come to new life with him. Damien was one of them. May his example inspire our fidelity to the vocation and mission of the Congregation.

Happy Easter!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



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Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, January 25, 1996

IV Circular Letter to the Congregation

The Philippine Project and the Africa Project

Dear brothers,

A very cordial greeting from Rome at the beginning of this year, 1996, which I once again wish will be filled with Peace and Happiness for you.

On some occasions I have expressed my intention of writing this letter regarding the Priority Mission Projects. Now the time has come for me to do it.

Introduction

Almost a year and a half since we assumed responsibility as the General Government, I can assure you that these Priority Mission Projects have been very much present in our studies, dialogues, Council sessions, meetings with the General Government of the sisters, prayers. Our dedication to this topic is not surprising; it is our duty.

Actually, the General Chapter of 1994 declared the International Formation Projects of Asia and Africa to be Mission Projects with Priority, which required giving them privileged attention on the part of all the Congregation and consequently of the General Government. This is why, in its plan of action for the six years of its mandate, this began a series of activities concerning these Projects and thus assumed its responsibility towards them.

Following the inspiration of the Chapter itself, this meant searching: for channels that would facilitate, coordinate, and guarantee for the Mission Projects needed international coordination in three indispensable areas: personnel, finances, and instances or structures for decision making.

One of the clearest consequences deriving from the declaration of priority given these Projects is that all the Provinces assume the moral

obligation of collaborating: in the realization of these Projects, making available some of their brothers in dialogue with the General Government and by request of that Government. Moreover, there is another consequence no less important: the General Government will establish a system of financing these Projects in which all the communities of the Congregation will participate according to their resources.

Given these premises, the General Government had a task to accomplish. Thus, one of the first decisions we took besides organizing the General Mission Secretariat was to get to know both Projects *in situ* as soon as possible and by the largest number of members of the General Government as possible. Because of the international character of both Projects and the collaboration of various communities in each of them, acquiring knowledge of these Projects was more complex. We also had to become acquainted with their wider context that is to say with the different Congregational presences involved in them. For these reasons we planned to visit Asia and Africa as quickly as possible.

This we did. Last spring the members of the General Government visited Japan, India, and Indonesia, finally meeting together in the Philippines for the Asian-Pacific Assembly. Last autumn some of them visited Kinshasa and others visited Mozambique, later meeting in Mozambique with members of the decision-making group for the African Project.

These visits gave us a sufficiently precise idea of the actual state of both Projects and of their short and longer term needs. Response to these needs is something that, to be consistent with what was approved in the General Chapter, concerns the entire Congregation. The content of this letter aims at helping us give that answer.

The method I shall follow in this letter will be to present briefly the evolution of both Projects, the needs existing in both, and eventual solutions to these problems. At the end I shall present some conclusions.

Philippine Project

Evolution of the Project

The Congregation has been in Asia for quite some time, at least long enough for us not to consider ourselves newcomers. The French

brothers have been in China, the Dutch and Belgians in Indonesia, the North Americans, Irish, and French in Japan, the North Americans and Irish in India.

Nevertheless, it is true that until the General Chapter of 1988 there was not an awareness at the level of the entire Congregation just what implanting the Congregation in Asia would entail.

It is true that much before that date we had Japanese brothers, and later we received candidates in Indonesia, but a deeper reflection was lacking as to what this would involve for the Congregation as a whole. This reflection was made in the Chapter of 1988 and from then on steps were taken to study the consequences of implanting the Congregation in Asia.

One of the consequences, perhaps the most immediate and clear, was the need to provide an Initial Formation for our Asian candidates that would facilitate the close relation among diverse communities on this continent and at the same time develop an awareness of belonging to an International Congregation. Moreover, conscious of the importance of being only one Congregation of brothers and sisters, we invited our sisters to follow with us the path thus traced, even if their presence in Asia was much more recent and limited.

After having searched for other possibilities in Asia, the advisability of establishing a community in the Philippines was realized because, among those in that geographical area, this country had the best resources for formation and also more easily allowed new religious to enter.

As a result of all this, the Philippine Project was set up. In it diverse elements were combined: internationality, collaboration between brothers and sisters, fundamental attention to Initial Formation of Asian candidates, and some other ministry which would allow for insertion in the local Church and at the same time provide pastoral practice for our students.

The organization of this Project made it depend directly on the General Government of the brothers for what referred to the brothers, and to the Provincial Government of the Pacific Province (USA) for what referred to the sisters. Based on this, a structure was established

that would make this double dependence compatible and would at the same time try to meet the diverse needs of the Project.

The two basic instances of this structure, which on principle was considered provisional, were an International Community in the Philippines with both common and diverse elements for the brothers and the sisters, and a Commission for the International Community in the Philippines which would in some way fulfill the task of governing.

Establishing this Project involved good doses of generosity and enthusiasm on the part of those who initiated it, almost none of whom had been in Asia before. That generous enthusiasm resulted in first steps being taken by the community on the levels of apprenticeship and of insertion in the milieu, as well of planning the first International Novitiate for the brothers.

A series of painful events consecutively struck the community, which saw the number of its founding members reduced, so that only thanks to the generosity of those who remained could it continue to exist.

Missionary Project with Priority

At that time the General Chapter of 1994 was held and, in the context of the Chapter Document **Mission Policy**, declared the Interprovincial Formation Project of Asia was one of the Missionary Projects with Priority. From then on the Philippines became a focus of attention for the whole Congregation.

As I have already said above, the General Government elected at that same Chapter, assumed right away its responsibility in the Project and quickly informed itself about it.

Structures

Our visit to the Philippines coincided with the meetings of the Asia-Pacific Assembly. This meeting for communication and participation among the diverse communities of Asia and the Pacific had been established, as the Philippine Project had been, to serve as a means for accentuating SS.CC. collaboration in that part of the world.

During our visit in Asia we became concretely certain of something we previously had intuited: the importance of having the Philippine Project assumed principally by the Asian communities and, in the measure possible, with Asian brothers or those with a long experience in Asia undertaking the task of formation in the Project.

Moreover, we also began to see more clearly that attempting to connect and involve in the same orientations and eventual decisions such extensive and, in good measure, diverse areas as Asia and the Pacific could be ineffective. Thus, the Asia-Pacific assembly led to the formation of the Asian Forum for the communities of Asia, and to eventual meetings of the communities of the Pacific by themselves. Recently in Tahiti a meeting was held which planned meetings every two years for Hawaii, Polynesia, and the Cook Islands jointly.

In this context the General Government insisted on the suitability of having the Asian Forum be the most immediate and natural place where the orientations, decisions, and search for solutions and resources for the Philippine Project could be treated. This did not mean that the Project would be disconnected from the rest of the Congregation, but rather that the connection would be articulated more by means of the communities of Asia than by means of the General Government.

In this sense it became increasingly clear to us that the support the Congregation should give the Project in terms of personnel would be to send brothers to reinforce the different communities of Asia, which would allow them to free brothers from these communities for the work of formation in the Philippines.

Although this articulation of the Philippine Project with the Asian Forum, which the General Government was hoping for, could not be realized during the Asia-Pacific Assembly, we did unite in one person the functions of Coordinator of the Asian Forum on the part of the brothers and of the Delegate of the General Government to the Philippine Project.

This person was Martin Irawan, Vice-provincial Superior of Indonesia. We believed him the most suitable choice, given his Asian origin and his responsibility for the community with most candidates we have in Asia.

All this introduced modifications in the organizational structure of the Project, since in reality the Commission for the International Community of the Philippines no longer existed. Instead of designating a member of the General Government as person in charge of the Project in its name, we named Martin Irawan. It was a way of drawing the managing responsibility for the Project closer to Asia. In the last analysis, the General Government would continue to be responsible for it, but with the mediation of the Delegate.

Because of his double position as Coordinator of the Asian Forum for the brothers, and of Delegate to the Philippine Project, we decided it was advisable to integrate Martin Irawan in the General Mission Secretariat. As a result, the former assistant to the General Secretary for the Philippine Project, Richard McNally, will no longer fulfill this function; that position became meaningless when the new role was given Martin.

Collaboration of brothers and sisters

Another of the very important aspects in the evolution of the Project is collaboration between brothers and sisters. The General Chapter of the sisters introduced something new in respect to their presence. It decided that the Philippine Project in Asia is, for the time being, "an International Missionary Project of the Congregation", such as Africa is, with consequences both at the level of organization, now that the General Government has fuller involvement in it, and at the level of criteria for evaluating and developing the presence of the sisters in the Philippines.

In the meetings of the General Governments of the sisters and brothers, which we have held frequently after our election, the topic of the Philippines has often been discussed. In these meetings our desire for unity in the Congregational vocation and mission that must be expressed in close collaboration in the Philippines has remained clear but, at the same time, the different accent or emphasis the General Chapters adopted toward the Project has also been clear. Therefore, this desire and these differences must be kept in mind.

Although the sisters consider the Philippine Project as an Asian missionary implantation in which Initial Formation is provided for their Asian candidates, we regard the Philippine Project primarily as a

Project of Initial Formation at the service of the other Asian Communities.

Both Governments have agreed on insisting on the autonomy both branches have in the Project, and on the consequences at the level of organization and of administration this entails.

Formation Teams and Candidates

Up to now we have had a year of International Novitiate with four candidates from India and one from USA-East, the stage of the professed, the first year with professed students (one from Japan and one from the USA) and the second with the newly professed from India (three in all, since one left the novitiate, and one from Japan who continues his formation in the Philippines). Last October one of the professed from India left the community and subsequently has been granted the dispensation from his vows. We have had two Philippine prenovices who left the community before beginning the novitiate. We now have two India prenovices who will begin their novitiate in May.

The members of the formation team up to now have been brothers from the USA-West Province, the Province which has most generously have been committed to this Congregational Project, and in justice we must acknowledge their missionary dedication. Richard Danyluk, besides being local superior, was Master of Novices in the first year and in charge of the students in the second; Stephen Foster is vocation promoter and has charge of the prenovices; and Paul Murtagh collaborates in student formation while also serving as administrator. Richard will continue this year as Master of Novices.

Some steps have been taken to increase the number of team members and to give the team a more Asian composition. Andrew Healy, a Brother from the Vice-province of Japan, is incorporated in the Project and is preparing to be in charge of the professed. Before long, two other brothers will be collaborating: Pearse Mullen from Japan who is preparing to be Master of Novices, and Thomas Sukotriharjo of Indonesia.

The novitiate will begin anew in May with candidates from India and from Indonesia, while our Brother from Japan, Michiaki Chihara,

will receive post-novitiate training along with our two brothers from India: Subal Nayak and Alexis Nayak.

We were serving in a parish in the diocese of Imus, thus giving ourselves a pastoral presence, but the death of John Kenny, the pastor and one of the founders of the community, forced us to leave it for lack of personnel and because formation was our main purpose. Considering this primary objective, we are now studying what kind of apostolic service would be more appropriate.

Need of Personnel

Thus far the evolution of the Project. Based on this evolution, we can study the main needs it presents at this time, to which we have to respond in short and longer terms.

On one hand, we faced with the need of personnel. After what I have just said regarding the formation team in the Philippines, it seems that we have for the moment basically solved this problem. This does not mean, however, that we do not have to continue being attentive to this question and take steps to prepare more brothers, preferably Asians, for this apostolate of formation.

Now, keeping in mind that the policy of the General Government with respect to the Project is to promote the presence of formators who are Asian or have a long experience in Asia, and that logically these have to come from the communities of India, Indonesia, and Japan, it follows that the personnel of these communities will be appreciably affected. This is where the support of the rest of the Congregation is necessary.

We must not forget that those who will involve themselves directly in the Project will leave empty places, and normally important empty places, in their own communities. Now, it surely would be a sort of contradiction if we achieve what we are trying to do on one side by destroying what is being done on another. Hence, it is evident that the objectives given priority demand restructuring and, therefore, the option for formation entails readjustments. Nevertheless, it would be inconsistent if in opting for the implantation of the Congregation in Asia we would reduce everything to Initial Formation.

In this sense, we must say clearly that, in order to make possible and give a real finality to the Philippine Project, we must help the Asian communities in terms of personnel. Allow me to insist strongly on the need in a specific community. I refer to that of India.

As you know, India is a community that depends on the Province of USA-East. In reality, the problems relating to entry into this country have made the presence of the brothers very difficult. At present, apart from the candidates who are in diverse stages and states of commitment with the Congregation (maybe around fifteen), we have only two brothers there and one who, after a limited absence because of health and visa problems, probably will return to India in the near future.

As you can imagine, this number is excessively small for making an implantation of the Congregation in that country and, certainly, if we are there it is because different instances of the Church in India have requested our presence. Up to now the brothers have done what they could, all worthy of real praise but insufficient from the point of view of a Congregation wishing to implant itself there. We must also keep in mind the limited presence of the sisters who for some years have been two, but that number is now reduced to only one. Other sisters may come occasionally but only temporarily.

At present the problems of entry into the country have begun to decrease. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, India has in effect opened itself a bit toward the West and makes it less difficult for foreign personnel to enter. Therefore, in dialogue with the Provincial of USA-East, Columban Crotty, we have considered it advisable to appeal to the brothers to have more personnel go to India. The Province will try to find someone, but it is very important that brothers come from other parts of the Congregation as well.

Financial Resources

Another aspect is that of economic resources. In September last year and in a rather urgent way, I wrote to all the Major Superiors of the Congregation requesting help to finance the purchase of a new house in the Philippines to lodge the novices. In my letter I explained the reasons for this purchase and the urgency of the appeal.

It is true that the Philippine Missionary Project has priority and must be able to count on the financial support of the entire Congregation, but I do not think this way of obtaining funds should be repeated. What the Chapter asked was "*that the General Government establish a system of financing those Projects in which all the communities would participate according to their means*". This is why the General Mission Secretariat began in May of last year to study such a financial plan.

Perhaps we have delayed in drawing up this plan, and the urgency of needs imposed itself on us. In order to remedy this situation, we have asked our Treasurer General, Frans Steenbrink, to go in March to the Philippines to study on site the plan that should be drawn up to meet the real needs of the Project. This is why; too, we have asked the Delegate of the General Government, Martin Irawan, to make a detained study of those needs. In order to help, Édouard Brion, General Mission Coordinator, will also go to the Philippines at the same time.

As I presented the evolution of this Project, I indicated what its structure is now from the point of view of its organization and government; therefore, it is not necessary to insist more upon it. Suffice it to say that frequent dialogue between the General Government and the Delegate in the Project on one hand, and between the Delegate and the Asian communities on the other, is the key point in this structure.

At the end of last years the General Mission Secretariat published an issue of *Evangelisation* dedicated exclusively to the Philippine Project. I refer you to it for further Information and also for a better understanding of the questions I have raised in this letter.

Africa Project

In Africa the Congregation is not a recent arrival either. Since the Thirties of this century the Belgian brothers have been present at Kole, in the center of Zaire, later the Dutch arrived in Mozambique in the Fifties; still later Spanish, Polish, and Andalusian brothers have collaborated in Kinshasa, Zaire, and Irish brothers in Mozambique. A Brother from the Chilean Province has just arrived in Mozambique. We have been present in a temporary basis in Tanzania and in Zambia. The sisters are present in Zaire and in Mozambique, until last year they were serving in the Ivory Coast.

At any rate, it was in the Eighties that the Congregation decided to implant itself in Africa by accepting and forming candidates. There had been some attempts at Kole previously, but no great progress was made. Responsibility for accepting and forming candidates was assumed by Kinshasa in 1987 and by Mozambique in 1988. The sisters at the same time decided on an implantation in Africa by accepting candidates in Kinshasa.

The extreme poverty and the political and social upheavals which have worsened in recent years in Black Africa, when this area ceased to have the geostrategic importance it had during the Cold War and after it was abandoned by the great powers following their systematic exploitation of the natives, these have very much marked our pastoral response as well as the evolution of our Project of implantation.

On the other hand, if the Philippine Project is a project of Initial Formation at the service of the Asian communities, it may be said to be localized in a place distinct from each of them, the Interprovincial Project of Formation of Africa, which the General Chapter declared a Priority Missionary Project, is localized between the two Regions of Mozambique and Kinshasa. Therefore, to speak of the evolution of this Project is to speak of the evolution of both Regions which are committed to the formation of candidates and, at the same time, of the evolution of collaboration between them to fulfill this task together.

Mozambique

The evolution of this Region has been strongly marked by the recent history of the country; anticolonial resistance and repression before independence, independence, armed confrontation and civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO, peace and elections. Mozambique has suffered some twenty years of war, destruction and violence, impoverishment, to which has been added a seemingly endless drought. At present the situation seems to be improving, but there are still many questions.

During there twenty years the brothers of the region denounced the repression, with some of them returning to Europe. Those who remained accompanied the people during all the civil war, helping them through grave suffering and hardships. At the end of this war they intend to rebuild former missions and at the same time face the task of

welcoming and forming candidates. To help in this double orientation, new brothers have arrived.

Since 1989 candidates began to be received necessitating the establishment of formation communities in Beira for the prepostulancy and at Matola for the postulancy and the novitiate. We now have two brothers in temporal vows, three postulants, and eleven prepostulants.

The distance separating these communities is some 1,200 kilometers. For now our presence in Matola is imperative because this is the only place where philosophy is taught in Mozambique. Historically our presence has been centered around Beira, where we have had Missions at Inhaminga, Marromeu, Doudo, Ghupanga, and Goronga. We are presently serving in the first two, where a more demanding spiritual and material reconstruction is needed to overcome wartime damages.

In addition, a new service has been organized: accompaniment of organizations of women and men who are seeking creative ways of dealing, by themselves, with the ruin the war has left in its wake.

The Region extends for great distances like the one between Matoa and Beira, but there are also shorter distances which at present are difficult to overcome, like those between Beira and the missions of Inhaminga and Marromeu where, although the kilometers are fewer, the means of communication are very, very poor.

The community at Matola remains very much isolated and concentrated on the task of formation where no pastoral service is available to broaden the horizon of our brothers and facilitate the pastoral formation of our students.

In this Region most of the brothers are newcomers, living with brothers who have already been there at a previous time or who have remained continuously in Mozambique. If we add to this the international character of the group since the arrival of the Irish and the Chilean, as well as the entrance of the new Mozambiquean professed (two at present), the complexity of the regional enterprise becomes obvious.

We must also include the presence of the sisters who have generously gone to Mozambique at the request of the brothers.

Given this situation, one of the observations we made in the course of our visit as General Government was the need for a Regional Project which would link the different objectives with the means and resources available. In the first place, it would have as an essential element close collaboration with Kinshasa in the Initial Formation of candidates, with eventual collaboration in other fields in the measure on which formation develops.

Kinshasa

This Region began with some parishes our Belgian brothers had in the Archdiocese of Kinshasa. They were all located in the N'Djili zone, one of the outlying barrios of the capital which lately has extended and given rise to new barrios and new parishes. This was so when the Spanish, Polish, and Andalusian brothers replaced the Belgians.

This part of Africa has also been shaken by upheavals of every kind, especially at the beginning of the Nineties when attempts were made to change a totalitarian regime into a democratic state. Although Zaire is one of the African countries with many natural resources, the political situation has engendered economic and social chaos, making it difficult to understand how this country continues to exist. The remarkable qualities of many women and men of its population are the only explanation of its survival.

In the beginning the congregational presence was centered in parish work, the brothers having at one time eight parishes in their charge with a population calculated to be above 250,000 inhabitants. The sisters also collaborated in this ministry.

In the middle Eighties, at the request of the General Government, the Region changed its course quite drastically as it began to orient its efforts towards the implantation of the Congregation in Africa. Acceptance and formation of candidates became the first objective of the Region which, however, continued to have charge of a good number of parishes.

Great efforts were made to plan and restructure so as to free brothers for the apostolate of formation.

For the time being, two communities of formation have been constituted: prenovitiate and novitiate. Another community is being

established for the professed, who today share space with the postulants. At present we have four professed in temporary vows, one novice, and fourteen postulants.

Some members of the formation team are less involved in other work, but others are still committed elsewhere, since the weight of apostolic works is heavy, particularly that of assisting the people because of the difficult situation in the country.

In this area, the sisters have taken the same steps. Good collaboration exists between the two formation teams and among the candidates of both branches.

Attempts are being made to organize some other work that is not strictly parochial and can broaden the field of our Congregational mission at the service of the Church and the people of Zaire.

Collaboration between both Regions

Having decided on the implantation of the Congregation in both Regions more or less at about the same time, it was considered advisable from the beginning to study the possibilities of collaboration. Steps were taken in this direction by reciprocal visits, but it was during the Enlarged General Council at Quito in 1992 that this collaboration began to take more organic form.

In September of 1993 a meeting was held in Kinshasa of all the communities involved in what was beginning to be called the African Project. That meeting resulted in proposals that were presented to the General Chapter and led to the Interprovincial Africa Project of Formation being declared a Missionary Project with Priority.

In keeping with these orientations, too, collaboration in Initial Formation between the two Regions began with the period of studies of theology together in Kinshasa and stages of a pastoral nature in Mozambique for the candidates of both Regions. This involved meetings of the formation teams and of the regional governmental bodies.

Evaluation

On the occasion of our visit last October, there was an evaluation of these first steps. The result is positive. However, this does not mean that some activities do not have to be reviewed. It will also be necessary to intensify the contacts and the relationship between the formation teams and the governments of the two Regions.

The differences between the two communities are clear, some due to the different ecclesial and social contexts, others to the orientations and styles of the communities themselves. These have repercussions on formation. An evaluation of these differences must be made and, when necessary, a fuller proximity in criteria and actions must be achieved. All this requires constant communication and joint revision.

It is also evident that for now, both formation and government of the community are in the hands of non-African brothers. Hence, much attention should be given to ensuring that the African voice and cultures can and are ever increasingly incorporated in the Project we have begun. It will be our African brothers who will really inculturate our charism, our Congregational Vocation on and Mission.

Yet this does not mean we should create artificial processes. If the distinct steps taken in formation continue to incorporate our African candidates in fraternity, this incorporation itself will be the natural way, according to our Constitutions and the General Plan of Initial Formation, that they have of participating the development of what is called the Africa Project.

Structures

From the structural point of view, the African Project is different from that of the Philippine, as we have indicated. This Project actually depends directly on the two regional communities, each of which in turn depends on a respective Province.

To assist the needed collaboration, a structure called the *Decision-Making Instance* has been created. Composed of the two Regional Superiors, the Provincial Superiors, and the Mission Coordinator, this group must see to it that collaboration between the two Regions in the field of Initial Formation, which will later be extended to other phases, assures the development of the Project.

Evidently to be collaboratively efficacious, relations between the different regional teams must always be structures of specific collaboration. In some way members will be the ones who will incarnate in the day to day happenings what the Decision-Making Instance signifies.

Need for this close collaboration does not invalidate the usefulness of regional projects which give solidity to a specific community and make for collaboration in equality of conditions. This is why, as General Government, we have insisted on this point especially with regard to Mozambique.

Collaboration with the sisters also involves meetings of governments, formation teams, etc. Since the sisters have only one Region comprising both Zaire and Mozambique, the structure they have adopted is much simpler. Up to now, they participate by invitation in the Decision-Making Instance.

Need of Personnel

In the Africa Project as well, the criterion is that persons with experience in and knowledge of that world should assume responsibility for formation. In the not too distant future, the African brothers will be able to take this responsibility.

Meanwhile, it is obvious that in order for brothers to be freed to serve as formators and at the same time maintain or transform our parochial presences in consistence with the needs of the local Church and of the people we serve according to our Congregational orientations, the support of brothers from outside is necessary. Neither in Kinshasa nor in Mozambique have we sufficient personnel to carry on the double task which implantation involves.

In Kinshasa we have only one formator per level: prenovitiate, novitiate, community of professed. Evidently, the increase in the number of candidates; the need for collaboration with Mozambique, which involves frequent trips; and the advisability of separating the different levels of formation all indicate a need for new members dedicated to formation. We continue to have charge of our parishes, and a work of promotion and development is beginning. All of this speaks to us of very urgent needs.

However, I want to insist a bit more on the need for personnel in Mozambique. I am led to emphasize the need for personnel in this Region for several reasons: the geographical distances, the destruction after the war, the fragility of its structures, and the complexity of elements in play. Without fuller support both in Matola and in Beira, Initial Formation will be a very difficult endeavor.

At the same time, responsibility for the missions at Inhaminga and Marromeu, as well as the need to broaden our pastoral presence in Matola does require more personnel than Mozambique now has. Two or three brothers are vitally necessary for this work to continue and develop.

Financial Resources

Since both Regions depend from European Provinces, these Provinces have provided for the expenses of some communities that until now have not been able to be self-supporting because of conditions in the countries and in the local Churches in which they are located. This is why I believe it is just to recognize the generosity of both Provinces in providing so much help to the African Regions.

Nevertheless, if the Africa Project is a Priority Mission Project, the whole Congregation must cooperate in sustaining it and for this, as I have indicated above, a plan is necessary. I have also said that the General Government is involved in this, and through the Mission Secretariat will give you the details of that plan.

We must seek means of self-support that would allow these communities, of course, to be more independent from the resources of the rest of the Congregations.

Conclusion

Up to here I have explained the evolution of both Projects and given a list of needs for personnel and financial resources; I have also indicated some solutions.

As I said above, this letter evidently does not have only the function of informing. It also invites each and all the brothers to let us know what we can do in regard to the Priority Mission Projects and suggest how we can do it.

The need for personnel in both Projects is unmistakably clear, and I believe I have explained this sufficiently. I understand perfectly that not all the brothers can offer to go to Asia or Africa, but I also think there are brothers who can do so. Therefore, I appeal to their sense of Congregational communion and to their missionary commitment. Normally, volunteers are already rendering important services in their Provinces or Regions. Given our shortage of personnel, brothers who can go to Asia or Africa are already well occupied at home. However, in a Congregation which has an order of priorities established by the General Chapter, all are called to face those options which give a specific ministry priority over others.

As happens often enough in religious life, this means having to choose between two good things, between two important and worthy Congregational services. It may happen that what in terms of the Province is good and even advisable, has to be placed in second place because of the priorities chosen by the Congregation at an international level.

I am inviting all, therefore, to look beyond the frontiers or limits of their Provinces or Regions. I am inviting all to assume generously and freely the theme of our last General Chapter: *Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers*.

Since the Chapter entrusted the asking of personnel for these Projects to the General Government and asked it to establish dialogue about this with the Provincial Governments, I would ask the brothers who see their incorporation in the Projects as possible, to get into contact not only with their Provincial Governments but also with the General Government. This means finding in a fraternal and respectful way that the Provincial or Regional criteria do not impose themselves above those of a more general character.

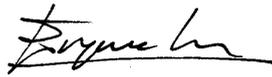
In this sense I would like to conclude by commenting on something I regard as having a close relation to all this. In the recent General Chapter, participants spoke insistently on the restructuring of the Congregation. The Chapter Document dedicated explicitly to this point says that "*this challenge of restructuring is a very important task of the General Government, closely related to animation in communion for a better and more efficacious fulfilling of the Mission of the Congregation.*"

For this reason, the General Government sees, in its plan for action, that the Mission Projects with Priority can and should be cause for restructuring in the Congregation. If as a Congregation we have adopted some priorities, this will surely affect everyone in terms of personnel and resources and, since both are scarce, change and restructuring are inevitable.

If we wish to strengthen the international character of the Congregation, we must always think more in a way that surmounts the limits of Province or Region, and this will certainly have repercussions in our lives as individuals and communities. Definitely, this will be in many cases the reason for restructuring.

Finally, I wish to remind you that the Priority Mission Projects are a concrete aspect of something much broader, that as our Constitutions in article 60 say: "*our evangelizing mission can be carried out in all cultures, in keeping with the initial intuition of our Founder, who saw us as 'a group of missionaries who would spread the Gospel everywhere'.*"

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a horizontal line underneath.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, March 20, 1996

V Circular Letter to the Congregation

The Charismatic Impulse

Dear brothers,

As you know, this month is doubly linked to our Founder, the Good Father: by the anniversary of his birth on March 1, and of his death on March 27. So, I believe this is an appropriate time to write the letter I already announced when I commented briefly to you about the visit I made last November to those places we call the *historical sites of our Congregation*.

Personal Experience

The deeper and more complex personal experiences are, the more difficult they are to transmit through the medium of language. It is true that words are the most precious means we have for communicating among ourselves, and it is also true that there are geniuses who produce marvels with words. However, there are also other poor mortals like myself who have difficulty expressing themselves eloquently. Hence, please excuse the awkwardness with which I now try to transmit to you something so meaningful and moving as was my special visit to the places of our origin.

I must acknowledge being a member of the generation that could be numbered the first among those coming after Vatican Council II. All my Initial Formation came in the years close to the end of that decisive ecclesial event in the history of the contemporary Church.

Therefore, although in the first years my formation followed the methods of previous kinds of religious formation during my years as a professed student, this system has changed a great deal due to development in the Spanish Province. I confess I am deeply grateful to my formators and really appreciate the formation I received then. Yet, I must also honestly admit that my formation for religious life was based

more on a general theology of what this lifestyle means in the communion of the Church rather than on a specific theology of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. To say it more explicitly, I felt myself to be more a religious than an SS.CC. religious.

Most certainly, the Rule of Life as well as the practice of adoration - a bit in my own way - nourished my Congregational spirituality in the Seventies. Above all, I was supported by what we have traditionally called our family spirit. Since the novitiate I have grasped and lived that *family spirit* as very worthwhile and well adapted to my way of being. But not much else.

That was a time when it was difficult, very difficult, to recognize ourselves in the Constitutions, those of 1964, which in some way were stillborn since they were drawn up when the Council had not yet ended and reception was far from general.

From the point of view I am presenting, two events marked my life in the Eighties. First, the General Chapter of 1982, which strongly shook the Congregation and placed at stake the deepest roots of our identity based on our common Mission. We saw it more clearly in the line of an option for the poor, as did so many other Congregations. Another very important consequence was the need to write new Constitutions.

Second, something happened at the level of my own life: I was asked to be in charge of the formation of our professed students. Somewhat earlier I had spent five years in the "Mother-House" of the Spanish Province which you know is the house at Miranda de Ebro. My stay there left a mark of Congregational history on me. It was difficult to remain unaware of that history when the ancient walls, the cloister, and even the church building itself were speaking of other times, of foundations, of Congregational roots...

All this influenced me so that when I was asked to be formator, I asked myself to what point I could transmit a Congregational spirituality I had not fully and explicitly assimilated. Nevertheless, the confidence of my brothers gave me courage to accept and also to try to fill, with the means at my disposal, the lacunae I kept noticing.

In this sense a great opportunity for me was to be able to follow courses on the charism of the Congregation, which Juan Vicente

González, our Brother from Chile, gave each year in the second novitiate of the Spanish Provinces in Sevilla. I will never forget one of his first statements when he presented the course: "*One cannot be a religious in the abstract; one can only be so in the concreteness of one's own charism.*" I shall always be grateful to him and he knows it. From that time on I tried to deepen my awareness of what it means to be a religious of the Sacred Hearts.

Another privileged event for me was the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Good Father. The material then provided, through the historico-critical methodology and the hermeneutics we moderns cannot ignore, drew me close to that extraordinary religious who is the fundamental reference to our Institute, along with the Good Mother.

At the same time, the letters of our former Superior General, Patrick Bradley, were developing and actualizing the meaning of charism or significance of our Congregation based on the orientations of the General Chapter of 1982.

The Constitutions of 1990, in which I had the happiness of collaborating as Chapter member, embody all the actualized theology on religious life and the spirit of our Congregation. Along with the subsequent development and in-depth study contained in Pat's last letter, they continued to develop in me the serene and at the same time proud awareness of belonging to the SS.CC. Congregation.

When I was a child, as a student in one of the Congregation's school in Madrid, Damien became a hero for me like those who strongly influence our infancy and adolescence. Later, when I was a novice, he became a model—not fully imitable because of my fears and ordinariness, but a model just the same. His centenary and, recently his Beatification, have drawn him profoundly into my life.

But something remained for me to do, something I considered ever more urgent: paying a visit to the places where our Congregation was born. Once I had passed rapidly through Poitiers; I now wanted to visit those holy places unhurriedly and more tranquilly.

The expert and deeply devoted guidance of Xavier Riou, Maida Carlier, Armelle Laudrin, Bernard Couronne, Anne Marie Caron, Marie Lucie Geniteau, as well as of my chauffeur-guide, Henri Olier,

helped me immensely. With time and careful attention I visited La Motte, Coussay, Saint Georges de Noisne, La Chevalerie, each of the corners of Poitiers linked with the history of the Congregation, especially la Grand'Maison with the Oratory of our Founders, the souvenirs of the Good Mother, "Gabriel de la Barre's tunnel," as M. Henriette humorously described the chapel her dear friend had built there.

In Paris I visited with calm devotion the following places: Picpus; St. Roch, where our Good Father preached; rue d'Argenteuil and rue de Vendome (now rue de la Paix), where the sisters first lived when they moved to the Capital; the Irish Seminary, in the library of which the Good Father was ordained – an event recorded in a plaque on the wall; Issy les Moulineaux, the former house of formation, where Damien made his novitiate, and the cemetery there in which some of our Superiors General are buried.

I would like to highlight two special moments of my visit. Allow me to quote from my diary of those days to describe the first: *"Entering La Motte for the first time took on a special significance for me. Certainly, as Riou says, here the inspiration to found the Congregation was born. It is the site of 'the annunciation.' I don't need to describe the granary since it is already so well known; however, I must admit I was surprised – even if I was already aware of it – by how difficult it is to stand up there. We prayed, first each one individually, and then I prayed aloud in Spanish for responsible fidelity to the intuition of our Founder in all members of the Congregation, which means living our Vocation and Mission at the service of the Church and of the world."* (Nov. 11, 1995)

The other moving experience was not a single event but was rather something that, fortunately, happened several times during those days: making adoration tranquilly in the serene peace of the Oratory of our Founders. *There I entered into communion with the thanks-giving of the Risen Jesus, Bread of Life, Presence of Love... I participated in His attitudes and sentiments before the Father and before the world, which impelled me to assume the ministry of intercession and reminded me of the urgency to work for the transformation of the world according to the criteria of the Gospel (see article 5 of our Constitutions). I was also able, and in a most intimate way in that place, to enter into communion with our Founders, who did find in the Eucharist the source and summit of our apostolic and community life (ibid).*

Those were moments of personal renewal, of hopeful and thrilling enthusiasm, of reinforcement of my convictions; they brought confirmation of the bonding of my heart. For all this I cannot cease thanking God and the sisters and brothers who made these graces possible.

Importance of the charismatic impulse in our lives as individuals and as community

Many of those who know me are aware that I have never considered myself an expert in any area, despite the many years I have devoted to studies. I say this not out of false humility but because it is true and may be related to what I shall say later on. Perhaps if there is anything in which I have experience it is in government, since it is the task to which I have dedicated most time. Karl Barth the great twentieth Century theologian, used to say: *"When I speak of God, don't forget that it is a human being who speaks."* I could paraphrase that and say, *"When I speak of the charism, remember it is a Brother who speaks."*

Article 1 of our Constitutions says: *"In the communion of the Church, the People of God, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is an Apostolic Religious Congregation of Pontifical right, founded by Pierre Coudrin and Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie. Brothers and sisters, united in the same charism and the same mission, form a single Congregation approved as such in 1817 by Pope Pius VII."*

Article 153 says: *"1. These Constitutions and Statutes are a way of life for us, Religious of the Sacred Hearts. By profession we freely commit ourselves to observe them and to meditate on their message. Thus we shall be able to proclaim the love of the Sacred Hearts through our lives and through our ministry 2. We see ourselves likewise as pilgrims together with the whole People of God. Our Constitutions and Statutes express the convictions, aspirations and concrete possibilities we have at this moment of our journey. In equality and shared responsibility, we desire to advance toward full communion among ourselves, with our sisters, and with all lay Christians."*

I believe that both articles manifest the grandeur and the limits of our charism for each one of us and for all the community. I shall try to explain my thought a bit.

Every religious institute is the fruit of a founding charism which is the gift of the Spirit to the Founder, in our case the Founders, and

which becomes an institutional charism when, moved by the Spirit, he, she, or they start a religious institute. Obviously, the founding charism is unrepeatable as a gift from God to the Founders, but the institutional charism, recognized as such by the Church, continues through the history of the institute as the charism that gives life to the Vocation and Mission of each of its members and of the community as such.

Like all gifts of the Spirit of Jesus, that charism is at the service of the People of God who move forward in history; this is to say it is at the service of the Church and its mission to announce the Gospel, with its life and its word, to all peoples and all cultures. Therefore, it is evident that our charism must be seen in the communion of the charisms and ministries of the People of God at the service of humanity, at the service of extending the Reign of God.

Our charism is none other than the particular form of living and proclaiming the Gospel that the Spirit has given the Church through our Founders. Hence, our charism cannot distance us from the Gospel or from the Church; on the contrary, it inserts us in the communion of the Church at the service of the Gospel.

At the same time, our charism is a gift from the Spirit that as such is to be lived and transmitted in communion with the other gifts and charisms. Like every grace, it is a gift and at the same time a responsibility. As always happens in the logic of the Gospel, the indicative comes before the imperative. "Since you can, do it!" Since we have received the Congregational charism, let us place it at the service of communion. "*Would you bring in a lamp to put it under a tub or under the bed? Surely you will put it on the lampstand.*" (Mk 4, 21)

Theodor W. Adorno, a philosopher of the *Frankfurt School*, has remarked, "*Thought that attempts to eliminate contradiction is threatened by falsehood on both sides.*" The same can happen in regard to communion of charisms: to strengthen unity, we could fall into uniformity; to enrich plurality, we could fall into division and sectarianism.

We surely know that in its members the Church is righteous and good yet sinful. Hence, we cannot ever evade tensions that, handled well, can be enriching. If we let ourselves be dragged into a polarization that excludes, however, these tensions lead to sterility and impoverishment. To insist that our charism is something exclusive would be absurd and would sin against ecclesial unity. Not to be responsible

about it would be unjust in view of communion among us and would be destructive for the Congregation.

Therefore our Congregational Vocation and Mission are none other than the expression of the Congregational charism. To insist on both as support of our individual and collective lives is to assume responsibility for a gift of God to the Church and to the world.

In more individual terms, we could say that what others have the right to expect from each of us is the best of ourselves, and I believe that the best of ourselves is always the bonding of our hearts, understanding this metaphor in the most biblical sense of the center of our person. This bonding is expressed in beliefs; it is incarnated in assumed values; and it lives in the form of profound convictions. Here is where the charismatic influence in our lives can be located.

Evidently, each of us is the result of a special biology and has a specific biography where need and chance are united to freedom and grace - the presence of the Spirit. This actualization of the Spirit leads us along different ways to the Father in the following of Jesus. One of them is the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. To accept and follow this way is to commit oneself personally according to one's possibilities and limitations to the Vocation and Mission of the Congregation. It means, definitively, to open oneself to the Congregational charism.

Actualization of the charism in the Constitutions and the General Chapters

The Spirit guides the Church and its institutions throughout history. To speak of the Congregational charism as something historical is to fall into the serious mistake of considering the charism as a thing, instead of as a vital impulse, a creative force, a renewing inspiration.

It is also certain that the charism is not something which can be reinvented from time to time, subject to decisions determined by historical conditions of the moment.

The basic reference will be the founding charism but, like all things human the incarnation of that charism is dependent on time and space. Hence, during the entire history of the Congregation there have been successive forms of incarnating the Congregational charism, forms that have been expressed in a normative way in the succession of Constitu-

tions approved by the Holy Apostolic See and in the successive General Chapters.

Knowledge of the history of the Congregation is very important for us since it is the form in which the Congregational charism has been incarnated since our founding. As in all charismatic movements, and because the Congregation considers itself heir to the charism received by the Founders and transmitted to it, reference to the founding time in our history is basic.

We must be very grateful to the brothers and sisters who, through their works presenting our historical sources and through their research on these sources have made it possible for us to know our history. I would like to commend here our archivists who, by means of work that as often very silent and hidden, place at our disposal important elements which help us know that Congregational past which can illumine our present and gave us impetus for the future.

Our charism continues alive and active in each of us and today, more than ever, in very diverse geographical areas and cultures. Moreover, it has just been expressed in a very significant, meaningful way at the General Chapters held by the brothers and the sisters in 1994.

As I told you in my letter promulgating the Documents of that XXXV General Chapter of the brothers: *"Article 121 of our Constitutions assigns to the General Chapter the task 'to support and encourage the Congregation in the realization of its mission, with renewed fidelity to its proper vocation.' To fulfill this mandate, the Chapter brothers met in Rome and, guided by the theme Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers, prayed, reflected, and decided. Preparation for this Congregational event had involved all the brothers and communities in contributing their prayer, considerations, and suggestions. Consequently, we can say that the documents and decisions promulgated can be considered the specific form of renewing our fidelity to the Congregational vocation in the next six years. We are following the direction begun by the General Chapters of 1982 and 1988, whose orientations have helped us arrive where we are today."*

A year and a half have passed since this promulgation, and all the communities have begun a process of accepting these decisions and orientations in order to be faithful to what the Congregation should be and do during this time between Chapters.

As I said above, this is not a question of fixing our attention on some documents only as directives from a central office to be carried out by all means. Rather, we should see in this Chapter, as in those that preceded it, an effort to incarnate the congregational charism and a commitment to concretize that Vocation and Mission—the task for which we were convoked.

Effort for change and fidelity to the charism in the line of this Chapter: missionary communities, internationality, priority missionary projects, collaboration with the sisters, collaboration with the laity

I remember very clearly, and I have commented on this on various occasions to the members of the Council, that during the Chapter sessions of September 1994, a Chapter member reminded us from time to time that we were dreaming and that the real state of the Congregation was very different from our dreams.

During the year and a half I have been Superior General I have in some ways had to agree with those warnings. Yet, in spite of this, I do not regret having dreamed and of continuing to dream regarding the terms in which the Chapter concretized the Congregation's Mission for the coming years. Jesus was also a dreamer, and there as a dream for humanity called the Kingdom of God.

Allow me to remind you of the fable of the chickens and the eagles. It is said that once a chicken hatched two eagle eggs and the eaglets lived like chickens. One day an eagle flew in and showed them they could soar over summits and not just spend time on the ground. One of them believed in that dream of flying and did indeed soar above the highest peaks; it flew and flew and continued to fly. The other did not believe in its possibilities and went on spending all its life in the barnyard.

We must convince ourselves that we can do something; then we shall be able to accomplish it. Age, health, different sensitivities and cultures always introduce differences, and so we cannot all do everything. Nevertheless, all of us can always dream again enthusiastically and bond our hearts truly with the Congregational Vocation and Mission the Chapter concretized so beautifully in "*Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers*", and contribute to it what we can.

When the Chapter itself pointed out the obstacles we would be encountering, it did not do so to hold us back but rather so that strategies and ways to overcome them could be studied.

It is not easy to change the community into the missionary agent par excellence, when we are so accustomed to working alone. It is not easy to avoid polarizing ourselves in action, when we have so often justified our lives by what we do rather than by what we are. It is not easy to break away from an excessively presbyterial vision which may be detrimental to our basic condition as religious. It is not easy to make an option for the poor and the marginalized, when we have many times been bourgeois. It is not easy to surmount barriers of race, language, sex, culture that history has been building up around us as human beings. It is not easy to express the unity of the Congregation among sisters and brothers, when we have often considered ourselves as "Fathers" and priests whereas they are just "Sisters." In general, we have not collaborated with them on as equals. It is not easy to unite action and contemplation, when at times we have separated the two.

Aware of all this I am not, however, trying to judge and much less to condemn. I am trying only to animate and urge all of us to renewal so that we may be faithful to our Congregational charism.

This will involve changes and it always costs us to change. The General Chapter has spoken of two needed changes: structural and personal.

Certainly, fidelity to our Mission as well as the real state of our Congregation will require structural changes. And even more, the Chapter expressly asked for these changes during the course of these years. This is what has come to be called restructuring.

The General Government has begun to make plans and wants to have consultations; it would like to promote a sharing of opinions regarding these changes. Clearly, if we wish to face the future in the line the Chapter has indicated, we must place more emphasis upon the community as missionary agents, upon internationality, as characteristic trait of our Congregation in service for a world without borders, upon priority missionary projects which are for all the Congregation, upon collaboration with the sisters as expression of unity, upon collaboration with the laity, upon Initial Formation that makes all this possible. Structural changes along these lines are indispensable.

Another very important change was strongly emphasized during the Chapter: the change of heart. Without this change all the rest could remain just empty and meaningless structures.

Ongoing formation as very appropriate means for this change

The fundamental purpose of Ongoing Formation is to cause persons to become enthusiastic about their religious life once again, and to promote the Congregational Mission. When we seek to understand our present and to foresee our future, a key question is personal coherence or consistency, and religious depth. The changes produced in society, in the church, and in the Congregation have profoundly affected the lives of many brothers who, in many cases, have been unprepared for them, have been without the necessary personal resources for coping with changed situations.

Perhaps, therefore, it would be worthwhile for us to stop a moment and reflect on those two terms; *personal coherence and religious depth*.

Coherence has to do with both resistance or solidity and the joining of distinct elements of something. Both meanings are complementary, and this is especially true in the case of personal coherence because it is basically that solidity of the person which is achieved only when the distinct elements constituting the person are integrated.

Perhaps it is not necessary to insist on what it is to be a person. At any rate you will permit me, without intending to give a precise definition (which is not called for here) to recall what the Spanish philosopher Zubiri says. It will illuminate the question in point: A person is one who can change the query "*What will happen to me?*" into the more important "*What will I make of myself?*"

Hence, personal coherence or consistency would be that solidity based on the integration of all the elements of the person which would allow him to assume responsibility for his own life and make of it, as another Spanish philosopher - Ortega y Gasset - used to say, a project. Because of the historical character of the human person, this is always open and capable of being renewed.

Religious depth? Perhaps we can measure this by thinking of the relation that personal consistency, if you will allow me to be less precise

in order to be more expressive, has with that of God. Yes, one may speak of the consistency of the Mystery in which the transcendence of the totally Other converges with the immanence, the nearness of a person. St. Augustine would speak of what is more intimate than one's own intimacy. As believers we see this above all as a deepening of human insight in which are discovered new dimensions of reality. The world and history are transfigured, rendered visible signs of the invisible. It is this invisible toward which we are moving. This movement is "verified" by a growing sense of dignity in personal and social life.

When we speak of all this in the context of Ongoing Formation in the Congregation, we cannot speak of the brothers in a univocal, nor in a manichaeian way. Differences must be recognized and methods must be varied in view of the variety of situations. Basically it is a matter of considering the individual and appealing to each one. We cannot forget that the community is a very basic means for seeking personal coherence and spiritual depth. Nevertheless, given our limitations, it can often become a refuge.

Therefore, all this requires a consideration of the person in his most profound aspects, a view that is dynamic and open to the future of the person, accepting his lights and shadows with serenity and in relation to the community, the Mission, the apostolate, the charism of the Congregation, etc.

Religious must become enthusiastic once again about themselves, about their Vocation and Mission in the Church and in the world. Above all, this must be an invitation to be personally enthusiastic about the times we are living in, what we are experiencing in the Congregation, the Church, and society. We must be thrilled indeed about the Mission we have been called to, wherein our lives become a personal and community project at the service of the Kingdom of God.

Relation to the Vocation Ministry

Allow me some final reflections that relate the point made above with another the General Governments of the sisters and the brothers have begun to study together. This has to do with the Vocation Ministry.

It is no secret that vocation to religious life have decreased sharply in what is called, with a kind of superiority, "the First World" This produces diverse reactions. Some Congregations seek elsewhere for the replacements that are no longer found in the Old World, whereas others accept the situation without major conflicts being created and solutions being sought.

Given the internationality of our Congregations we are receiving vocations in some geographical and cultural areas but not in others. Hence, the study of the topic of Vocation Ministry has absolutely to be diversified. This is why the General Governments have sent a letter to the Provincial and Regional Superiors so that this question may be discussed on the Congregational levels.

At any rate, it cannot be doubted that the topic of Ongoing Formation, which I discussed above, and this one of Vocation Ministry will be related and will have mutual implications.

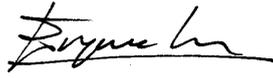
We are not the origin of a religious vocation; only to God can that possibility be attributed. However, we certainly serve as mediators. No one can become acquainted with the Congregation except through us who belong to it. Without wishing to create any guilt complexes, since the absence or presence of vocations is due to many factors, we can also affirm that a religious who is enthusiastic about who and to what he feels himself called will be in any case a clearer mediator of vocations.

We must never think that because there is a person or members of a team involved in the Vocation Ministry, the task belongs exclusively to him or them. True, we must divide tasks and functions, but let us not forget it is the community as a whole that is called to witness to the joy of belonging to the Congregation.

Conclusion

I end this letter with a prayer to the father of Jesus through the intercession of our Founders, that He continue to send us the Spirit Who sustains our Congregational Vocation and Mission at the Service of the Church and of the world.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a horizontal line underneath.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
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Rome, November 23, 1996

VI Circular Letter to the Congregation

A Congregational Reading of "Vita Consecrata"

Dear brothers,

I am writing to you once again as we try to fulfill the goal of communicating and animating that we set for ourselves at the beginning of our term as General Government.

This time we are sending you what members of the Government have called *a congregational reading* of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "**Vita Consecrata**".

There have been many and varied commentaries on the exhortation since it was published over six months ago. Hence adding one more to the long list would just be unnecessary work. For that reason, this letter will not contain a critique of the document. Rather it will try to show how the apostolic exhortation can shed light on the orientations of our recent General Chapter and how it helps us in practical ways renew our fidelity to the Congregations' vocation as expressed in those orientations.

Origin of this letter

First, I would like to explain briefly how this letter came to be. That could help make its purpose clearer.

The Apostolic Exhortation was published in Rome on March 27, 1996, two days after His Holiness Pope John Paul II signed it. The very next day I had a Spanish copy from the Vatican press on the desk in my office. To tell the truth, what first caught my attention was its length. It was really a book.

The following day I left for our Vice-province of Japan and so, with many hours of travel ahead, I was able to begin reading it. It was clear to me that *Vita Consecrata* would be from then on a must when thinking about, studying and speaking of religious life. And so I thought there was no time to loose in reading it. In spite of the fact that airports and planes are not conducive for the concentration that a document of this type calls for, I got down to work.

The language of a papal document does not usually make for light reading. This document was no exception. Yet many aspects of the text did hold my attention. Almost without expecting it, I began to find that among the themes of religious life addressed in the exhortation there were many reference points for concerns of the Congregation.

It was not long before the margins of the text were filled with notes where I had found convergences or divergences between points made in post-synodal exhortation and our Congregation's orientations. It would be false to say that there was complete agreement. That would be to misrepresent both sides. However it can not be denied that many things in the exhortation confirm the analysis, reflection, and decisions made in our recent Chapter.

Because I was occupied with so many other things during my visit to Japan, my reading slowed down some. The document traveled with me to all the different places where our brothers live in the beautiful land of the Rising Sun. I finally finished reading *Vita Consecrata* in Mito, the first house of our Congregation in Japan, before the Sunday Eucharist.

Shortly after I returned to Rome, the biannual Assembly of the Union of Superiors General met in Ariccia. I eagerly attend these meetings. I find them not only interesting but also helpful and encouraging in my service to the Congregation. This time the main topic was the Apostolic Exhortation. Since the results of this meeting have been published in various media, it is not necessary to report them here. However, I must say that our reflections in Ariccia largely confirmed the assessment I had already made. That encouraged me to think about something similar to what we had done in Ariccia but this time with our General Council.

Immediately after that the General Council had a series of meetings in Rome, and I invited the members to consider a joint study of *Vita Consecrata*. But, as so often happens in governments of religious communities, urgent matters usually force more important things to be postponed. However that allowed us to find a very fortunate alternative. We would take advantage of the coming October sessions to go on retreat together away from Via Rivarone and then we would study the papal document.

Considering the results, I would say that was a wise decision. On the first free weekend after we were all back, we went to the residence of the Dominican sisters of St. Rose of Lima outside Rome. Our retreat had a clear objective: to make a *Congregational reading* of the Apostolic Exhortation. All of us had read and studied it in different contexts and circumstances during the months since its publication. The purpose of reading it together was to find light and reinforcement for the orientations the Congregation had chosen in its Constitutions and especially in its recent General Chapter.

The retreat allowed us to share ideas, feelings and experiences that deeply affect our religious life in a quiet and more restful way than we could in the midst of our regular work. In keeping with art. 94.2, we have always tried to foster unity and healthy relationships among ourselves. The retreat certainly had positive effects in that sense also.

The retreat could also have repercussions on our animation of the Congregation, which is another aspect of our ministry that we have tried to be attentive to.

We divided our study into three parts that coincide with the three parts of the Exhortation. In each part we had time for personal reading, for sharing, and for prayer or liturgical celebration.

At the end of the two days we had a somewhat spontaneous evaluation. There was general satisfaction regarding content, atmosphere and communication. We had fulfilled our objectives of doing a congregational reading of the text that could serve as a reference for our work as the General Government and of communicating with one another at a deep level.

Undoubtedly, the consequences of both things for the life of the Congregation could be quiet remote. Was there some way we could share what we had accomplished? Then there arose the idea of writing this letter, which was first foreseen as a synthesis of what each member of the Government had contributed to this *Congregational reading* of the document.

However, when I began to work on it, I found it was very difficult to produce such a synthesis. Despite the fact that we had agreed on many elements in our sharing, the differences were clearer once the different contributions were put together. Synthesizing diversity is not only difficult but also impoverishing.

Although as members of the General Government we really do try to think, feel and speak at an international level, all of us come from definite cultural contexts that condition our thoughts, feelings and words. So instead of trying to synthesize the diversity, we thought it would be better to offer the richness of the differences that came up as we were reflecting on the same theme. Since our reflection came out of different cultural contexts, these very contexts can benefit from the sharing. It is clear that when one writes in Spanish, no matter how good the translation is in another language, it never quite captures what was said in the original. So if there are contributions from different cultures and languages, animation can be richer. As we have said, animation is a concern and goal of this government.

Therefore, we decided that I would write this letter that would reflect my appreciation of the document. The contributions of the other members of the General Government on the *Congregational reading of Vita Consecrata* will be shared in other publications.

The Thirty-fifth Chapter and *Vita Consecrata*

In this section I will offer references from the Apostolic Exhortation for each of the main orientations of our recent General Chapter. I will go over the more important Chapter documents and consider some of the paragraphs of *Vita Consecrata*. For some paragraphs I will provide quotations. For others I will simply give the number. In order to avoid repetition, the initials VC will be substituted for the complete title.

Missionary communities

From the beginning of our government we have emphasized the importance of this Chapter document in encouraging fidelity to our Congregation's mission today. VC confirms the value of this document in various ways.

The centrality of mission for our religious life is clearly supported in the first part entitled *Confessio Trinitatis*. In No. 25 we read, "... the sense of mission is at the very heart of every form of consecrated life." No. 27 says, "Eschatological expectation becomes mission." But, it is particularly in the third part, *Servitium Caritatis*, that this idea is more emphasized. No. 72 attests that "... by the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus' life. (...) It can therefore be said that **a sense of mission is essential to every institute.** (...) Thus it can be said that consecrated persons are 'in mission' by virtue of their very consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their institute. (...) Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: **fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission.**"

A close reading of VC No. 73 will help us to understand more deeply some of the characteristics the Chapter document attributes to missionary communities. For example, note the insistence that "to carry out this service appropriately, the consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God and be aware of the challenges of their times, understanding the profound theological meaning of these challenges through a discernment made with the help of the Holy Spirit." It continues: "In fact, it is often through historical events that we discern God's hidden call to work according to his plan by active and effective involvement in the events of our times."

It could also be interesting to read the opening paragraphs of the second part, *Signum Fraternitatis*, particularly Nos. 41 to 45. The last one emphasizes something that is very present both in our Chapter documents and in our Constitutions: "The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all toward the one mission. If the Church is to reveal her true face in today's world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the 'new commandment'."

Several paragraphs of VC emphasize characteristics that the Chapter document attributes to missionary communities such as the option for the poor and communities inserted among the poor. No. 82 does not only clarify the meaning of the option for the poor but it clearly calls us to make that option characteristic of religious life: "*The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor.*" Nos. 83, 89 and 90 treat this question more deeply from diverse points of view.

There are references to spirituality in various paragraphs of VC. The spirituality that is necessary to support communal commitment to the mission is another aspect that the Chapter document lists in describing missionary communities. We can even find some what of a definition of such spirituality in No. 93: "*All these elements, which take shape in the different forms of the consecrated life, give rise to a **specific spirituality**, that is, a concrete program of relation with God and one's surroundings, marked by specific spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or other aspect of the one mystery of Christ.*"

Explicit mention of aspects closely related to our Congregation's spirituality can be noted in Nos. 22, 75, 88, as well as in No. 95, which speaks of the Eucharist and of Eucharistic adoration.

Our General Chapter did not treat the subject of collaboration with the laity as such. However, it did address the topic in several of its documents. Among them is the document on Missionary Communities. VC has some very instructive sections on this topic, among them numbers 55 to 58. These paragraphs can also be helpful when it comes to the question of the Congregation's secular branch.

Internationality

There is a clear reference to internationality in the very title of the Thirty-fifth General Chapter: *Missionary Communities for a World without Frontiers*.

The Chapter's final message to the Congregation pointed out that internationality as a dimension of the Congregation's life, and described as such in the third chapter of our Constitutions, is rooted in our best SS.CC. tradition. It also becomes a sign and witness for people

today as we try to move beyond our own countries and cultures and overcome the barriers that have arisen and that remain in our world due to hatred, injustice, ethnocentrism, discrimination, and indifference.

If we compare this with what the Apostolic Exhortation says, the parallels are clear even using some of the same words and expressions. For example No. 85 affirms explicitly, "*The fraternal life is itself prophetic in a society which, sometimes without realizing it, has a profound yearning for a **brotherhood which knows no borders.***" (Here the emphasis is mine.)

Internationality is discussed in VC under different aspects such as fraternity in the universal Church, the mission ad gentes, evangelization and inculturation. We also see these topics in Chapter III of our Constitutions under the heading "*An International Community.*" However, the Chapter document entitled "*Internationality*" focuses mainly on international solidarity both within the Congregation and outside it. The missionary aspect and inculturation are also discussed in other Chapter documents, such as *Missionary Policy* and our *General Plan of Initial Formation*.

Paragraph 47 of VC could help us reflect on the tension between a universal understanding of mission and insertion in local churches and different peoples and cultures. This is a tension that is always present in an international religious institute like our own. This section is also important because of its reference to ecclesial communion in and the bond linking international institutes to the Petrine ministry, which is a ministry of unity and universal mission. As a counterpoint, there follows No. 48.

Our Chapter document speaks of promoting universal brother/sisterhood that would surpass borders both within and outside the Church. This finds solid support in number 51 of VC. The Exhortation calls us to the task of "***spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence. Places as they are within the world's different societies—societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it – communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages,***

languages and cultures meet, as brothers and sisters, ***are signs that dialogue is always possible*** and that communion can bring differences into harmony."

Since the recent General Chapters, one of our main concerns and expectations has been the healthy tension that should exist between inculturation and international communion. This finds reference a little later in the same No. 51: "*In an age characterized by the globalization of problems and the return of the idols of nationalism, international institutes especially are called to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races, and cultures. In a climate of fraternity, an openness to the global dimension of problems will not detract from the richness of particular gifts, nor will the affirmation of a particular gift conflict with other gifts or with unity itself. International institutes can achieve this effectively, inasmuch as they have to face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity.*"

Sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts

The sisters' and brothers' General Chapters met together in 1994 in Rome and sent a letter to the whole Congregation. This became a Chapter document of each branch. In a world that questions relationship between men and women and in the face of the injustice that women experience in society and in the church, the letter sought to reaffirm our desire to live together what we are: *a single Congregation of sisters and brothers*. We want to find ways to meet and collaborate so that our life reflects more clearly this fundamental characteristic of our SS.CC. charism. Where such possibilities already exist, we want to strengthen them.

Paragraphs 57 and 58 of the Apostolic Exhortation speak particularly of the dignity and the role of the consecrated woman, as well as new perspectives for woman's presence and action in the Church. Both sections can be helpful in helping us understand and implement the objectives set forth in the Chapter document concerning the relationship of sisters and brothers in the Congregation.

An attentive reading of these paragraphs can help all of us, but especially the brothers, to appreciate more fully some of the consequences of being part of one and the same Congregation. Then this element of our charism can enrich our lives.

I would like to underline No. 57. "Certainly, the validity of many assertions relating to the position of women in different sectors of society and of the Church cannot be denied. It is equally important to point out that women's new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organize social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life." Again: "In this context the consecrated woman, on the basis of her experience of the Church and as a woman in the Church, can help eliminate certain one-sided perspectives which do not fully recognize her dignity and her specific contribution to the Church's life and pastoral and missionary activity. Consecrated women therefore rightly aspire to have their identity, ability, mission and responsibility more clearly recognized, both in the awareness of the Church and in everyday life."

Priority Mission Projects

As the Chapter document on the Priority Mission Projects makes clear, the *Missionary Policy of the Congregation* is the context for rightly appreciating those projects and their consequences for the Congregation's life. Thus, references to VC are valid both for the Chapter document and for the *Missionary Policy*.

When I spoke of missionary communities I already referred to some texts in the Apostolic Exhortation that were enlightening. Those could be repeated here. There are also some other interesting references that I will consider below.

Paragraph 78 of VC is an invitation to religious to be present in all the corners of the world bringing the Gospel. This number begins by quoting 2 Cor 5,14: "*the love of Christ impels us.*" There is a footnote referring to Lumen Gentium 44. As religious of the Sacred Hearts, that calls to our mind the words of the Good Father about seeing us as "*a group of missionaries who would spread the Gospel everywhere.*"

Paragraph 79 also helps deepen our awareness of the choices that the Congregation's *Missionary Policy* asks of all of us and the action that will entail. This section emphasizes inculturation as a necessary condition for evangelization. As regards the Priority Mission Projects of Initial Formation in Africa and Asia, which the Congregation has established for the years from the Chapter of 1994 to that of 2000, an important reference is No. 80.

This paragraph only touches in summary form on some aspects of our decision to inculturate our Congregation's charism in Asia and in Africa. Given the complexity of the topic, perhaps it may be even a poor treatment. At any rate, this section encourages to work at inculturation in a bold process of discernment and evangelical imagination. At the same time, it encourages us to be faithful to our Congregation's charism and to recognize the Church's role in validating the process.

Other parts of the Exhortation can also be helpful as regard this Chapter document, but they are spread out over the text. Enumerating them all would be somewhat excessive. However, as an example let me mention No. 66, which speaks of the *formation of formators* and shed light on a topic of vital interest to the Priority Missionary Projects.

Restructuring

As I have already said in my first circular letter "*Likewise the document "Restructuring" can be considered a result of the ideals we have chosen for ourselves. We have to incarnate those ideals in a reality which, in the words of the Chapter, is 'fragile and promising at the same time.'* To consider creating significant missionary communities, to give attention to the priority mission projects of the Congregation, to experience the deep meaning of internationality, to face the needs of Initial Formation and the long list of other things that we could add brings us face to face with a Congregation that includes very diverse situations as regards personnel and structures. Because of this we cannot neglect the restructuring such as the Chapter document calls for. The restructuring that we will have to carry out, with the General Government taking the leadership, will involve everyone, will be for the good of all and will be a result of our fidelity to our mission."

One thing that has been clear to this General Government from the beginning is that the Congregation called us to initiate a process of restructuring. It is a requirement if we want to be faithful to our vocation and mission. We see restructuring as a consequence of renewed enthusiasm for the Congregation and its role in the Church and in the world.

Most commentators on *Vita Consecrata* have characterized the Apostolic Exhortation as follows: it is an inspiring invitation to those

called to live the consecrated life within the ecclesial community to experience the beauty of religious life.

While undertaking this *Congregational reading of VC*, I came to think that the reference for our commitment to restructuring could be the entire Exhortation as such. In other words, if we take on restructuring as the Chapter has asked, it is because we believe that our Congregation still has something needed and valuable to give to the Church and society. This is what VC says about religious life in general.

Part III of Chapter II is entitled "*Looking to the Future.*" Before speaking of Vocation Ministry and Initial and Ongoing Formation, No. 63 realistically and courageously faces the question of *difficulties and perspectives*. A close reading of this section can be a good meditation on the basic aspects of our religious life, and an interesting consideration of the measures demanded of us by the restructuring asked for by the General Chapter.

Initial and Ongoing Formation

The General Chapter approved the General Plan of Initial Formation. It had been developed over the last six years with the collaboration of everyone and in particular the formation teams of the Provinces and Regions.

The topic of Initial Formation was given attention not only when this document was approved but also at other times during the Chapter sessions. Proof of this is that it is mentioned again and again in the different Chapter documents. Initial formation was very much discussed at the Chapter, as it is also being considered far and wide throughout the Congregation.

The General Plan of Initial Formation is good plan that is comprehensive and rich in suggestions. It can serve as the basis for developing Provincial and Regional Plans, which must take those general orientations and contextualize them in diverse cultures.

Paragraphs 65, 66, 67 and 68 of VC do no more than confirm many of the orientations contained in our General Plan of Initial Formation. Some of the topics that appear in these sections are: the central role of the candidate both as an agent of formation and as one who receives formation, the evolutionary character of the formation

process, the role of formators in accompanying candidates in the process, the adequate preparation of formators, the role of the community and apostolic activity in the formative process, and finally the importance of a complete and up-to-date *ratio institutionis*. We see in them clear parallels with our General Plan of Initial Formation.

The General Chapter did not produce a specific document on Ongoing Formation, but this topic was a concern of the Chapter members and was alluded to on several occasions. Number 15 of the message the Chapter sent to all the brothers with the Chapter documents were given them says, "*All this basically involves – we repeat – a change of mentality and of heart in all the brothers, to which in large measure Ongoing Formation should contribute.*"

In my Fifth Circular Letter I reminded you of this: "*The fundamental purpose of Ongoing Formation has to be to make us enthusiastic once more about our religious life and the Congregation's mission. When we try to understand our present and to foresee our future, a key question is personal coherence or consistency, and religious depth. (...) Religious must become enthusiastic once more about themselves, about their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. Above all, this is a call to each of us to have new hope about the times we are living in and our life in the Congregation, the Church, and society. We must become enthused once more about the mission we have been called to. For it is there that our lives are placed both personally and communally at the service of God's Kingdom.*"

Paragraphs 69, 79, and 71 of VC develop these questions in depth. Reading them can help us face shed light on the question of Ongoing Formation in our Congregation.

I cannot help but quote No. 40, which concludes the first part of the Exhortation. Although it does not make specific mention of this aspect of religious life, it can help us understand more clearly what we mean when we speak of Ongoing Formation as ongoing conversion or of its purpose as "returning to one's first love." Allow me to conclude this part of the letter by quoting at least the final sentence of No. 40: "*From the standpoint of the Christian life as a whole, the vocation to the consecrated life is, despite its renunciations and trials, and indeed because of them, a path 'of light' over which the Redeemer keeps constant watch: 'Rise and have no fear'.*"

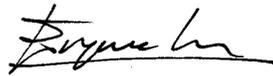
Conclusion

At the beginning of this letter, I presented the purpose for it: a *Congregational reading of Vita Consecrata*. Obviously, to want to reduce such a reading to my commentary would be arbitrary and wrong. All of you can also study the document from an SS.CC. point of view. I am sure you would do it with greater depth and richness. My emphases and references are certainly open to discussion. Others, and even better ones, are possible. Hence, the letter is open ended. As I have already indicated, the other members of the General Government will be sending you their commentaries.

In any case, this letter comes from the desire to be faithful to the task of animating the Congregation so it may be faithful to its mission in the Church and in our world today.

Through the intercession of the Good Mother, whose anniversary we celebrate today, may the Lord grant us His blessing and His peace.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', written in a cursive style.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, May 11, 1997

VII Circular Letter to the Congregation

Volunteers for Mozambique and India

Dear brothers,

We have just celebrated the Eucharist on this Sunday of the Lord's Ascension here in our chapel on Via Rivarone. As you know, in Italy the solemnity is celebrated on Sunday. During the Gospel reading we heard a passage from the appendix of the Gospel of St. Mark. It is a true definition, or better yet, a description of the mission to which the Risen Christ has called us: "*Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift for tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.*" (Mk. 16 :15-20)

As I was listening to this to this beautiful description of the Gospel mission, it made me think of our common vocation that unites us as brothers of the Congregation. We are called to enter into the dynamism of the love of Christ for his Father and for the world by bringing the Good News to all and giving witness that God's reign has come.

There are many demons that come forth from the human heart. If anyone doubts this, the media of communication offer ample demonstration. The front page tells us of egoism, injustice, indifference, oppression and exploitation. This is the news with which we have breakfast every day.

The Gospel is expressed in many languages and cultures. At times you do not have to go too far in order to find them. The phenomenon

of immigration, often unavoidable because of the unfair distribution of wealth, makes many societies ever more intercultural. In any event, being members of an international Congregation mission means crossing borders of all kinds, in many cases, geographical ones.

There is much sickness and many sick who await healing, and more than ever, a caring hand to soothe them.

It is true that this call to mission, as the Gospel warns us, will mean risking serpents and poison. But with faith and hope, which are the fruits of the Spirit, we can overcome these forces. At least we will not let ourselves be dominated by them and we will find antidotes that will heal us of their attacks.

In the final analysis, we follow Jesus. Our Constitutions say of him: *"He was able to say that His food was to do the will of His Father. Completely consecrated to His mission of making God's Kingdom present, He was always attentive to recognize the will of His Father and to fulfill it. His obedience as Servant was the concrete expression of His love as Son and that obedience to God led him to become the Servant all human beings."* (Const. 31,1)

Yesterday, for the second time in history, we celebrated the memorial of Blessed Damien. In the Office of Readings, the liturgy gives us a quotation from a letter of Damien to his brother Pamphile: *"Even though I am not a leper, I make myself a leper with the lepers; when I preach I always use the expression: 'We, lepers.' Thus may I gain all for Christ, as St. Paul."* (November 25, 1873)

During these days the figure of our brother Damien has made me think of the missionary vocation in the Congregation. It is the incarnation of our Founder's original intuition: *"I saw then what we are now..."* a missionary community destined to *"spread the Gospel everywhere."* (see Missionary Policy, Annex, General Chapter, 1994)

It has been a while now that I have wanted to write a circular letter to revive interest in something I spoke of in my Fourth Letter and which led to a request to all of you regarding the Priority Mission Projects.

As stated in the Chapter document mentioned above, the Congregation is experiencing a revival of interest in mission, due no doubt to

the inspiration of Damien. The willingness to leave everything, including one's own country with all that means, and go forth to proclaim and witness to the Good News of the Kingdom, is very present in the Constitutions. A new missionary consciousness in the whole Church, expressed in a significant way in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, has also favored this missionary resurgence. The growing importance of Asia and Africa in the Church's present and future is also an aspect which has a decisive influence. It is in this context that the Priority Mission Projects arose. They are meant to be a way of concretizing the Missionary Policy of the Congregation.

I do not intend to repeat what the circular letter on those projects has already stated extensively and completely. More than a year has passed since its publication. In that time we have been communicating about the development of both projects and it would be useless to repeat it again here. There is something however, that impels me to write once again to all of you. Therefore I have chosen the form of a circular letter, although it could seem unjustifiable given its length.

I want to repeat the request that was addressed to you a year and a half ago. We still need brothers to collaborate in the African and Asian Projects. In particular, as before, I am appealing for volunteers to go to Mozambique and India. There have been some responses from brothers who are willing to go to those missions. Yet, they are not enough. Some of them were unable to go for internal reasons in their own Provinces, while others were held back by problems of age or health. In any event, we continue to need the collaboration of other brothers.

The reasons we are asking for brothers for Mozambique and India are the same as stated in my former letter. I believe that they are the communities in Africa and in Asia that are most in need of help, now as then. It is true that we try to think of the projects of Africa and Asia holistically with priority given to the Initial Formation. But as I told you earlier, if the communities are not strengthened, it could prove very difficult for us to continue formation.

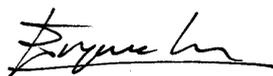
It is true that economic solidarity continues to be necessary and in this sense steps are being taken that I hope will continue. But right now, I want to emphasize the need for volunteers to go who can continue the work of those missions.

I understand that it is not common in our recent history for the Superior General to speak to the Congregation in these terms; nevertheless the responsibility that the General Chapter has entrusted to us as regards these Missionary Projects convinced me to do so.

I am not trying to supplant the responsibility of the Provincial Governments. And so the indications found in the Fourth Letter remain valid. It is important that all those who feel called to offer themselves as volunteers contact not only the General Government but also the Provincial Government, so that all those involved in such a decision play their part: the religious, his Provincial Government, and the inter-provincial, provincial, vice-provincial or regional structures involved in the mission community for which the brother is offering himself as well as the General Government.

I will not extend this letter any further. I leave it in your hands, so you may reflect on and pray over it before the Father. May He pour forth His Spirit on us, through the intercession of the Sacred Hearts.

Fraternally in the SS.CC.,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a horizontal line underneath.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



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Rome, July 13, 1997

VIII Circular Letter to the Congregation

The Plan of Apostolic Religious Life

Dear brothers,

A very cordial greeting from Rome at the season when the summer makes itself felt to the fullest in these latitudes and gives full meaning to what the Italians call "*dolce far niente*". However I owe you all something and I can not give in to what the climate suggests. Rather I must return to the literary genre of the circular letter to write something on a topic that comes up so often among us and that is the famous "Plan of Apostolic Religious Life".

The origin of this letter is the same as that of the Sixth Letter. The members of the General Government had a meeting some months ago to reflect on this topic that so often comes up in conversation and we thought that it merited a far deeper reflection. Actually we were away from our residence in Roman for two days in order to create an atmosphere for more intense reflection and we gave ourselves to shared consideration of the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life. We tried to come to a common vision which would enable us to offer the most complete perspective possible on this topic in our studies and during our visits to the communities.

At the end of this meeting, in addition to obtaining the desired results, we considered it opportune to make a summary of these reflections for a circular letter. Certainly between visitations and other types of communication, this letter was delayed much longer than we planned in the beginning. Normally when I have to write a circular letter, I am able to plan my time in Rome without interruption and I can combine this work with the ordinary routine of the office. However this time I was not able to do so and this letter had to travel with me

during the last few weeks. I wrote many of the paragraphs in the very beautiful house which we have in Wareham (USA-East). Now, here in Rome, I must express again my gratitude for the love and the kindness of the community there.

What we understand by the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life

In the very beginning of our meeting we decided to present the vision that each one had of this subject from their own experiences. Eventually it became evident that neither the terminology nor the content was identical for each one. However, there were enough points in common that we could enter into a reflection that was deeper and an approximation and a description that could be shared by all. In using these two words approximation and description, I am trying to express how flexible and open our reflection was. There was no attempt to become enclosed in a terminology that was overly precise.

As we became clearer about what a Plan of Apostolic Religious Life might mean, (from now on we are going to use the initials PARL in place of the full title) we reflected rather on the history of religious life and the context in which the topic under consideration arose. Proceeding ahead we found ourselves focusing more on the contents of such a plan.

Clearly the historical context of PARL is the renewal of religious life after the Second Vatican Council. In summary form we can say that this renewal invites individuals and communities to take an active role. In the past, emphasis was placed on the need for the person and the community to conform themselves to the rule as an expression of a common vocation and this was the key to progress in religious life. With the renewal emphasis was placed on the person and community entering into dialogue with the rule rather than conforming themselves to it. In this sense, a PARL would be the result of that dialogue in which the person and the community try to see how they can respond to the common vocation in the concrete historical circumstances, within a local church, among a certain people, a certain culture and given the situation of the community i.e. the age, the sensitivity, and the formation of its members. Basically it is an attempt to respond to the vocation, which comes from God through our founders, in the here and now of our community.

In that sense PARL cannot be just a document, but it is rather an embodiment of the religious vocation in real historical circumstances. Given that, the process of developing a plan is something important in and of itself. It means making the effort to unite the wills of all the members of the group as regards a communal commitment which then becomes the concrete way of responding to our vocation and mission in these circumstances. The development of the PARL is something dynamic, something that calls for creative fidelity. It involves discernment which calls for the commitment of every one of the brothers according to their situation.

If we do not make the effort to have a PARL, our response to our vocation becomes paralyzed and we just cling to our repetitious stereotyped routines. Or else we lose the sense of responding together and become satisfied with just individual or particular responses, which could be very valuable in themselves but are not expressions of a common vocation.

We run the risk of our Congregation's mission losing its character as a charismatic response to the needs of the society and the Church in which we live. Finally we will be in danger of just looking at the past and appreciating each other only in function of the past. This can lead us to believe that we have no future. In the end we will be reduced to group of alumni of a famous scholasticate of the 40's, 50's and 60's of the large Province that was but is no more.

Both the process of the development of the PARL and the role of religious authority which must animate the process are very important. This process cannot be understood in as an exercise in balancing wills as in the parliamentary process in a democratic state. Rather it involves the communal search for God's will for this present moment in the community's life. Respect for the person and for each brother's conscience must be combined with the courage to remain faithful to the Congregation's vocation and mission. This fidelity is what we seek through communal discernment. We cannot exclude anyone but rather try to encourage the participation of all. Of course there will always be some who will isolate themselves, but that kind of behavior cannot be allowed to annul the process or impede the community from going forward.

Religious authority that facilitates the process and leads its implementation, if chosen well with the participation of all, must not become subject to the special interests of one or the other but it must be vigilant that the process and implementation of the PARL be a real way of exercising religious obedience. This is what this is all about. Authority must be the first to obey. In other words, authority must be the first to facilitate the understanding and implementation of what we as a Congregation have discerned as God's will, which is expressed in the Constitutions and Chapter documents, in the particular circumstances of each community. Therefore this is not about defending the interests of either majorities or minorities but rather discerning with everyone's participation so as to find ways to respond with creative fidelity to our vocation.

The relationship between the PARL and the Constitutions

There are some who ask why we need a PARL if we already have the Constitutions. One can answer in very simply by saying that the Constitutions are for all the members of the Congregation whereas a PARL will only be valid for those who have discerned together the meaning of the Congregation's vocation and mission in certain context determined by society, culture and local church. The question really loses meaning if we understand adequately the meaning of the PARL: the contextualization of our vocation as it is expressed in our Constitutions.

There are some brothers who believe that the Constitutions tell us how we are to obey and that they are quite enough. What we have to do is fulfill the Constitutions. Either we obey or we do not. But when the Constitutions themselves speak about the vow of obedience, they call us to discernment. In principle this is the deeper sense of what we are talking about when we speak of PARL. As I appreciate articles 33 to 35 of our Constitutions they are a beautiful description of what is meant when it means to develop and implement a PARL.

33. In common with all Christians, we are called to make our own the obedient attitude of Jesus. For us, this call is concretized in the apostolic religious life that our Congregation proposes to us. Identifying ourselves with its mission and its orientations, we find our way of following Jesus. Our obedience as religious derives, then from our belonging to the Congregation, and in that it finds its meaning.

34. This belonging involves the active and diligent participation of each brother in the life of our Congregation at all its levels. With his own resources and in his own place of service, each member contributes to the fulfillment of our congregational mission.

35.1 This participation is especially indispensable in the task incumbent on the whole Congregation and each of its communities to discern the will of God in order to fulfil it in a concrete manner.

35.2 In this process of discernment, the respective Superior has his own role within the community; he must promote the process, animate and guide it. When he judges it to be opportune, he can in an evangelical spirit and in fraternal dialogue, take the decisions which he believes to be appropriate.

Our obedience as religious flows from our belonging to the Congregation and it is there that it finds meaning. The active and conscientious participation of each member in the life of the Congregation at all its levels is especially indispensable in the task, which is that of the whole Congregation and each of its communities, of discerning God's will of so that we might fulfill it concretely.

Basically this would be the justification for PARL from our own Constitutions. What's more they call for a PARL when trying to define what we mean by a Province. (art. 101)

At this point it would be impossible to avoid reference to the exercise of authority in our community because the articles I have quoted point out the importance of its role. It would also be good to recall the meaning of authority such as it is spoken of in our own Constitutions:

90. The living out of communion in mission, treated in Chapter III of the Constitutions, requires a style of authority that fosters participation and co-responsibility.

91. Authority must be discharged in the Congregation in the spirit of service to the brothers, just as Jesus presents it in the Gospel.

92. The brothers who exercise authority:

1. are concerned with fostering the development of the personality, talents and well-being of each brother;

2. seek to animate the community in the task of discerning the will of God in life, of taking care to see that it is put into practice and of fostering our "family spirit";

3. *foster the fulfillment of our mission more than the mere observance of rules;*

4. *are called to promote solidarity and unity between the different parts of the Congregation, and to establish the necessary bonds with the different organizations or movements of the Church and of society.*

Above all the Constitutions speak of leadership that encourages participation and co-responsibility in this search for fidelity to our vocation and mission in the service of the Church and the society in which the community finds itself. We are to foster adult mature obedience that must be combined with profound respect for the personal conscience of each brother and creative fidelity to the common vocation. This does not involve two contrary elements because fidelity to our common vocation will normally be a constant reference for each brother's conscience. However it is true that at certain times and for extraordinary reasons the two can come into conflict. This is why some aspects, namely prayer, freedom of spirit and dialogue, are always important in any discernment.

There are some elements which can not be lacking in discernment at the community level or when it is necessary for the individual and the superior to do so in extraordinary circumstances. Some of these would be: the ability to contemplate life from God's heart in keeping with our congregation's spirituality; freedom with respect to the many things that appeal to our heart, whose real source of unity with others must be God's will; dialogue as profound openness of one to the other, an openness that seeks not so much the defence of one's individual or group interests but rather the search together to be at the service of God's reign and his justice in faithfulness to our vocation.

After the "masters of suspicion" and the many ideological crises that men and women of the twentieth century have gone through, we find it difficult to use these big words because they seem dangerous. However to speak about the Plan of the Apostolic Religious Life basically refers to profound elements of our life, expressed in such great words as person, community, liberty, love, service, vocation and mission. Only in this way is this all really worth it. PARL is not just another abbreviation but truly an experience of the depth of our religious life. I believe that we must not fear the danger of being

profound, for as Holderlin said, "*where danger dwells, there also is an increase of saving help*".

Elements of the PARL

Without trying to be exhaustive or to define some kind of inflexible orthodoxy, we believe that the elements of PARL are to be found in the first three chapters of our Constitutions. These must be read and assimilated in the light of the cultural, social and ecclesial needs of the place where the community is located. It is precisely in these chapters that we find values concerning our vocation, consecration and communion in the service of mission. These must be contextualized and inculturated.

It is also certain that when we speak of elements of a PARL we have to distinguish between those that might be general elements of the Plan, which affect the whole of our religious life, as was indicated in the previous paragraph and certain other aspects of the Plan which we seek to prioritize in a determined time. These must be limited because if they are not, it will be impossible to prioritize them. Because of that, it is best to distinguish between the plan and the program of action points that flow from the plan.

It is clear that the plan itself is meant to create energy as regards apostolic action but that activity at one particular time might be focused more on one aspect than on another. That depends on the characteristics of each community. As they differ according to ages, formation, sensitivity and culture. To program that activity means setting priorities within the PARL. What is more urgent at one given moment might be less so at another. Given the scarcity of personnel that many of our communities are experiencing, such programming becomes all the more important.

It can happen that there are good and noble objectives which cannot be realized at present and trying to do so just results in dispersal of energies. So it is necessary to prioritize and be aware that perhaps we can only realize two or three objectives. But these have to be ones that can consolidate the efforts and dedication of all the brothers or at least of the majority. At the same time it would be wise that these objectives be programmed according to a time-line. There are some things that possibly can not be achieved yet but we can begin and perhaps even

with time they will not be finished. Besides thinking of when, we also have to think of how and who.

It would be best that this process be as participative as possible and that it not be left just to the Provincial Government or the Provincial. The greater the participation in this exercise, the more it will stimulate unity in the Province.

To our understanding, by emphasizing the process of developing a PARL we are emphasizing an essential aspect for it touches on communal discernment. The important thing is not the written document with everything signed and sealed. What is most important is the journey together. We do not mean to say that the actual formulation of the PARL is not worthwhile. In fact, a written PARL allows greater clarity and the ability to share and assimilate it. That is much better than plans that are "implicit" or "not explicit enough." And so we definitely are in favor of writing out the PARL.

According to the Constitutions, the broadest level at which a PARL is required is the provincial. Nevertheless, in the evolution of the Congregation since the General Chapter of 1994 we have spoken of PARL as open to broader groupings than the Province such as interprovincial and international structures, Conferences and Priority Mission Projects. The development of the PARL within a Province at the same time open to these broader horizons can be something positive that would enable us to collaborate interprovincially.

Relationship of the PARL with other projects

There is only one mention of a personal plan in the Constitutions and this is found in article 58. Nevertheless it is clear that much has been written about this in the literature on religious life. We can say that a personal plan can be a very useful tool for personal growth and maturity, as well as when it comes to evaluate both. Certainly it can be very beneficial when the personal plan is related to the development of the community plan and vice versa. Actually it is very difficult to live according to a personal plan if the community in which one is a member does not have a community plan. On the other hand only people who understand the meaning of a plan in their own lives can create a communal plan. Finally, we could say that when communities have a community plan the PARL will be something that draws together

and gives meaning to personal plans. When a community plan is lacking the PARL becomes more difficult and is seen as something external and even imposed from without.

The idea of having a Plan at the provincial, community and personal levels is not just a way of organizing the community on different levels but rather a way of understanding the renewal of religious life. As we said above, it is related to the way we understand our religious vocation, our response to that vocation and the personal and communal consequences while taking into consideration the concrete historical circumstances in which each religious and each community lives.

As was mentioned previously, the PARL should not only be related to the projects of the communities and the brothers of the Province. The PARL should also be related to the wider Congregation and to groupings at that wider level such as other Provinces. The last General Chapter called us in a special way to interprovincial collaboration and solidarity. It is here that reference to the Priority Missionary Projects of the Congregation has special relevance. Every PARL in the Congregation ought to not only refer to them but also in some way to see how, when, with whom, and with what, we can be in solidarity with them.

PARL in the context of restructuring

At this present time in the life of the Congregation, to speak about the PARL process without speaking about restructuring does not make sense for the two topics are closely related.

First of all, restructuring will not mean the disappearance of the Provinces as basic the basic structural unit of the Congregation. In this sense, new provincial configurations which are resulting as a result of reconstruction should have their own PARL. This cannot be simply a juxtaposition of different Provincial Plans but the result of the groups that are part of the new structure working together on a common plan. And so to keep in our mind and heart what a PARL means could be a great help and a challenge for those groups making up the new configurations.

It is important that as regards the program of restructuring that the General Chapter asked of the General Government, we understand

from the outset that it involves looking for useful structures in the concrete circumstances in which the community lives so that its mission can continue to be valid. In that sense all that we have been saying about PARL could be very interesting material when it comes to envisioning such structures.

At this time of restructuring, certain aspects appear more clearly such as those we have been speaking of in the previous paragraphs. One of these would be the opening of some provincial communities to others. That would have consequences in terms of understanding and implementing a PARL. When we speak about restructuring we are not speaking merely of a new map of the Provinces but of seeing how all of us can respond more effectively to the new demands coming to us from the world and the Church. This must be concretized in projects and plans that demand definite structures.

We all know that when there are projects and priorities, changes have to be made. We have understood this at the level of the Provinces. Now is the time to understand the same at the level of the whole Congregation. Practicing this at the provincial level can be a great help in making changes at the general level.

It would also be good to take into account one other important point as we look at PARL and restructuring. There are some Provinces that feel they are sufficiently strong at this time that they do not need others' help. They might even think that it would be counterproductive to their own interests to modify their own PARL in some way in order to open themselves to other groups in the Congregation that are more fragile or have less of a future. However we have to remember that we are not a national Congregation that can understand itself only in terms of a certain geographical or cultural area. No, we are an international Congregation and for this reason, that which affects some can and must affect all. And so as we shape the future the aspect of internationality has to be considered something essential.

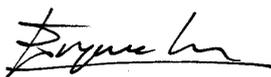
Clericalism certainly has its own costs. The exercise of the priesthood often binds us more to the local church than to our international dimension. This can have a special effect on those who work in parishes, which involve a very large number, even perhaps the greatest number of the brothers of the Congregation. We must take care that we do not lose sight of the international character of the Congregation.

The restructuring of which the General Chapter spoke cannot be understood adequately outside this perspective of internationality and solidarity with the Priority Missionary Projects of the Congregation and with the mission on a general level. And so we can see the importance of Ongoing Formation that broadens our horizon which is so often reduced to the space where we usually find ourselves. It also shows us the need for our PARL to be open to that dimension.

Conclusion

I am finishing writing this letter on the feast of my patron St. Henry, the duke of Bavaria and emperor of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire. I believe that his holiness came not from all his titles but rather from his unceasing dedication to the reform of the Church. Let us ask God Our Father through the intercession of Saint Henry to grant us the grace not so much to reform but to renew our lives with the Spirit who sustains our vocation and mission so that we might be more useful in the service of His Reign.

Fraternally in the SS.CC.,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', written in a cursive style.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
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Rome, March 27, 1999

IX Circular Letter to the Congregation

Toward the General Chapter of 2000

Dear brothers,

My very best wishes from Rome on this day when we remember the Good Father. If I mention him at the beginning of this letter it is not only out of obligation, this being the anniversary of his death, but because of the deep meaning he has for us as founder.

The "Work of God" that Marie Joseph Coudrin began has come down to us. The Spirit that filled the Good Father's heart with zeal for the reign of God has continued to inspire the Congregation to our days. Serving the love that we contemplate in the hearts of Jesus and Mary has been the mission of the community throughout its history. Remembering the Good Father is, as the German theologian Johann B. Metz¹ says in speaking of the religious life, a "dangerous memory." For it is a memory that challenges the fundamental values that are the basis of our life. These are the values that must give us light to truly evaluate our fidelity and commitment to the vocation to which we have been called.

This is what this letter is all about. It is intended to begin a process of evaluation that will help the Congregation make a real discernment in the upcoming General Chapter in 2000. That is the basic reason for this letter that could really be entitled "*...Toward the General Chapter.*" It is a contribution by the General Government to the preparation of that important event in the congregation's life that was announced to all the brothers in my letter of March 10. Of course this is not the report that the General Government is required to present to the Chapter. That

¹ Johann B. Metz, *Las ordenes religiosas. Su misión en un futuro próximo testimonio vivo del seguimiento de Cristo*, Barcelona, 1978.

will come later. However, this is intended as sort of a preview of some of the government's reflection that we think needs to be taken into account in the Chapter process.

1. Looking Backward

The Plan of the Government

I have spoken several times² of how after our election as the brothers' General Government in the General Chapter of 1994, we had a series of council meetings during which we outlined a Plan of Government. In the plan we set some objectives that we thought would be a way of implementing the principal orientations and decisions of the recently finished General Chapter. The plan was also inspired by the functions that the Constitutions assign to the General Government and to the Superior General personally.

As you remember, the plan set out three areas for attention by the General Government: animating and challenging the Congregation to become missionary communities for a world without borders, missionary policy with a strong emphasis on the Priority Mission Projects and Initial Formation and finally restructuring as a consequence of the abovementioned. It was clearly a plan that flowed from the recent General Chapter.³ It was based on the orientations of the Chapter and was designed to implement them. It has been the constant guide for our action as a General Government. Year after year we have evaluated its implementation. Over the years we have tried to be faithful to it in the conviction that by doing so we were being faithful to the General Chapter that entrusted us with the task of governing the Congregation.

Difficulties

Without a doubt one of the most difficult parts of the plan to put into effect has been restructuring. Without wanting it to be, it has become one of the most outstanding questions of these years. We have repeated on different occasions that we do not consider restructuring as an end in itself but rather in function of the Congregation's mission, which was always the horizon against which we had to understand

² Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Second Circular Letter to the brothers*, Rome, 1995.

³ *Thirty-fifth General Chapter*, Rome, 1994.

everything else.⁴ Certainly we believed and we continue to believe that restructuring is something necessary that we must do as soon as possible. Otherwise circumstances could impose on us a certain kind of restructuring. However we can not say that as of the present we have forward clearly or decisively enough.

Another of the aspects discussed has been the Priority Mission Projects. This is a more complex question than the previous one. Here we are dealing with important elements such as the whole Congregation's missionary commitment, international solidarity, the option for two continents presenting particular challenges for the mission and the inculturation of the Congregation's charism, the identification of projects that go beyond provincial borders becoming projects of the whole Congregation, and the tension between the particular and the universal, the provincial/regional and the general. Even though we have taken important steps, with the generous collaboration of many brothers and communities,⁵ resistance and misunderstanding still exist. That indicates that the abovementioned tensions have not been well integrated.

Initial Formation and related issues in Vocation Ministry have come to the fore as a focus of attention in very different contexts during these years. In this area we had to take into account the great difference between communities with personnel and finances but few vocations and those that have vocations but lack all kinds of resources. There is also much to do to insure greater coherence with the orientations contained in the Congregation's *General Plan of Initial Formation*.⁶ However we must recognize the generosity and dedication of brothers and communities in the area of Initial Formation, sometimes under very difficult conditions. This is especially true in some of the Regions that are closely related to the Priority Mission Projects.

⁴ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Introduction to the Meeting of the General Government with the Provincials and Regionals of Europe*, Rome, 1996.

⁵ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Fourth Circular Letter to the brothers*, Rome, 1996; *Seventh Circular Letter to the brothers*, Rome, 1997; *Report of the General Government to the Enlarged General Council*, Rome, 1998; Édouard Brion ss.cc., *Les antécédentes du projet Afrique (1931-1994)*; you can also consult numbers 73 and 74 of the Congregation's review *Evangelization* dedicated to the Priority Mission Projects.

⁶ *General Plan of Initial Formation*, Rome, 1995.

Observations

We have been working in these areas without neglecting to carry out our fundamental task of animating the brothers in their fidelity to the vocation and mission flowing from the Congregation's charism. Through our visits, during which we met with each of the brothers, and also in developing the government plan and the obstacles encountered in implementing it, certain of our impressions have been verified. Some are clearly positive such as missionary commitment, generous dedication, self-giving service, and deep piety. However often they are more evident at the individual level than as a characteristic of the community as such. We also must recognize that we have frequently encountered disillusion, superficiality, immobility, individualism, lack of fraternity, self-seeking, lack of availability, flight into activism, a lack of a solid spiritual referent, etc.

We have made other observations related to the service of authority in the Congregation. We observed provincial and regional authority too focused on the respective community with little openness to the Congregation as a whole. Often leadership understands itself as very dependent on its Province's or Region's characteristics. This is true in both emerging and aging communities. Leadership sees itself as very independent of the General Government. Many times leadership is overwhelmed maintaining communities at great cost and with great generosity but it is not really open to proposals for change. There is a tendency to avoid the conflict involved in processes of transformation and insufficient freedom to embark on new paths. We also observed that local authority has little importance in the dynamics of community at that level.

The Enlarged General Council

In the Government's plan the Enlarged General Council in Poitiers last October was seen to be a very important moment, especially as regards restructuring. It seemed to be the appropriate structure to evaluate what had been done up to that point and to give direction for the future. The General Government had presented a series of proposals on restructuring. We wanted the Enlarged General Council to ratify them or offer alternatives. As we see it, the Enlarged General Council did neither. Confronted with the topic it became deadlocked and in a certain way the topic is still unsettled. We somehow continue

moving forward but at a slower pace and the understanding of restructuring is even vaguer than the one on which our proposals were based.

At the same time attention was given to other topics which are certainly related to what we have observed as the General Government over the course of these years: the quality of Religious Life, Initial and Ongoing Formation, Youth and Vocation Ministry and the Service of Authority.

The conclusions⁷ of the Enlarged General Council set out strategies and means to confront these problems between the Council and the next General Chapter. According to the document each structure of the Congregation has its proper responsibility in carrying out these strategies and providing the means to do so. That is where we are.

Conclusions

It was clear to us that we had to reflect on the period between our election and the preparation of the next General Chapter. We have done so and this letter is the fruit of our reflection. As I have already said we deduced our Government plan from the General Chapter. However during these years we have become increasingly aware that even if our deduction was correct, it was based on a faulty premise: the unreserved acceptance of the Chapter decisions by the Congregation.

The Chapter itself clearly alluded to the obstacles we were going to encounter in several of its documents.⁸ In the documents as well as in interventions on the floor of the Chapter there was explicit mention of personal and communal conversion. I alluded explicitly to all of that in one of my circular letters.⁹ In any case we must sincerely recognize that perhaps we were too optimistic and that we should have kept in mind the Gospel passage that calls us to build on solid rock.¹⁰ We can not just call on the Lord and then not do what he tells us. Jesus is not looking for admirers but followers. Our life as religious of the Sacred Hearts is not just based on theoretical acceptance of a doctrine about

⁷ *Enlarged General Council*, Poitiers, October 4-17, 1998, *Final Documents*, Rome, 1998.

⁸ Cf. *Thirty-fifth General Chapter*, in the documents "Missionary Communities", "Internationality"...

⁹ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Fifth Circular Letter to the brothers*, Rome, 1996.

¹⁰ Luke 6: 46-49.

the Congregation but rather on practical fidelity to the Congregation's charism.

The observations, which I indicated above and which in large part coincide with the concerns manifested by the Enlarged General Council, make us envision a General Chapter that would face the future with clarity having taken into account all of this. The Chapter must not so much arrive at a document that reflects consensus so much as mobilize the brothers' wills to do God's will for the Congregation, such as we discern that to be.

2. Looking toward the Future

The Future and the Congregation

The future is never an easy topic. When we speak of the future we immediately raise questions about the present. Our assessment of the present is a point of departure for understanding the future. In a society in which liberal capitalism has triumphed some have proclaimed the end of history. Consequently there is no other choice that to settle down in the present. However one of the features of Christian faith is its eschatological character: *already but not yet*. With faith in the Lord's paschal mystery the future is not a question up for discussion but rather a gift we receive. But then this ever-possible future only becomes a reality when we open our hearts and we inhale the freedom of the Spirit of the Risen One.

When we speak of freedom we can not forget that it is not absolute but conditioned. Knowing what those conditions are is a necessary if we want the exercise of our freedom to be as intelligent as possible. But it is not only a question of clarity; it is also a question of will. "*One thing is knowledge of causes and another is the strengthening of souls. It is as important to strengthen souls in courage as in knowledge, even if one is not possible without the other.*"¹¹ Often human beings have greater need of overcoming what keeps them from doing the good than of overcoming their lack of understanding the nature of the good.

When we as a Congregation look towards the future it is because we believe in it. And this is the first thing we must ask ourselves. Do we believe in the future of the Congregation? Certainly throughout history

¹¹ Seneca L. A. Nat. 6, 32, 1, Madrid, 1951.

many religious institutes have gone out of existence. Our own could disappear; for it clearly is not an essential part of the life of the Church. However it is not in that direction that our reflection should go. The question is not whether our Congregation will exist in the future but rather whether we believe in it as a gift of God to the Church. Making that act of faith, as in any act of faith, are we ready to commit our life, our present and our future? The answer to the question does not come from statistics, history or sociology, even if we should be conversant with the social sciences. I will speak to that later on. Above all it is a question which challenges each one of us as believers in the God of Jesus Christ who has manifested himself in history.

If we believe in the future of the Congregation, a General Chapter is a privileged opportunity to exercise that belief. Believing in the future, we commit ourselves in freedom to make the possibilities inherent in our charism a reality. That means understanding the conditions in which we are living and discerning with the greatest honesty what is the concrete ways the Congregation can be in service to churches and peoples. It means discerning the will of God for the future of the Congregation. As I already said in another circular letter: *"There are some elements which can not be lacking in discernment at the community level or when it is necessary for the individual and the superior to do so in extraordinary circumstances. Some of these would be: the ability to contemplate life from God's heart in keeping with our congregation's spirituality; freedom with respect to the many things that appeal to our heart, whose real source of unity with others must be God's will; dialogue as profound openness of one to the other, an openness that seeks not so much the defense of one's individual or group interests but rather the search together to be at the service of God's reign and his justice in faithfulness to our vocation."*¹²

Renewal

The post-conciliar renewal has been going on for many years. During this period we have taken many steps. As Hans Kolvenbach, the Superior General of the Jesuits, said recently during a meeting of the USG (Union of Superiors Generals), just comparing the fifties and the nineties of this century one could easily discover change in styles, forms, references and customs. If they had been proposed years ago

¹² Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Eighth Circular Letter*, Rome, 1997.

they would have seemed practically impossible. It is clear that some of those changes were very positive and others not so. It is impossible to separate one from the other. The cost of real progress in understanding and living religious life as a result of Vatican Council II has been the errors committed in the process. During the same meeting Aquilino Bocos, Claretian Superior General and former professor of the theology of religious life, remarked that today more than ever what religious life is all about and what must be its choices and commitments is clear at the theoretical level.

In his conference during the week-long meeting of the USG in Arricia, José María Arnaiz s.m. listed elements which have contributed to the renewal of consecrated life in the past thirty years: the personal rediscovery of the Bible, presence among and service of the poor, the return to the sources of the institute, the movement toward insertion and inculturation, missions *ad gentes*, new ministries, and community that is fraternal and missionary.¹³

If we reread our Constitutions, Rule of Life, Chapter Decisions, Patrick Bradley's circular letters and so many other documents that have animated and energized our renewal during these years we will easily recognize those features of which Arnaiz spoke.

If that is true, what is there left for us to do in the future? What could be the objective of the upcoming General Chapter in the context of the celebration of the *Jubilee of the Year 2000* and the celebration of 200 years since our Congregation's foundation? Perhaps putting it simply but clearly, we could say that it's time to put into practice what have spoken of so beautifully during these years.

For a creative fidelity, to refound

An expression which has appeared again and again in religious life in recent years is "refounding."¹⁴ What does this mean? It certainly does not mean coming up with a substitute for the charism of the founders, to which *Perfectae Caritatis*¹⁵ No. 2 called us to return. Nor does it mean

¹³ José María Arnaiz sm, "From Sunset to Dawn: Reflections on Refounding", *Fifty-fourth Conventus Semestralis USG*, Rome, 1998.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Prezzi scj, "Towards a Creative Fidelity (Final Synthesis)", *Fifty-fourth Conventus Semestralis USG*, Rome, 1998.

¹⁵ Vatican Council II, *The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Northport, 1975.

modifying the Constitutions, which the majority of institutes renewed just a short while ago after Vatican Council II. It does not refer to a managerial style of government that would result in new forms of representation and direction. Nor is it to return literally to the traditions and ways of the past. Nor does it seem to be a creative break of the sort that orders and religious institutes underwent around the tenth century and in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The best way of expressing it would perhaps be that of *creative fidelity*, a term given new importance by its use in the Pope John Paul II's Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of. In No. 37 he says, "*Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world.*"¹⁶

The Signs of the Times

Returning to what I was saying above of how we must be conscious of the ways we are conditioned so as to be able to commit our freedom in the power of the Spirit of the risen one, we have to look once more at the signs of the times. We can consider the signs of the times outside and within the Congregation.

In the World

It is evident that the global society that we have at the end of the century is not exactly the same as the one to which we wanted to respond at the beginning of the post-conciliar renewal. The *globalization* that has taken place over these years can not conceal the pronounced differences between peoples and cultures that in so many cases are being aggravated the unification imposed by the market. The ever increasing awareness of the need to inculturate the Gospel message¹⁷ and the religious life¹⁸ is but one more manifestation of the tension between unity and diversity that can not be resolved either by uniformity or chaos.

Migration, which in former times took place more slowly, in our time is accelerating and is one of the most significant results of that tension. The marginalization of whole sectors of the world's popula-

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata*, Rome, 1996

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome, 1975.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *op. cit.* No. 80.

tion, among whom are women, the aged and children, is a wound that is hemorrhaging. Growing poverty, a result of unjust distribution of wealth and the few monopolizing what is rightfully everyone's, was one of the features of society which the post-conciliar Church challenged.¹⁹ That situation not only has not improved but has become more dramatic in the context of the post-industrial technological revolution.²⁰ That revolution makes clear the resources humanity has to understand and dominate nature. The positive effects for the development of humanity are clear, but clear also are the abuses committed against nature.²¹ The very concept of development is in question. Also in question is the kind of human reasoning that the technological revolution has encouraged. It seems an instrumental reason that tends to ignore the ends of human behavior and the transcendence of existence.

In such an atmosphere the problem of developing a world ethic is an ongoing challenge,²² one in which churches and religions are deeply involved. In such a context the religious problem becomes acute in two aspects: the cry of the impoverished and the indifference of those who have everything.²³ Injustice and unbelief are two poles of the same problem: the absence of God from the global scene. There is even a sense of the absence of God in the very way of speaking of religion: *religion without God* that seems to be part of some of the new religious movements.²⁴

In the Church

Today more than ever there is awareness in the Church of worldwide expansion.²⁵ In view of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, the Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops called by Pope John Paul

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, Rome, 1968.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Rome, 1991.

²¹ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America*, Rome, 1999.

²² Hans Küng, *Proyecto de una ética mundial*, Madrid, 1991.

²³ Juan Martín Velasco, *Increencia y Evangelización*, Santander, 1988; by the same author *El malestar religioso de nuestra cultura*, Madrid, 1993.

²⁴ Johann B. Metz, *El clamor de la tierra. El problema dramático de la teodicea*, Estella, 1996.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, Rome, 1994.

II²⁶ for each of the five continents can not but confirm this vision forcefully incarnated in the personality of the Pope himself.

This awareness of universality along with the need to inculturate the Gospel message, mentioned above,²⁷ creates strong tensions between unity and plurality. There is often a tendency to resolve such tensions in favor of uniformity.

The vigor of the pontificate of John Paul II as well as the evolution of the particular churches, especially the young churches, has created an image of a universal church that is strong and dynamic. It is an image of a church facing the next millennium with optimism and enthusiasm. However the internal problems related to unity and difference, especially challenges posed by mission in today's world that I characterized as very problematic, continue to be present. These call into question that optimism, which is at times a bit exaggerated. It is an optimism that is not always identified with the theological virtue of hope, something else very present in the person of the Pope.

Ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue are two unavoidable tasks for this global church as it approaches the year 2000. But this clearly includes risks: avoiding relativism in the presentation of Jesus Christ and at the same time an aggressive proclamation of what his salvific message means.²⁸ The challenge will be to proclaim Jesus Christ in a way that is dialogic and open with sensitivity and respect, listening with an open mind to other religious experiences and sharing our own, trying to discover the saving way of God in the lives of all our fellow men and women.

In the Congregation

a) Vice-congregation

Perhaps one of the most expressive and meaningful signs of the times within the Congregation, which we must take time to consider, is the existence of a *vice-congregation*.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America*, Rome, 1999.

²⁷ Cfr footnote No. 9

²⁸ Orlando Quevedo, Archbishop of Nueva Segovia (Philippines) "¿Qué quería Asia antes del Sínodo? Contribuciones de las Iglesias locales a partir de los Lineamenta", *Vida Religiosa*, Vol. 86, No. 1, Madrid, January, 1999.

Where did such a term come from? During the Enlarged General Council in Poitiers a presentation was made of statistics and graphics concerning the members of the Congregation and their distribution over the course of history down to the present.²⁹ A study of the demographic trends of the Congregation for the period 1995 to 2010³⁰ was also presented. It was in this study of Paul Willot that the term *vice-congregation* first appeared. Explaining the population pyramid of the Congregation resulting from demographic projections for the year 2010 the author told us, "*the pyramid allows the symptoms of a "vice-congregation" to appear, that is to say two subgroups distinct in age, vocational motivation and styles of life which will have to be adequately managed if you do not want to end up in tension, suffering and an explosion.*"

In short, it is has to do with to vocation trends in the whole Congregation. For many years ours was a Congregation whose base was in vocations coming from Europe and North America. These vocations allowed us to expand to five continents. But it is clear that when that expansion reached its peak, the vocation crisis in those places which until then had been our principal source put a stop to the Congregation's growth. Then the opposite happened. Now vocations to the Congregation come especially from Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. With the result that the parts with larger population are going to be made up mostly of older brothers, who are in large part Europeans, while the younger brothers will be mostly non-Europeans. Whereas the middle age group will be reduced quite a bit.

However it is not just a question of reversing numbers or biological unbalance between age groups. The problem we are faced with is also structural. Until now the most solid structures have been in Europe, the United States and a few places in Latin America. With the turnaround in the sources of vocations we are faced with the fact that the strongest structures are where the Congregation's population is decreasing while the weakest structures are where the population is growing. We could even say that in some cases structures are practically nonexistent.

²⁹ Piet Hoedemaekers ss.cc., SS.CC. in *Statistics and Graphics*, Rome, 1998.

³⁰ Paul Willot, *Tendances démographiques. Congrégation des Sacrés Coeurs 1995-2010*, Rome, 1998.

b) New Mission Outreach

The reversal of the Congregation's population should not hide another very important problem: facing the Congregation's presence in the old churches. It is clear that the Congregation as well as the Church is faced with some very difficult challenges in Europe and the United States. We can not be satisfied just by saying there are no vocations and simply orient the Congregation's efforts to other areas. We must continue to think about the Congregation's mission in the places where we are present. It seems to me that explicit attention to western culture, which because of its dominance has all kinds of consequences for the rest of the world, should call forth concrete responses from us as a Congregation. This is nothing new. Many of our Congregation's documents provide us with valuable statements and studies.³¹ Some good things have also been achieved but it is not enough. In many cases the things we have been able to achieve have not been important nor have they had the structural consequences they should have had for the rest of our words and communities. In other words they are not the priorities that condition everything else.

We also have to remember that in Europe and North America we have young brothers and some not so young, who are open to the change and newness called for by this understanding of the Congregation's mission. The fact that we have not drawn out the structural consequences implied by these changes means that we overload the few young of the older Provinces and we deplete their energies in apostolic undertakings that are not adequate to the present challenges.³² Or we ask them to take on many tasks and they have to keep going from one thing to another. Clearly this situation requires that we establish priorities and that governments be consistent with them.

³¹ The five circular letters of Patrick Bradley ss.cc. are a clear example that we have very good doctrine that continues to be valued today and which we must carry out in practice. There has just been published in Spanish the collective work *Un Carisma en la Iglesia. La Congregación de los Sagrados Corazones de Jesús y de María*. (A Charism in the Church. The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary). In the coming months it will be published in French and English. I believe also that this work is a clear sign of the vigor and strength of our Congregation's vision. Again it is a matter of insisting on action.

³² Cf. above "Signs of the times in the World".

Volunteers

The General Chapter must help us to *see, judge and act*, as the classical methodology of Catholic Action would say. I would say especially the last, to act. As I have been repeating throughout this letter, there is a good vision in the Congregation. We must be clearer in judging and especially go from there to action. When I speak of discernment, I am referring to that judgment that allows us to know God's will for the future of the Congregation and then to act.

However I do not want to be naive. Action is not easy. It is much easier to reach a theoretical consensus than to commit ourselves to act in freedom. We also have to accept the fact that we can not ask the same of everyone for many different reasons. That would seem to be accepted across the board. However consequences can be different, depending on the person.

Since we can not easily ask the same thing of everyone we easily settle for the average. An example: since the characteristics of *the missionary community* as described by the last General Chapter³³ do not seem viable for all the brothers, in the end we consider every community as *a missionary community* and the truth is they are not. Why can't we accept plainly and simply that we can not all move at the same rhythm? Why not accept the fact that we have some projects that are more clearly along the lines of refounding that are manned by volunteers?

Evidently if we accept this orientation we must do so with all the consequences. We can not ask one thing and at the same time the opposite. We can not ask that there be people who give themselves to Congregation projects, where they live out the obvious and clear consequences of our Congregation's vocation and mission in response to the challenges of the world and of the Church, and at the same time expect them to be concerned for the maintenance or conservation of works and structures that are not priority. We will have to accept that there are brothers and communities who dedicate themselves to the latter and in that way make it possible for the others to carry out those other projects.

This is how we see the future in the General Government. We believe that the General Chapter must inspire us to action. We do not

³³ *Thirty-fifth General Chapter, "Missionary Communities", Rome, 1994.*

understand action as activism or focusing our attention entirely on apostolic activities however new they might be. No, when we speak of action we are speaking of implementing the vision of the Congregation that we have expressed in so many worthwhile decisions. In first place this means being faithful as religious of the Sacred Hearts. It means living prayer, community and missionary service in depth. And we do this as a response to the needs revealed in the signs of the times. We see a General Chapter of this type not as being a call to consensus but to discernment with all its consequences.

3. The Service of Authority–Leadership

The service of authority in religious life, as in other institutions of a communal character, is a basic element when speaking of any kind of evolution or change. Different stages of the history of religious life can be characterized to a great extent by describing the features of authority in each of those periods, as Fintan Sheeran ss.cc. did very eloquently during the Enlarged General Council in Poitiers.³⁴ The General Chapter is a very important exercise of that service of authority and the Enlarged General Council indicated that authority was one of the topics had to take up, must face, indicating strategies and means.

That led the General Government to include a special section on leadership in our reflections on the General Chapter. We consciously go from one term to the other, not because they are synonymous, but rather because our reflection is pointing us in the direction of fostering leadership in the service of authority.

Authority or Leadership

In the first place, it is necessary to clarify the terminology a bit. After the Enlarged the Province of Ireland–England circulated an article by George Wilson SJ.³⁵ I would recommend highly reading it, at least for those who can do so in English. It is very enlightening in this area.

³⁴ Fintan Sheeran ss.cc., "Restructuring: an organizational perspective", *Minutes EGC*, Poitiers, 1998.

³⁵ George Wilson, SJ, *Leadership or Incumbency*, *Human Development*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, Cambridge, Mass., 1998.

Not all those invested with authority, be they individuals or structures, are leaders. Nor are all leaders invested with authority. But if the service of authority wants to be effective it must be attentive to the type of authority that it must embody or enable so that the ends and objectives of its authority are fulfilled. The mere fact of assuming the role of Local, Regional, Provincial or General Superior does not mean that everything is over and done with. If it were ever so, today more than ever we know that the exercise of authority calls for a good dose of analysis and reflection, along with the ability to make decisions, assure follow up and evaluate.

With respect to the objectives and purposes of the service of authority, we have sound doctrine in our Constitutions.³⁶ I am not going to repeat what I wrote in this respect in my previous circular letter.³⁷ So I refer you to that document. However, it would be worthwhile to dwell a bit on some of the points Fintan Sheeran's made during the Enlarged General Council. That will allow us to establish clearer objectives and goals in this area at this moment in the history of the Congregation and religious life. As a consequence we will clarify the type of leadership that the exercise of authority involves.

Interdependence

We can consider the evolution of religious life in the last forty year in terms of three phases: the pre-conciliar phase characterized in short by dependence, the post-conciliar by independence and a third phase, which perhaps is *already but not yet*, in which we move toward interdependence. I am not going take time to explain each of the concepts as Fintan did. His talk is available to all. Of course, as with any schema this can be understood simplistically and result in an incomplete and inaccurate view of things. But it can be useful in providing a way forward.

³⁶ Cf. Chapter V: "The Service of Authority", especially articles 90-92, 94-95. It would also be good to review what is said of obedience in articles 31-37. It is also important to consider the service of authority in the light of Chapter III: "Our Communion in Mission". It is difficult to understand the kind of leadership that our Congregation needs without reflecting deeply on all these aspects of our Constitutions which in this area as in others are truly inspiring.

³⁷ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Eighth Circular Letter*, Rome, 1997.

I want to underline something that Fintan said clearly. Going from the first phase to the second is very easy. You just sort of slide into it. However, going from the second to the third is very difficult. It entails growth in freedom by communal commitment to choices that the community has discerned and that have been implemented by interdependent individuals and communities at the local, regional, provincial or general levels. When I spoke to you of the Project of Apostolic Religious Life in the Eighth Circular Letter³⁸ I was speaking of the commitment of personal freedom: the active involvement of the individual and also commitment to the options discerned as a community.

As I understand it, the majority of the Congregation, if not the whole, is in the second phase or trying to pass from the second to the third. And I have no problem including myself there. It is very important to be aware of this. This is one area where we have to spend time in reflection and analysis before going on to action. The General Government's observations, which I spoke to you about in the first part of this letter, are but symptoms of this situation. They tell us not only that a good part of the brothers are stuck in the second phase but they also speak to us of the type of leadership corresponding to that. There is individualism on the part of the brothers and leaders respect and protect that individualism.

To Lead Interdependence

You can easily see that the role of the leader in this change from the second to the third phase is very important. To really make the transition from one phase to the other, as we already said, is not something spontaneous or simple. In this perspective the leader is called to be an agent of movement and change. He has to support and encourage the community in its movement toward the future, a journey that has already begun. It also may involve provoking the first steps in those who have not been able to move at all.

With this orientation, the leader's principal focus of attention will have to be the community as such and not so much individuals. It will be important to be able to appreciate the real situation of the community as a whole. Then it will be important to clearly maintain the

³⁸ Cf. Ibid.

direction that the community has to take. Analysis, discernment and firmness are necessary. This clearly demands courage and patience, especially with one's self. It means accepting conflicts and living with them. It means respecting the conscience and the rights of each individual, and at the same time respecting the conscience and the rights of the community. As our late brother Flannan Markham ss.cc. said, "*without a doubt the way of acting is important, but it is more important that you act.*"³⁹

Unity and Plurality

Going from independence to interdependence, the relationship between the parts of the Congregation, the universal and the particular, the provincial or regional and the general will be very important. Leaders must be conscious of this. I always remember an expression of Jan Scheepens, eighth Superior General of our Congregation. When speaking to a Provincial he told him, "*Do not forget that you are Provincial of such and such a Province in the Congregation.*" This seems to be a wise perception of the role of the leader and interdependence at the level of the whole Congregation.

On some occasions things are simplified, either for lack of analysis or because of particular interests, and people speak of *centralism versus respect for plurality*. I am very conscious of the values that come into play when we speak of unity and plurality within the Church and within the Congregation. We can not settle the question by suppressing one of the opposite poles. It would be as great a mistake to suppress plurality in favor of unity as unity in the interest of plurality. However, it is not enough to identify Provinces or Regions, which are really only parts of the Congregation, with the particular Churches that these parts of the Congregation serve by inculturating the charism common to the whole Congregation. Experiencing the tension between the particular and the universal is an art that we must learn and cultivate. The Congregation's leadership has an indispensable role to play in that.

As I said, the General Chapter is an exercise of the service of authority. The General Chapter will also have to be attentive to what type of leadership it wants to exercise in the Congregation and what

³⁹ Flannan Markham ss.cc., "El servicio de la autoridad" in *Un Carisma en al Iglesia*, Rome, 1999. He makes some very inspiring points on the present topic.

consequences this leadership can and must have at the other levels of authority. In a certain sense, the General Chapter is a school for the Congregation's leaders. Therefore, as the General Government we clearly propose that the next General Chapter be an exercise of authority in accord with the orientations concerning leadership that I have been speaking about.

4. Conclusion

In the introduction to this letter I mentioned the Good Father. That was not just a matter of protocol. I have to say that I was trying to do justice to the inspiration that he has been for me and for all of us as we look toward the Congregation's future. I have not wanted to place too great an emphasis on something that I mentioned in passing. I am referring to the fact that we will celebrate the General Chapter in the year 2000.

The Church is celebrating the Great Jubilee and we are celebrating 200 years of our foundation. If I have not emphasized that it was so as not to introduce too many topics. However I want to make one important thing clear. The celebration of our anniversary, as the celebration of the great anniversary of Jesus Christ, is a source of inspiration that we can not pass up. On the contrary, it is an outstanding opportunity to realize whatever our hopes be. To situate the General Chapter in the year 2000 can also be an exercise of that "dangerous memory" to which I alluded in the introduction to the letter.

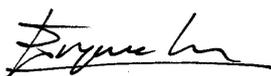
As brothers and sisters of the Congregation we share the same charism expressed in one vocation and mission. Thus we want to celebrate the anniversary of our foundation together. Several months ago in a joint letter⁴⁰ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc., Superior General of the sisters and I announced the celebration of the bicentennial during the year 2000. We said, "*The time has arrived for the Congregation to draw out from its memory 'the new and the old' that allows it go forward toward our General Chapters of the year 2000 with the confidence that 'the new is already emerging'.*" (Isaiah 43:19)

⁴⁰ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Joint Letter of the First Sunday of Advent*, Rome, 1998.

In the Enlarged General Council in Poitiers⁴¹ it was clear that everyone wanted to take good advantage of the fact that we are having the General Chapters of the brothers and sisters at the same time in the same house. This was something that we consciously planned in fidelity to the unity of the Congregation. We must assure that the serious and responsible collaboration of the two Chapters might be a manifestation of and at the same time a new impulse toward that unity.

"The divine goodness has had to do wonders to sustain us in the midst of torments. The Lord has not failed to pour forth upon us miracles of his providence; he has led us by the hand. Each day we have received proof of his powerful protection." These were the words of the Good Father in the Circular of April 14, 1817 in which he announced the approbation of the Rule.⁴² These words give witness that he had seen his faith in divine Providence confirmed in the life of the nascent community. Firm in that same faith we can always trust that the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ continues to pour forth on us his Spirit, who inspires and makes possible the commitment of our freedom. May Mary who opened herself completely to the will of God accompany us!

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

⁴¹ *Enlarged General Council, Minutes, Poitiers, 1998.*

⁴² Marie-Joseph Coudrin ss.cc., "Circulaire annonçant l'approbation des Règles", 14 avril 1817, *Annales IV*, 1960.



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
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Rome, January 25, 2001

X Circular Letter to the Congregation

After the General Chapter of 2000

Dear brothers,

First of all, cordial greetings from this city of Rome, only a few short days into the new year, into the century and the millennium.

Ordinary time

Too many things have happened in rapid succession for us to get a full idea of what the present moment holds. Despite the exceeding abundance of such historic landmarks, I am inclined to consider in their stead, "ordinary time" which begins now.

Only a few days ago I was amidst the last of the throngs of pilgrims who, throughout the Holy Year, have entered the embrace of Bernini's famous colonnade. I was present in Saint Peter's Square for the ceremony, presided over by the Pope, of closing the Holy Door.

In the same way, a few weeks ago, I was in Poitiers, together with brothers and sisters from all five continents celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the vows taken in that same place by our founders, the Good Father and the Good Mother. There, we brought to a close, *familystyle*, at the same time as many brothers and sisters did so in other parts of the world, our Bicentennial year.

Thus, in a short space of time, I witnessed the conclusion of two happenings that have found concrete expression in many words, actions and events in the last few years.

To repeat, precisely when the landmarks which measure time are so out of proportion with an individual's experience of time, I come to

"ordinary time." Time that is ordinary comes after so many "extraordinary" happenings!

Allow me to confide something to you. I am pleased that, with everything behind us, we will now be able to enjoy a certain daily routine. It may be my own natural disposition that is not very imaginative and creative, or a certain weariness of big events. It may simply be the valid desire to transpose to ordinary everyday life, all of the good intentions that we have had as members of the Church and of the Congregation. In these years of preparation and celebration of the Jubilee and the Bicentenary, The famous slogan of the recent General Chapters of brothers and sisters allows me to summarize, and find a concrete expression, for all such desires: "*Rise, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk.*" (John 5, 8) In fact what we have to do now is to walk the road in front of the open door, a road which stretches away to the far horizon, as the design of the Chapter slogan showed us.

Living radically our consecration

The road we wish to travel together is the following of Jesus. With our eyes focused on His Heart, living out an intensely shared fraternity in evangelical poverty, we take our place among the men and women of our times, offering a simple service to the poor. Enthused by the Church, people of Christ, and close to Mary, companion on our road, we celebrate the Eucharist and reparative adoration, in a total and unconditional placing ourselves in the hands of God and His providence.¹

As John Paul II said in his homily on the closing of the Jubilee year: "*While today, with the Holy Door, one symbol of Christ closes, Christ's heart remains more open than ever before.*"² Thus we continue to gaze at Him so that the strength of His Spirit will sustain us in our moving ahead each day, as we begin the year, the century and the millennium.

To allude to the Heart of Christ is to allude to our innermost person, to the roots of our values and options as religious of the Sacred Hearts.³ This perception was brought home to us by the General

¹ Cf. "Introduction to the Chapter decisions", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

² Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, Monday-Tuesday 8th-9th January, 2001.

³ Cf. "Introduction to the Chapter decisions", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

Chapter, when it invites us to live our religious consecration radically. Once more what is at stake – at this time of putting into practice all the good intentions formed on the occasion of the church and congregational events experienced in these years – is the quality of our apostolic religious life. That is the faithful and creative answer to the vocation to which Jesus Christ; the Lord called us and continues to call us, living radically the truth of our consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.⁴

When it comes to verifying this radical living of our consecration, one all-important criterion that we should bear in mind always is something that the General Chapter also recalled for us: our commitment to the poor and excluded. The poor and excluded are not merely the preferential recipients of our pastoral service, but an essential criterion of our mission. The context of globalization with its lights and shadows, above all, the exclusion that many men and women are experiencing as its result, is a circumstance destined to sorely try our fundamental option for building a more just world based on solidarity with the poor, a world more in line with the dream that includes every human being. That is the dream God has for humankind.⁵

The Holy Father reminded us recently in his apostolic letter concluding the Jubilee: *"Certainly it should never be forgotten, that no one can be excluded from our love, insofar as, by His 'incarnation, the Son of God was united in some way with each man and woman' (Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 22). Basing ourselves on the unquestionable words of the Gospel, we find in the person of the poor a special presence of His, that lays on the Church the duty of a preferential option for them"* and further on: *"In fact in our times there are many needs appealing to the Christian sensibility. Our world begins this new millennium weighed down with contradictions. There is an economic, cultural and technological growth that offers a few fortunate persons great possibilities, while leaving millions and millions of people not only cut off from progress, but living in conditions far below the minimum required by human dignity."*⁶

⁴ Cf. "Living our consecration radically", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

⁵ "Message to the brothers on our commitment for the poor", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000; John Fuellenback svd, "Some reflections on the spirituality of a religious life today", No. 77 of *Evangelisation*, Rome, 1999.

⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Rome, 2001; Nos. 49 et seqq.

Here we find a plea to live our life radically and, at the same time, a plea to offer in the concrete answers we give, proof of such radical living. In fact we have no intention of adopting this life style in an isolated or individualist way, but in community at the various local, provincial and interprovincial levels, in interdependence and with a strong sense of common vocation and mission. We are looking not only to what is inside the brothers' branch, but in communion and collaboration with the sisters and laity of our Congregation.⁷

Plan of Apostolic Religious Life

In order for all of this, not to remain at the level of good but unaccomplished desires, the General Chapter has confirmed for us the validity of the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life. Fruit of community discernment, the PARL should take the form of an effective means towards a renewal in continuous conversion. So, we are not dealing with a role or with one more community activity. All together, as members of an apostolic religious community, inserted in a given space and time, in a concrete culture with its lights and shadows, with its questions and its attempts at answers, we should plan our lives in the constant search for creative fidelity to our vocation and mission.⁸

Along these lines, I would like to remind you of something I said at the General Chapter, when we were dealing with this subject. It would mean emptying this attempt at community discernment of any deep meaning, if we were to reduce PARL to the drawing up of regulations or merely a more or less complete organization of our community and apostolic activities. Instead, what we have to do is to discern in the concrete circumstances of each community and each brother, what God's will is that we should obey, since this alone merits a religious attitude, like that of Jesus.⁹

The answers cannot be the same in the different parts of the world in which our Congregation is present. Thus the unity of the Congregation does not pass for uniformity, but for the wealth constituted by diversity. What the Chapter and the Congregation are presenting to us

⁷ Cf. "Structures at the Service of Communion", the "Secular Branch", 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

⁸ Cf. 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

⁹ Cf. art. 33, *Constitutions*.

in all of this is not an imposition from above or from below. It is rather an invitation to take the lead, out of an ongoing dialogue between us and the peoples and churches in which we are inserted, for the direction of our own lives as religious.

We must pay the utmost attention to everything and everyone if we are to be capable of discerning therein the "voice of God", since life is "the burning bush at the side of the path where God makes himself heard."¹⁰ And, lastly, we must answer such a voice by drawing on the charismatic wealth entrusted to us, as a gift to the Church and the world. That gift, proceeding from the Spirit, through our founders, the Good Father and the Good Mother, becomes a possibility and, accordingly, a responsibility for all of us, who are its depositaries.

Priority Projects of the Congregation

Undoubtedly this effort to discern God's will for the Congregation in each of the places in which we are present is a fundamental task for each community and each brother. However, at the present time in the history of our Congregation, we consider as a priority the efforts in favor of Africa and Asia. This is a priority aimed at transmitting the charism of the Congregation to those peoples and cultures. In this way, we continue the missionary service that we have developed thus far in those particular churches. The General Chapter reiterated that those projects are still priorities and that accordingly the brothers and communities are invited to do their utmost to collaborate with them.¹¹

Basically then, every effort must be made to refound the charism in certain cultures that are very different from those so far framing our charismatic expression. As I myself said at the beginning of the Chapter: *religious life, and within it we as a Congregation, are experiencing a shift in the fecundity of the charism. From the periphery of our tradition, from fragile situations, from non-hegemonic cultures new candidates are arriving and with them new signs of the fecundity of the charism.... Undoubtedly this phenomenon is part of another larger one. It is true that the Catholic Church is still profoundly European and Western, as evinced in our ways of thinking, in*

¹⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Madrid, 1964. Undoubtedly it is to Ortega y Gasset, a Spanish philosopher (1883-1955), that to a large extent I owe my understanding of "life as a project".

¹¹ "Priority Projects of the Congregation (Missionary Policy)", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

*our forms of government, in our spirituality. Nevertheless this cultural monocentrism deriving from our history has begun to change since Vatican Council II; and now that is where we are still. Certain groups would wish to see faster rates of change, while others would prefer to slow it down out of reservations and fears. Religious life, and with it, we recognise that the churches of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, are bringing new life to the Church and to ourselves. This situation provides grounds for hope, opening up as it does new prospects for the future.*¹²

In relation to these projects, the General Chapter has taken the decision of asking the General Government for the erection to a Province of Africa¹³, for ASA (Assembly of Superiors in Asia) to assume more responsibility in the Philippines¹⁴ and that the General Government should establish a new Interprovincial Conference consisting precisely of the communities that are directly affected by such projects (Interprovincial Conference of Africa, Asia and French Polynesia)¹⁵.

The first decision, that is, that the General Government should erect the Province of Africa, concerns a process already under way for some years now, the "Africa Project." Basically, it is a question of completing rather than initiating a process. The second decision, on ASA, has been taking shape in the last few years and is advancing. On that score, we sustain and develop something already started. Finally, the decision on the Conference is something quite new and that logically will suppose the starting up of a new process, with all that may imply in terms of time, organization and relations.

In any case, as may be seen, these are decisions aimed at channeling and giving adequate structures to that "new life" that is bursting forth

¹² Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Introduction to the 36th General Chapter*, Rome, 2000. Very interesting in this respect is the Instrumentum Laboris on which the Assembly of the USG worked in Ariccia in November, 2000. We are still awaiting the final version of the document we drew up on that occasion, which should prove very useful, in relation to this point in general and to all the Chapter documents.

¹³ No. 5 of "Priority Projects of the Congregation"; No. 2.1 of "Restructuring", 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

¹⁴ No. 6 of "Priority Projects of the Congregation"; No. 3.2 of "Restructuring", 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

¹⁵ No. 1.3 of "Restructuring", 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

in the Congregation and, like the "new wine" requires new wine-skins.¹⁶

Interdependence, restructuring and leadership

It seems quite clear that the 36th General Chapter devoted a large part of its discussions and decisions to internal aspects of the Congregation such as the relationship of its members and communities. So also the Chapter addressed the understanding and encouragement of a type of leadership essential for the service of authority at this juncture in the history of our Congregation.

Undoubtedly this is a necessary exercise in order to make a missionary service possible in the different parts of the world where we are present as a Congregation. Basically it supposes an exercise in responsibility for the charism received that we continue to believe represents a precious gift for the churches and peoples of our times.

We cannot and ought not to separate the different aspects affecting our apostolic religious life; however, it is clear that we cannot treat them all at the same time and in the same way.

In this sense, we should regard the Chapter documents dealing with Restructuring and the Service of Authority¹⁷ first and foremost in the context of a religious community wishing to be faithful to the vocation received and to place all of its resources and means at the service of the common mission. The General Chapter itself called on us to sum up the work of the Chapter with two accents that were present throughout all its sessions, namely: living radically our consecration and living interdependently. Both accents underline the fact that our looking at what is interior to the Congregation seeks to further explore our religious roots and to deepen the effective and co-responsible communion among members and communities so as to thus serve more faithfully the common mission.

The processes already under way with regard to restructuring and those about to be undertaken on the service of authority appeal, as presumably they will continue to do in the next few years, to our creative fidelity. We must live with hope and courage through processes

¹⁶ Mark 2:22.

¹⁷ Cf. 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

of change and transformation that undoubtedly will only be valid and even possible if they are processes sustained by the desire to be more useful to the Church, as the Good Father desired. That is to say, they are processes that are powered by the zeal of our common mission.

Communion and Collaboration with the sisters

The General Chapters of brothers and sisters worked together, coming to common decisions. These were validated by each of the two Chapters. Among these decisions stress should be laid on those referring to the Priority Projects of the Congregation¹⁸. Through the decisions, attempts were made, above all, to pinpoint a common awareness of what in these projects is the same and what is different between the two branches. Awareness of these differences, and jointly accepting them, marks an important step precisely in *the* direction of reinforcing a solid base for collaboration in such projects. Such collaboration is an inestimable service to the common vocation and mission in those places in which the Congregation is setting itself up, where it is desirous of making people aware of the value of unity between brothers and sisters.

However it is clearly a question of ensuring the collaboration, arising from the unity of our Congregation, not only in the Priority Projects but wherever this is possible. Accordingly the Chapters also called for "*structures of communion*," that is to say agreements, encounters and meetings between the corresponding levels of government of each of the branches of brothers and sisters in the Congregation.¹⁹

Such structures could help us insofar as the Pope urged us in his message to both Chapters: "*This unity has not always been easy and it is important for the governing bodies of both branches to work for an ever more mature testimony of evangelical union, solidarity and interdependence among all the members of the Congregation. Within each autonomous branch, your communities are called to flourish in the strengthening of a family spirit, that fraternity which leads to each one carrying the burdens of all*".²⁰

¹⁸ No. 7 of "Priority Projects of the Congregation (Missionary Policy)", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

¹⁹ "Structures of Communion", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

²⁰ "Message of the Pope to the brothers and sisters of the SS.CC.", 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

Lay branch

In recent years, the Spirit has been leading in various parts of the world a significant number of lay men and women "*to commit themselves to live out the mission and spirit of the Congregation.*"²¹ The recognition of this development by both General Chapters is important. Significant also is the invitation to our lay people to live experiences of the SS.CC. Mission in their lay capacity. This gives to them first of all, as well as to the rest of the Congregation, an idea of the extent and consequences of such a movement of the Spirit. Whether as brothers and sisters of the Congregation in general, or as those accompanying the lay branch in a more immediate way, we find here a call to make sure that such lay members of our Congregation receive first of all due acknowledgement and, at the same time, the conditions and resources required for their formation, growth and expansion.

Undoubtedly here we brothers and sisters have an important challenge which we must answer and, at the same time, a clear invitation to collaboration between us and the members of the lay branch.

General Government

As you can see, my main purpose in writing this letter was to support the efforts made by most of our communities in the months since the Thirty-sixth General Chapter to encourage the communication, awareness and assimilation of the decisions of the Chapter. Let me remind you, and in a special way the capitulants, of our responsibility in implementing the Chapter. In the name of the General Government, I urge you to continue to do so.

And since I have come to mention the General Government, at the end of this letter, I think it would be advisable to make a few comments on the road covered since we began our sessions in November last. Through the Communications Centre, we have done our best to update you on our activities, so that I need not dwell on that here. Nevertheless I think it might be well for you know that we wish to be faithful to what the Congregation required of us, which indeed we assumed freely, and, at the same time, we feel supported by you, our brothers. We are trying with great good will and firm hope to build a government team.

²¹ Cf. art. 9 of the *Constitutions*; "Lay branch", 36th *General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

To that end, we have carried out a certain exercise of inclusion which is merely intended as the beginning of the integration which we will continue to develop over the years of our mandate. We wished to make our own the constitutional orientations and the Chapter documents that provide a framework and a content to our service. Thus, although this letter is my responsibility, it contains to a considerable extent, echoes of our shared efforts to own these documents.

We are still, of course, only at the beginning. We want to draw up a plan of government, in line, of course, with what the Congregation requires of us. The General Chapter has asked us to set processes in motion and to carry out decisions. Although we may initiate the process, the collaboration of us all will be required. The Chapter insisted on "circularity," as an image of the interacting of the different levels of the Congregation that make interdependence possible. On that basis we can clearly see that the General Government has to interact a great deal with the other levels of government.

In addition to a plan of government, we must draw up a calendar to make such interaction possible. Following the orientation of the General Chapter itself, and wishing to take the first steps in that direction, in this very letter I ask you the Provincial Superiors, Vice-provincials and Regionals to send in to us as soon as possible your respective calendars, that is to say, those affecting the functioning of your communities. And in the same way I would ask the coordinators of interprovincial bodies to do the same. Already a certain number have arrived at the general house, and hopefully soon all of them will have been received.

Conclusion

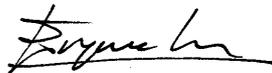
For the moment that's all. Referring back to the beginning of this letter, I would repeat that the fundamental theme is: putting into practice what, under the inspiration of the Jubilee and the celebrations in connection with the Bicentenary, we expressed in our Chapter decisions.

I am aware that each of us is involved in so many tasks and apostolic commitments, with calls made on us on all sides, at times with our own personal and community problems, with so much information constantly bombarding us through the media, which in our age are

many and all-powerful. Thus a circular letter from the Superior General may be relegated to second place. I have no overweening desire to hold center stage. However, I would request not only your attention to my letter, but above all your attention to the fact that all of us are called, as members of the Congregation who take inspiration from our one common SSCC vocation, and establish the means that we should place at the service of this common mission, to devote ourselves to our peoples and our churches. Basically all of this was said in our 36th General Chapter, so that this letter is merely intended as a further commentary on it.

May the Spirit of Jesus be with you always and may Our Mother Mary be ever at our side.

Fraternally in the SS.CC.,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.

Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
Via Rivarone, 85
00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, May 5, 2001

XI Circular Letter to the Congregation

The New Province of Africa

Dear brothers,

Cordial greetings from Rome, where we have just ended the meeting on the new Province of Africa, which took place in the General House from the 1st to the 3rd of this month.

The meeting was attended by the Provincial Superior of Holland, Jan Wouters, accompanied by a Provincial Councillor, Miguel Verweij; the Provincial Superior of Spain, Vicente Arnés, the members of the Regional Government of Mozambique: Eamon Aylward, Regional Superior, Amado Pérez, Regional Vicar and Jef Martens, Regional Councillor, and the members of the Regional Government of Kinshasa: Javier Álvarez-Ossorio, Regional Superior, Raúl Valverde, Regional Vicar and Antonio Riaño, Regional Councillor; while all the members of the General Government were also present.

The meeting was held after a two-week visit by the General Councillors to both Regions of Africa: Sérgio Stein and Willie Donegan to Mozambique, and Alphonse Fraboulet and Javier Cerda to Kinshasa. This visit had been programmed precisely in order to gain a first-hand knowledge of the presence of our Congregation in Africa by the members of the General Government, elected in the last Chapter. Such knowledge was viewed as an indispensable condition for developing the responsibility that the General Chapter required of the General Government in relation to the Priority Projects of the Congregation and, at the same time, so as to be in a position to answer with sufficient competence the request that this same Chapter had made to it of establishing the Province of Africa.

Undoubtedly this Chapter's request was not something that started from nothing, rather it was the fruit of a process that had its remote

antecedents in the impetus to implant the Congregation in Africa that was started in the 1980's and continued with a project of collaboration and unity of the two African Regions, Mozambique and Kinshasa. The goal was that the Congregation should become African. All of this was implied by the "Africa Project", in the time elapsing between the Chapter of 1994 and the Chapter of 2000.

From the structural point of view this project counted on the Instance for Decisions on Africa consisting of the Provincial Governments of Holland and Spain, mother Provinces of the African Regions, and the Regional Governments of Mozambique and Kinshasa, presided over by the General Coordinator of Missions, on behalf of the General Government. Little by little the inter-regional instance, which was a delegation of that other wider one, progressively acquired more the features of a joint government of both Regions, enabling us to glimpse the possibility of arriving at a more solid and stable structural unity: the constitution of a Province. The result of all this was the drawing up of a common PARL, of a Plan of Initial Formation in common and of exchange of personnel both in the area of training and in that of the apostolic ministry.

Accordingly the Chapter's request, has come to complete a process and starting off from there the General Government, assisted precisely by all the governments directly involved in the matter, present in Rome, on May 2, 2001, took the decision of setting up the Province of Africa. This decision will take effect with the holding of the Chapter of the new Province in September next, between 17th and 25th. Until then the two Regions continue to form part of their respective Provinces and the Regional Governments have received the mandate of jointly organising the Provincial Chapter to be presided over by the Superior General.

The vast majority of the brothers present in Africa expressed their wish to belong to the new Province. Certain will establish their presence in it on the basis of a contract which will specify the type of relationship with their Provinces of origin as well as with the new Province.

In these few short lines I wish to say on behalf of the General Government a word of deep gratitude to all of those who have made it possible for us to arrive at this decision that was no easy one on

account of its original nature, since without antecedents. I would like to thank especially the so-called mother Provinces of Holland and Spain, with their excellent aptitude for dealing with all the various questions of personnel, assets and finance. Undoubtedly the establishment of the Province would not have been possible without their generosity and good will to continue to sustain the new Province from the economic point of view, within the limits laid down in an agreement between the two Provinces of Spain and Holland, an agreement corroborated by the General Government and accepted with satisfaction by the Regions. This agreement contemplates the ordinary expenses of what were until then Regions, which submit to a budget and which exclude the expenditures contemplated in the budget of the Priority Project of the Congregation in Africa.

I would also like to express our gratitude to the Provinces of Andalusia, Brazil, Chile, Ireland-England, Mexico, Poland and the Region of Southern Belgium which have also collaborated in sustaining the African Regions to date. It goes without saying that the doors will continue wide open in order for this collaboration to be maintained and even increased in the terms judged most advisable, especially bearing in mind the new necessities that the starting up of the Province will require.

And lastly, a word addressed to all the brothers in Africa. This step of arriving at a Province is a fundamentally structural step that we should view at the service of something much more important and exacting that is the Mission of the Congregation in Africa. What should always be borne in mind as the fundamental objective of every type of decision within the community is the search to be more useful to the mission that has been entrusted to us, that is not something that we possess for our own personal or community use, but that is an enjoined task and a responsibility: to be useful to the gospel, to the churches and the peoples that we serve.

The challenges that lie ahead for the African continent cannot fail to touch us. The living conditions of so many human beings, who suffer in the midst of those peoples to whom we have been sent out, requires the best from us. Our option of building a world in solidarity with the poor and our spirituality based on the pierced Heart of Jesus, whose

love includes everybody from his exclusion on the Cross, are sufficient foundations to inspire our commitment to the peoples of Africa.

The challenges that as a community we face in order to achieve communion at the service of the mission will likewise require of us discernment and availability. To continue to integrate the geographical, cultural, pastoral and a host of other differences, making them a source of wealth in communion, will undoubtedly be far from easy, however it will be an inexcusable task if we wish to continue to give content and life to the structural decision of forming a new Province.

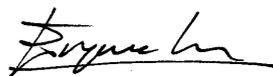
Specific attention to the Initial Formation of our candidates, the formation of formators, the ongoing revision of our stages of formation in order to see if they adequately meet the growth of the community and continue to give results in terms of true quality of apostolic religious life incultured in the peoples and cultures that we are serving in Africa, are as many other aspects of the task that our Province will be required to deal with.

The sisters have likewise just established a Province in Africa. The structural parallelism between the two situations may constitute an very fitting occasion to grow and back up the unity of the Congregation in the service of the mission.

For all of the foregoing reasons you know you can count on the solidarity and collaboration of all your brothers and sisters in the Congregation.

At this time of Easter, let us invoke the strength of the Risen Christ on all the brothers and sisters of the Congregation in Africa in order that His Spirit may sustain them always and involve all the members of the Congregation with them.

Your brother in the SS.CC.,



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



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Rome, November 15, 2002

XII Circular Letter to the Congregation

The PARL, the Means of Renewal to Be Creatively Faithful to Our Vocation and Mission

Let us speak once again about the Plan of Religious Apostolic Life

Dear brothers,

Very heartfelt greetings at the beginning of this circular letter directed to all of you, with the sincere desire that the lines that follow can be a help and stimulus to the efforts which we are making toward renewal and creative fidelity to the Charism of our Congregation.

First of all, I think it is appropriate to justify the title of this letter. In effect it is an invitation to return to the theme that has been present among us for several years already, and which the last General Chapter wished to emphasize. It could appear repetitive to return this question, having already dedicated a circular letter to this only a short time ago.¹ However, as was just mentioned, the fact that the General Chapter of 2002 has affirmed: "*the communities who, in recent years, drew up and put into practice the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life (PARL). As a fruit of communal discernment, PARL must now become for all an effective tool for renewal in a continual conversion. PARL is not just something on paper, it is life, planed out into a continual search to be faithful! ...*" and, "*wants to animate the brothers to continue their best effort in this task, and offers orientations about the diverse aspects of PARL, which has the Constitutions of the Congregation as its more immediate reference*"² could already be a sufficient reason to once again write about this subject. Nevertheless I believe that it is important to dwell a little more on this justification as

¹ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *8th Circular Letter*, Rome, 1997.

² "Introduction to the Chapter decisions", *36th General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

there are other reasons, which give meaning to this letter, and it is good that we make them explicit right from the beginning.

The General Chapter of 2000 dealt with many different subjects, certainly not only the PARL, this, on the other hand, was an element in Chapter Document No. 2, "*Living radically our Consecration*". These themes, which are developed in the rest of the Chapter documents: *Priority Projects of the Congregation, Restructuring, Leadership and the Service of Authority*, as well as those which were the fruit of the collaboration with the General Chapter of the sisters, *The Secular Branch and Structures at the service of Communion*, including the one which refers to the *Economy: Annual Contribution*; have a direct relationship with the PARL as the thematic content which should be kept in mind in carrying out new plans, as well as in the orientations for evaluating and modifying those already begun. In any case, given the very close relationship of the plans with document No. 2, we are going to focus a little more on this as the first part of this letter.

On the other hand, there is also a very direct connection between the PARL, which undoubtedly is a means of animation of our religious life, and the service of authority, which is precisely service for this animation. Therefore, we will also focus a little more on that relationship throughout this letter. Accordingly, we can say that the processes on **Leadership and the Service of Authority** which the General Chapter began, and in particular the first one of "defining and describing,"³ are already giving us very interesting elements for reflection and dialog on these questions,⁴ as well as on the orientation of the relationship between the PARL and service of authority. Thus this letter, then, becomes an echo of all of that, and contributes in a certain way to these same processes.

There are other reasons which must be taken into account as we begin speaking about the plans again. More than relating to the General Chapter, these reasons are related to the proper identity of the plan, that is to say with its basic features. In principal, it is difficult to speak in practical terms about an eternal plan. A plan is something dynamic and open and, in good measure subject to changes, evolution

³ Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

⁴ Cf. Cerda, Javier ss.cc., *Information "Guides for the exchange of experiences"*, Rome, September 2002.

and transformation. The conditions, personal as well as social, cultural, ecclesial and congregational..., in which a plan arises and from which a plan is determined, are variable. Therefore, the evolution and revision of these plans is a necessity. This letter seeks to contribute something to this fact, that is to say, to see the plans in an open and more flexible way, seeking, therefore, to facilitate not only to understand them and put them into practice, but also, to evaluate them and make changes where necessary.

Finally, it would be important here to try to establish a connection between this circular letter and the circular letter⁵ which I wrote five years ago on this same subject. Some of the points of that previous letter will be presented briefly, by way of reminder, with the understanding that it is not necessary to continue to focus on them. Other points, however, seem to be calling for a more practical approach from us. Here, as much as possible, I will try to refer to, and enter into dialog with, the congregational experience over these past years; and in the same way, with the material formerly alluded⁶ to in relation to the processes on *Leadership and the Service of Authority*. This can be especially useful, so that it be sufficiently recent and extensive.

At this point I am saying that the elements of the 8th Circular Letter, which connected the PARLs with *Restructuring*, seem to me to be equally valid and do not demand further treatment. Given that the process of restructuring is underway, and will be the object of evaluation at the next Enlarged General Council, I invite everyone to continue to reflect and keep in mind the paragraphs of that previous letter which dealt with that aspect.

In any case, at the end of this introduction, I would like to focus on something that I touched on briefly at the beginning, which sets a fundamental tone for this letter. That is, "*the encouraging and deepening of the meaning of the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life as an effective instrument of animation, renewal and change, and its connection with the 'personal plan' and the 'community plan'*", as the General Government has said in its Six Year Plan.⁷ Certainly in that Plan there was mention of the letter of the Superior General to the Major and Regional Superiors, but the

⁵ Cf. note 1.

⁶ Cf. note 4.

⁷ *Plan of the SS.CC. General Government, 2000–2006*, Rome, June, 2001.

truth is that, wishing to focus on the aspect of animation, it seemed more suitable that the letter be a circular to all the brothers.

1. To Live Radically our Consecration and PARL

*"What is at stake, at this historic moment, is the quality of our religious life, as a faithful and creative answer to the vocation to which Jesus Christ called us and continues to call us. This is but another way of speaking of what is true and deeply rooted in our consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. This commitment through fidelity should lead us to take new decisions on such important topics as our life of fraternity, personal formation, our spirituality and charism, religious animation, and service to the Church and the world."*⁸

In my way of understanding it, this paragraph of the Chapter document "Living radically our Consecration" echoes in a very expressive way that which the document seeks to capture. At the same time it sheds light on what the PARL can be. Being aware, as the Chapter itself indicates, that the quality of the religious life, the faithful and creative response to our vocation supposes a process of renewal and ongoing conversion, the Plan of Religious Life is situated within this process and seeks before anything else to respond to this need.

In this sense, the orientations which the Chapter has given to the PARL, have been of a two fold type: the first type is more along the line that the Plans be developed at the different levels, provincial, vice-provincial and regional, as an exercise of communion and participation involving all the brothers in the discernment which is at the root of the Plans. It also asked that, for each community, these plans become an instrument of animation, renewal and change, in order to respond in a creative and faithful way to the challenges, which come from society and the Church. At the same time, it asks that the communal and personal Plans provide the background for the Plans of the major and regional communities, all being inspired by the Constitutions and General Chapters, and all being evaluated and updated periodically.

The second category of orientations makes more reference to the content of the PARLs. Effectively, they are orientations for the life and the mission of the Congregation and, as such, are the inspiration for

⁸ Cf. Chapter Document No. 2, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

the discernment, which ought to be done at the different personal and communitarian levels, in order to put them into practice in their proper contexts. These orientations invite us to look for styles and forms of a life of poverty, fraternity, prayer and apostolic service; they ask our special attention to the celebration of the Eucharist and the practice of Adoration and their close connection with the reparatory mission of the Congregation; they call us to continue and deepen our commitment to the poor and marginalized, searching for the way each Province and community concretely expresses this in its Plan, keeping in mind its particular cultural and ecclesial contexts; and calling it to examine its life of fraternity and apostolic service in the exercise of a continual community discernment; and deepen, from Initial Formation on, the awareness and the fact of being an international community with its consequences in terms of belonging, identity, co-responsibility, solidarity and interdependence; they ask us to take concrete steps toward achieving a true communion of vocation and mission with the sisters and the laity of the secular branch.

Therefore, in various parts of this letter we are going to come back again to the questions, which have been presented here. In reality, with this brief summary of the Chapter document No. 2, we have, in good measure at least, the presentation of the distinct aspects, which will have to be kept in mind when we take up the PARL.

As has been said repeatedly inside as well as outside of the General Chapter, insisting on the Plan does not mean stressing the method, that as any other is relative and debatable starting from the ends to be reached, rather it is about seeking together to respond, here and now, to our Vocation and Mission as persons and communities. Therefore what comes into play when speaking of this, as we said at the beginning of this point, is precisely the quality of our religious apostolic life, putting into practice the radicality of our consecration, the service which are called to give, from the charism we have received, to the churches and the people where we are present.

Permit me to cite a point from a recent document which the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has published, with the thought provoking title of "Starting afresh from Christ", which shows us that this concern of ours

finds its bearing in a much wider context, that is the totality of Religious Life.

In addition to the life giving thrust, capable of witness and self-sacrifice to the point of martyrdom, consecrated life also experiences the insidiousness of mediocrity in the spiritual life, of the progressive taking on of middle class values and of a consumer mentality. The complex management of works, while required by new social demands and norms of the State, together with the temptations presented by efficiency and activism, run the risk of obscuring Gospel originality and of weakening spiritual motivations. The prevalence of personal plans over community endeavours can deeply corrode the communion of brotherly and sisterly love.

These are real problems, which should not be taken lightly. Consecrated persons are not alone in living the tension between secularism and an authentic life of faith, between the fragility of humanity itself and the power of grace; this is the experience of all members of the Church.

The difficulties and the questioning which religious life is experiencing today can give rise to a new *kairos*, a time of grace. In these challenges lies hidden an authentic call of the Holy Spirit to rediscover the wealth and potentialities of this form of life.⁹

Therefore it is not fundamentally a question of methods, processes, meetings, documents, even though all these can have their importance and place, rather it is question of the values which come into play and which give meaning to our lives. That is to say, how to live these values as persons and communities in this place and time where we are, from the charismatic tradition we have received, toward the future with a creative fidelity to our vocation and mission among the people and churches into which we are inserted. From within each person we make up the community and we are unique and unrepeatable in our personal situation, toward the communitarian expression of our fraternity and our apostolic service in the individual contexts of these persons and communities.

⁹ CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ. A renewed commitment to Religious Life in the Third Millennium*, Rome, May 19, 2002. Cf. Nos. 12 and 13.

2. The Religious Life as plan

I want to dwell a little on an aspect which I had presented in the 8th Circular Letter, and which seems to me important to stress in time of looking for ways to make it easier for everyone to assimilate what we mean when we speak of the PARL.

Many times we find ourselves with a problem in speaking about the PARL, that is, in the different languages, it has different meanings. For that reason we need to stress the philosophy that underlies all these expressions about religious life and the various levels of the plan: personal, communitarian, and provincial.¹⁰

The movement for the renewal of religious life has been maturing in a twofold direction: on the one hand the creation of a new vision, mentality and theology of religious life and of its own charism, and on the other hand the incorporation of new reflections of community animation more in keeping with the new mentality. Among those reflections certainly we would situate personal, communitarian and provincial PARLs.

Really this terminology about PARLs has arisen when religious life has had to face a new dominant culture that has been the modernism and, which is going to ask of it a new response from a renewed vision of itself and its manner of being present and working in the world and in the Church. One of the indisputable aspects of the modern culture, which is continued in postmodernism, is the recognition of the individual person and his autonomy. However, one of the consequences of autonomy is that the individual is responsible for himself and his world. Here, that is to say in the affirmation of the value of the person and of his capacity to respond, is where the true meaning of life as plan, and concretely, religious life as plan arises. In these terms, freely seeking the most adequate form for developing our possibilities of being and doing in the concrete circumstances in which we live, would be the most generic way of defining a plan. Applied to religious life we could say that the gift of a charismatic vocation is a personal and

¹⁰ In the following paragraphs I was inspired and followed the reflections of Juan Mari Martínez de Ilarduia ofm, who has published several works on the subject of Communal Plan and Provincial Plan in the papers *Frontera-Hegian* edited by the Theological Institute of Religious Life for the Faculty of Theology of Vitoria-Gasteiz (Euskadi, Spain), specifically numbers 14 and 38.

communitarian gift, which demands a response from the freedom and autonomy of individuals, in the concrete situation in which they find themselves. The articulation of those responses is going to result in PARLs at different levels.

However, the affirmation of the autonomy of the individual needs discernment, because it can involve certain ambivalence. If by individualism we understand the focus on one's self and the organization of one's life for one's own sake, turning one's back on everyone else, then the result is dehumanizing from a merely anthropological perspective and of course, from a vision, which seeks to be based in the Gospel, while having the aforementioned attitude at its roots would be the opposite of communion. If what we are saying, however, is that the whole process of communion is to be based on the recognition of the individual person and his freedom, then the attention to the individual will constitute one of the axes of all religious renewal and of every possible shared plan.

When people share their vital interests by means of a quality communication, only then can they advance toward the encounter of common identities, and even begin to feel one's ties to a charismatic family. This presumes that people have found themselves and are growing towards a greater depth in their vocation and mission, that is to say, what they have felt called to be and to give of themselves through their lives and their work.

Therefore, communitarian PARLs, to be successful are going to depend a great deal on personal involvement. And this personal involvement is going to depend a great deal on the capacity and effort of the brothers in facing themselves and seeking to respond, that is to say each one being responsible for common vocation and mission.

Neither the plans nor any other means is going to produce anything automatically. The renewal of religious life only will take place in the measure in which there are people and groups, that is to say people who carry out with responsibility their personal processes and share them, who help one another to walk in the same fundamental direction, with common goals and shared values. Therefore one must not fall into the temptation of leaving aside personal and communal dynamics and focusing only on structural and organizational ones. In such a way, we would move towards considering the means as a magical

object with aims of acting mechanically. Therefore, the subjectivity which is understood as the quality of the subjects, whether they be personal or communitarian, must be the center of all dynamics of personal and communal renewal.

Truly the other temptation would be a contempt for every kind of structure for support, orientation or discernment as well as rejecting the role of the service of authority. With those attitudes we could leave people without reference or support and run the risk of asking of them more than they can do for themselves, at both an individual and a group level, and in turn we would run the serious risk of asking of them less than what they can and should give to the dimension of structural integration of the community as "instances" of organization and communion.

In that sense the experience of many persons and communities tells us that when, on the altars of personal and group responsibility, every type of structure is sacrificed, what is produced as a result is, a weakening of the responsible answers or even their disappearance. It is one thing to say that the foundation of the plans be a responsible answer of the individuals, it is another to say that these plans do not need structures to articulate and organize the answers. With regard to the role of the service of authority in the plans, we will stress this later on in the letter.

At the end of these paragraphs which are more oriented towards a philosophical point of view, allow me to make a brief and more theological point about the PARLs. The very dynamism of life comes to us from God himself and is the permanent creation of something new, the creation of God as the fruit of love, which is producing more life, it is the gift of himself and the longing to surrender himself in order to be found, it is rest in order to see how it has been.... So too is our consecrated life at every level.

Finally, what can remain clear in a brief way from here on, is that it does not matter whether some brothers and communities have or do not have a plan, the plan in fact exists, with or without a name in every human being, group and organization. The matter is to incorporate that vital dimension into our religious consecration and the dynamic of our fraternal communion; it is to attempt to bring together our personal and real plans with their values, attitudes, behaviors ... to a meeting of

wills and of ideals, always renewable and renewed. The reality shows us that at times it is precisely those personal plans of the brothers, known or unknown to others, written or implied, that obstruct the real participation in a common plan, that is to say, the community or provincial plans not only fail because we do not value the plans as such but, rather, because personal plans absorb and focus a good part of the vitality of one or some of the brothers. Life is a plan; Religious Life is a plan.... The plan is a common instrument that allows us to contrast our life and service with objective criteria, and thus to evaluate and renew it.

3. The Congregation and the PARLs

3.1 Information that comes to us from the Congregation

As I have already said in the introduction of this letter, one of its purposes would be to make the content of my previous letter, which I wrote on this subject in 1997, more practical and concrete. Therefore once we have tried to establish, in a theoretical way, the sense of what we mean when we speak of the plans, and in order to find an agreement beyond all of the idiomatic distinctions, it seems appropriate to enter into a dialog with what is being produced around the PARL throughout the Congregation, and to see if it is possible to underline its lights and illuminate its shadows.

Therefore, as I have also said above, I am going to use an instrument,¹¹ that gathers the information on the responses to the "Guides for an exchange of experiences", which is certainly a considerable amount of material in both its importance and volume. At the same time that I contrast the content with the aspects of the PARL that I have just presented, I will offer, in a certain way, some of the contents whose explicit references to the PARL have not been included in the Reports on the responses to the "Guides for an exchange of experiences", precisely because this letter would be charged with doing so.

As you already know, there have been three types of "Guides for an exchange of experiences": one directed to local superiors, another directed to those responsible for apostolic works and a third directed to Major and Regional Superiors. In the three guides there have been

¹¹ Cf. note 4.

questions referring to PARL at different levels: personal, community and provincial or regional. Certainly not all the questions have been of the same kind, some questions required more articulate responses on the values, usefulness, existence or not, etc. with respect to the communal plan and that of the Province or Region. Other questions asked for a more spontaneous reaction to the personal plan and the community plan. The local superiors were asked more articulate questions about the communal plan, Major and Regional Superiors were asked the same type of questions about Provincial and Regional Plan. All, including those responsible for apostolic works, were asked to give their spontaneous reactions to personal and communal plans.

In general we could say that **local superiors**, who spoke of the **values in a common plan**, were focused on: the expression of the **Vocation and common Mission and the incarnation of the charismatic orientations**, however, perhaps this kind of answer is less in the majority than those which focused on the **usefulness of plan** which could be seen above all in: organization, coordination, facilitation, promoting the meeting of the community, uniting criteria, activities, mutual support, renewal, animation and co-responsibility...

On the other hand there are a variety of reasons provided by some of the local superiors for not having a communal plan: resistances that were not sufficiently clarified, poor presentation of what is desired in the plan, an aversion for this kind of thing, not seeing its usefulness, not having sufficient time to devise the plans, that fact that the brothers do not live together, considering the regular schedule as sufficient, dealing with problems and in general everything that the community asks of us in a spontaneous way.

In general, when the **Major and Regional Superiors** speak about the values and usefulness of Provincial, Vice-provincial or Regional Plans, they show considerable similarities in pointing out the value of the PARL for giving unity, cohesion, and a sense of belonging to the members of the community so as to offer a vision of the common mission, orientation for communities and individuals, a framework for making decisions at all levels, stressing especially the provincial, vice-provincial or regional government levels; the possibilities for evaluation, for realism, for conversion; the process of developing the PARL is

seen by some as the most interesting, as it can be opportunity for discernment and discussion...

Aside from the fact that some of the Major and Regional Superiors, who have the PARL, see a difficulty in expressing it or in putting it into practice, those who do not have the PARL indicate a series of reasons for this: lack of awareness of what the PARL really means, little appreciation for it, resistances that are not always clear, frustrating experiences from previous attempts, giving priority to personal plans over community ones, the difficulty of not having a vision of the whole idea, lack of quality in personal and communal life, difficulty of tailoring religious life to the time in which we live, poverty in the local communities...

Moving on to the **spontaneous reactions** to the personal plan, there appears to be a general appreciation in the responses to the three type of guides, although this appreciation is not well defined and it is not always clear if there a common understanding in these responses. Over all, there is tendency to connect the **personal plan** with spirituality, although, on the other hand, connecting it with the organization of the individual life, and as a basis for the community and for the community plans.

When addressing the **community plan**, the spontaneous reactions are more diverse, for some, a common plan is necessary, indispensable, the backbone of the community, and behind every good community there is a common plan; for others, however, it is more a question of living than having a plan, they do not know any communities with a plan, they would have to see how they function in reality and not just in theory, they can not have a plan with the brothers who actually make up their community, that usually the plan simply remains on paper. It is interesting to notice that some have experienced an evolution: before a community plan was a "phantom", now it is greatly valued. It is also interesting that some are asking work toward it very slowly. For me, it seems important to point out that, not even among the group of those responsible for apostolic works, is there an appreciation of the tension between community life and apostolic activity, but, this is an aspect which the community plan ought respond to as much as possible.

3.2 Some conclusions based on this information

At the end of this review of the responses in the "Guides for an exchange of experiences" on the questions dedicated to the plan, it seems to me that we can come to some conclusions. On the one hand, it seems clear that the plans on different levels: personal, communitarian, provincial/vice-provincial or regional are considered, each time, as **instruments of the animation of religious apostolic life**. The evidence, for Local, Major or Regional Superiors who see in the communitarian, provincial/vice-provincial or regional plans, something important and indispensable for advancement of the community on distinct levels, is an indication that this way of approaching the animation of vocation and common mission has taken root in our brothers and in our groups. In this sense we continue to verify what the past General Chapter told us when it invited us to *radically live out our consecration* and this supposes a *plan for renewal and ongoing conversion*: "*Supported by the lived experience of the Congregation we believe that the Plan of Apostolic Religious Life (PARL) of the major and regional communities is key to this process.*"¹²

Truly the **responses that we have handled stress more the usefulness of the plans than the values incarnated in them**. It is certain that the plan is a means and not an end. It is clear that we are talking about an instrument of renewal and animation of our lives as religious and as members of apostolic communities and that one should not over magnify this, thereby creating false expectations. Nevertheless, it is important to see in them, not only an organizational mechanism, but also the expression of a form in which the values which support our lives at the individual and community level are incarnated in a given place and time. As we have already said above, to reduce the plan to something merely structural and organizational, can bring with it a tendency to put aside the personal and communal dynamics of renewal and religious commitment and so in the end we ask for results of an automatic character from the plan, which certainly goes against its true meaning.

It is also important to emphasize that the answers about the personal plan, likewise indicate that this aspect has a more positive valued among us. I point this out for two reasons. The **first** is that, up until now, our congregational literature has not given this much attention.

¹² Cf. Chapter Document No. 2, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

Let us not forget that our own Constitutions only mention it once, almost just in passing.¹³ The **second** is because, as I have already indicated in the first part of this letter, the animation of the religious life in terms of plans presumes that people find themselves and deepen in their vocation and mission, that is to say, in what they feel called to be and to give to through their life and work. It also presumes that our SS.CC. religious consecration is incarnated concretely in a real, and each time stronger, sense of belonging to the Community. Without a personal and religious development of our belonging and feeling of being called to a vocation which unites us in one life and one common mission, it is difficult to understand that plans exist, and if they do, that they are useful and efficient. In a certain way we can say that without a personal understanding of life as plan is it very difficult for us to advance, by this means, in the process of renewal and ongoing conversion.

3.3 In the face of the difficulties

Although it is certain that the responses that we have collected provide hopeful results on this kind of dynamic of renewal, which the plans presume, nevertheless, it is also certain that not all the responses are oriented in that same direction. Because of that, it is fitting that I spend a little time on the deficiencies, problems and difficulties which the plans are presenting to our brothers and communities, so that, keeping them in mind, I can try to offer some suggestions that are consistent with the approach to the plans, which I have taken above. I will also try to keep in mind some other aspects of the responses in the "Guides for an exchange of experiences" which, even if they are not directly related to the plans, nevertheless have a great deal to do with them.

When we speak of the difficulties with respect to the plans, we emphasize a series of cases of "**resistances**". Resistance is an aspect of human life that can have a positive or negative value with regard to the object or subject, which is resisted. To resist in the face of a temptation of whatever type is virtuous behavior. Therefore if we speak of resistances to the PARL, the first thing we should clarify is, before what or before whom, do these resistances arise, and why do they arise. Therefore to speak only of resistances is not sufficient. We need to look

¹³ Art. 58, *Constitutions and Statutes*, Rome, 1990.

more deeply into their content and face them. When we speak of the plan among ourselves we are not speaking of a latest gimmick or technique. We are speaking of the values that come into play in religious life, of the different cultural contexts in which we are inserted, of the personal and communal responses that we are called upon to make. They are not some mere acronyms or a paper that must be written or a series of meetings we must have. It is a personal and communal response from our Vocation and Mission to the necessities of the churches, the people and societies where we are present as religious. Therefore the first thing that we will have to do, when resistances arise, is clarify what we are speaking about and how, in then end, they lie within the PARL.

It is also certain that normally these **resistances are not "innocent"**. That is to say they are not normally the fruit of ignorance, that once it is overcome, paves the way to commitment without conditions. Normally these **resistances are "conditioned"**. That is to say that these resistances are the fruit of the conditions in which we live our personal and communal lives, both the external and internal influences. This also comes through in the responses of Local, Major and Regional Superiors.

Effectively, some of the reasons that are put forth when there is mention of the absence of local plans is the lack of time, not living together, thinking that the regular schedule is sufficient, and dealing with questions in a spontaneous way.

The **lack of time** is always a reason that can affect many aspects of our life. But when we use that reason we should be very conscious of the fact that time is relative to the values and interests involved. It is clear that the time we dedicate to one thing or another has a great deal to do with the value that we place on those things. It is evident that one finds time for what one considers important and reduces time as the importance given to something is reduced. In this sense, when somebody alleges that there is no time for developing the community plan, he should ask himself what importance he attaches to the community, and his attention to it.

It is also logical that, **the absence of a common life** has an effect on the development of communal plans. If there is not a minimal amount of common life it is very difficult to imagine or to think that we can be

or do together in service to a local church, a people, etc... Also one would have to consider as a difficulty that which could include a good level of "common life", at the external level, companionship, positive relations, and nevertheless, lack a depth of life and a spirituality, which could sustain a life in common. In this sense the search for a personal and intimate relationship with God, which is expressed both at the individual and communal level, and Ongoing Formation, which seeks to renew the attachment to and following of Jesus in the Congregation, are also very important.

On the other hand, there are some who say that it is impossible to have a plan with the brothers in my community. It is certain that I have not chosen the brothers, they are given to me and it is with them that I am called to share a vocation and common mission and to offer the type of possible and practical responses, which the situation asks of us. We are not saying all the responses be univocal, neither are we saying that we are always called, at every moment, to do the "impossible", but with a healthy realism and a strong conviction that we are called together to serve from our charismatic condition, "something" will always be possible. We should recognize that all this can not be reduced to a mere regular schedule nor to a spontaneous style, although spontaneity and cordial relations are not opposed to it.

Major and Regional Superiors enter even more deeply into the difficulties at the time of implementing a Provincial/Vice-provincial or Regional Plan. In reality, they speak of **frustrating experiences** with former attempts; personal plans come before communal ones, a difficulty in having a vision of the whole reality, the lack of quality in personal and communal life, the difficulty of adapting religious life to the times in which we live, of the poverty in the local communities. In some way, what underlies all these reasons is surely the necessity of promoting, even a little, the quality of religious life that would make the attainment of plans on different levels possible. The base upon which a communal plan could be built, at any level requires in a certain way: the existence of minimum level of communion; a firm will in common agreements; mutual collaboration; discipline in the face of a cooperative way of living our mission; and the plan as an expression of our interdependence and belong; etc. This can appear to be a vicious circle, that is, if the plan is an instrument of animation of the quality of

religious life, at the same time, it also requires a certain quality of religious life for its establishment.

3.4 Some general suggestions

Here, there is something worth focusing on a little more. We have already said something about the meaning of the plans in the presentation, *when people share, by means of a quality communication, their vital interests, only then can there be advancement toward the encounter of common identities to feel oneself bound to a charismatic family. This presumes that people have found themselves and have deepened their vocation and mission, that is to say that they have felt called to be and to give themselves through their life and work. Therefore, communitarian plans, to be successful are going to depend a great deal on personal involvement. And this personal involvement is going to depend a great deal on the capacity and engagement of the brothers facing themselves and seeking to respond, that is to say each one being responsible for his vocation and common mission*¹⁴.

Let us recognize that all this does not happen in a more or less spontaneous way, especially when, for many brothers, these aspects were not very well developed in their Initial Formation, which in many cases was a long time ago. From this we can see the fundamental need to have Ongoing Formation that helps us to deepen the changes and, in a definitive way, that conversion to which we are called, in order to respond to a religious apostolic life demanded of us by the cultural contexts and the times in which we live.

It seems to me, that in order to deepen the awareness of the needs that we have, in this aspect, as persons and communities, it could be very interesting to return to the information which has been given in the "Guides for an exchange of experiences", beyond that which I covered in relation to the plans.

What is certain is that the plans are a means for animating "the whole religious apostolic life". In this sense, many vital aspects, which come into play when we speak of quality of religious life, have appeared in this exchange of experiences; and the results can do much to help us see which ones need more emphasis and attention. Simply in a list, I will tell you that we find comments there on such important elements

¹⁴ Cf. *Supra* & 2.

as: regular meetings of the community, prayer, communal adoration, renewal of life and fraternal correction, sense of belonging to the community, the tension between apostolic ministry and community life, communion in mission: common mission, diversity of generations: older brothers and the new generation, individualism and communion.¹⁵

Given what I have just said about the difficulties that we have in living out the plans, it seems important to me to stress that when superiors, whether local or at other levels, and those responsible for apostolic works, assess specific aspects of life in the community in a series of closed questions, **neither Ongoing Formation nor the rhythm and the quality of the community time, have a high percentage of responses, above all Ongoing Formation.**¹⁶

Allow me to stress this point, since, as I have said before, both Ongoing Formation which allows us to face ourselves, as well as quality of communication, are essential if we want to advance in the path of renewal fostered by the plans. For this, you will allow me to turn again to a quote from the document of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life:

The times in which we are living call for a general rethinking of the formation of consecrated men and women, which is no longer limited to one period of life. Not only to enable them to become better able to insert themselves into a reality which changes with a rhythm which is often frenetic but also and more importantly because consecrated life itself, of its nature, calls for the constant openness of those who are called to it. If, in fact, consecrated life is in itself "a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ", it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the whole person, heart, mind and strength (cf. Mt 22:37) reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity. Thus understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows but also represents a theological way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never ending formation "sharing in the work of the

¹⁵ Cf. Javier Cerda ss.cc., *Information ...* (previously cited). Questions 2.6/2.4/2.6 in each one of the three Guides.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* Questions 2.7/2.5/2.7 in each one of the three Guides.

Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son".

Thus it will be important that all consecrated persons be formed in the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture open to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them. But above all they must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death.

Openness to the other and to otherness, particularly a relation with time becomes most important. People in Ongoing Formation take advantage of time, they don't submit to it. They accept it as a gift and wisely enter into the various rhythms of life itself (days, weeks, months, years) with wisdom, seeking the harmony between them and the rhythm, fixed by an immutable and eternal God which marks the days, centuries and times. In a very unique way consecrated persons learn to allow themselves to be moulded by the liturgical year in which the mysteries of the life of the Son of God are relived in order to start afresh from Christ and from his death and resurrection everyday of their lives.¹⁷

4. How do we carry out the plans?

Many times this is the key question. In this sense, let's go to the General Chapter to allow ourselves to be guided by it, at least in a more generic presentation: *"The Plan of the whole Congregation is based in the Constitutions and Statutes and the orientations of the General Chapters which update them. The Provinces, Vice-provinces and Regions concretize PARL, setting priorities for life and mission according to the socio-cultural and ecclesial context and in tune with what is really possible. PARL should be the fruit of discernment among the brothers. To the extent that brothers participate in its development and commit themselves to its implementation, PARL will be a means of renewal and communion as well as a way in which the community moves toward the future. For that reason it is important that there be open interaction between the different levels of the life of the Congregation: the*

¹⁷ CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ. A renewed commitment to Religious Life in the Third Millennium*, Rome, May 19, 2002. Cf. No. 15.

personal, the communal, the provincial as well as the inter-provincial and general."¹⁸

As we have already said from the beginning, the elements that come into play in the plans can be none other than the ones that our Constitutions, our General Chapters, the congregational orientations and decisions offer. But these, only if they are personally and communally taken up and expressed and lived in the different cultural contexts in which we live and in which we serve the churches and people to whom we are sent. It is clear that there are elements, which in some way, we receive and others that we are going to create. Or better said, those elements which originate from our congregational charismatic condition, we recreate, making them our own in the proper cultural contexts, and in response to the needs and demands which come from the people, as well as from the calls of the churches.

This recreating or making our own, the elements proper to our Congregation in the different cultural contexts, should be the fruit of discernment. And we call it so without trying to characterize it in a very precise way, with elaborate techniques or distinct steps. When speaking of discernment, we mean that we look to the future not as a mere forecast but as a search for the will of God. The essential part of the exercise of discernment is not, first, to plan the future, but, to seek to know the will of God and to ask for the freedom to fulfill it, which has already been pointed out in my previous letter dedicated to the Plans.¹⁹ In the face of a facile adaptation to the times, discernment seeks to educate us about what God wants of us in a given situation. *"Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do."*²⁰

As I also said in my previous letter on the Plans, and as the General Chapter reminds us, the participation of all the brothers is indispensable, thus, *to the extent that brothers participate in its development and commit themselves to its implementation, PARL will be a means of renewal and communion as well as a way in which the community moves toward the*

¹⁸ Cf. Chapter Document No. 2, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

¹⁹ Enrique Losada ss.cc., 8th Circular Letter, Rome, 1997.

²⁰ Rm 12,2.

*future.*²¹ In this sense, let me remind you once again of the beautiful articles that our Constitutions dedicate to obedience (art. 31-37), and especially article 35,²² which directly illuminates the question we are dealing with.

Having called to mind some of the principles for the development of the plans, which appear in the General Chapter and in my previous Circular Letter on this subject, it seems advisable to make some suggestions of a more practical type, keeping in mind, above all, the information that has come from the Congregation, which we have already mentioned above.

Some of these points I have already made in my previous letter, nevertheless, it seems appropriate to stress them, as I consider them to be important.

"It is clear that the Plan itself is meant to create energy as regards apostolic action but that activity at one particular time might be focused more on one aspect than another. That depends on the characteristics of each community. As they differ according to ages, formation, sensitivity and culture. To program that activity means setting priorities within the PARL. What is more urgent at one given moment might be less so at another. Given the scarcity of personnel that many of our communities are experiencing, such programming becomes all the more important.

It can happen that there are good and noble objectives which cannot be realized at present and trying to do so just results in dispersal of energies. So it is necessary to prioritize and be aware that perhaps we can only realize two or three objectives. But these have to be ones that can consolidate the efforts and dedication of all the brothers or at least of the majority. At the same time it would be wise that these objectives be programmed according to a time-line. There are some things that possibly can not be achieved yet but we can begin and perhaps even with time they will not be finished. Besides thinking of when, we also have to think of how and who."²³

²¹ Cf. Chapter Document No. 2, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

²² "1. This participation is especially indispensable in the task incumbent on the whole Congregation and on each of its communities: to discern the will of God in order to fulfil it in a concrete manner..." Cf. Rm 12,3; Eph. 5,10; Phil 1,10.

²³ Cf. Enrique Losada ss.cc., & 4 of the 8th Circular Letter, Rome, 1997.

It is better to agree on a few things that are really carried out than to live in frustration with agreements that are not representative of the group, and which serve as the causes of blame, discouragement, etc. It is true that it is always difficult to give up "hoping for the best" in order "to accept and respect what is possible", as in an atmosphere of discernment, it can seem necessary to always arrive at first. However, many times we will have to accept with humility, the fact that what God is asking of us in at a specific moment, is the second. Once again we must turn to God, and ask him for the courage to change what we have to change, the patience to accept what we cannot change, and the wisdom to distinguish between both possibilities.

In any case, it seems that given the experience we have and have had among the brothers and communities, it is appropriate to stress that the plans exists to animate personal, communal, provincial, interprovincial or general life, not "to complicate it." That is to say, the plan should animate daily life, ordinary life, respecting those things that are essential to this life. It is not a matter of "adding extraordinary things to our life" rather, it is a question of doing well and together the ordinary, which our Constitutions and our General Chapters point out, and which we are called to live in each of the cultural and ecclesial contexts in which we are inserted. The plans are at the service of what we are and are called to be.

In this sense, the "methods", which can be many, should avoid turning into sophistications, which will be the best antidote to the fulfillment and animation of our life through the plans. Any method will have to be watchful, above all, to keep clear, the temporal-spatial references in which we move, that is to say, the "where" and "when" of our community, the necessities and demands which this cultural and ecclesial context poses to us as persons and communities. Likewise, the characteristics of the members and the community as regards: ages, formation, awareness, ability, experiences, health, etc.

Finally, the inspiration for our lives, which comes from our charismatic tradition, that is to say our reading of the Gospel, realized in the Constitutions, General Chapters, Provincial Chapters... And an other essential aspect that any method should assure is communication, the deeper, the truer and the most authentic, the better.

Lastly, on this point of "how to develop the plans", remember what I already said in my previous letter: we know that to insist on the process of the development of the PARL is to insist on an essential aspect of the question in as much as it affects the discernment in the community. The importance of this is not so much in a document that is well written and to be placed aside as signed and sealed. No, the important thing is that this is a road that we must run together. Having said this, we do not want to say that this concrete formulation of this PARL was not useful. Effectively, a written PARL permits greater precision and at the same time diffusion and assimilation, which is better than those "implicit plans" or those not "sufficiently explained".

5. The Service of Authority and the PARL

5.1 Orientations of the General Chapter

As you will remember, already in my previous letter on the plans, I dedicated some paragraphs with respect to this. In principle I would repeat those ideas once more, for I consider them valid and I once again refer to them. However, from 1997 to the present, a process centered on *Leadership and the service of authority*, was begun and continues to develop which has had some background²⁴ among us. Nevertheless, we can say that it was the General Chapter of 2000 that gave a time of reflection and an important impetus to this point,²⁵ at the same time it has initiated in the Congregation, some processes of characterizing, training, and undertaking, which we are trying to move forward with everyone. Therefore it seems appropriate to me to take up again this relationship between service of authority and the plans from this capitular perspective and thus, in some way, collaborate in these processes, which are underway, through this letter.

I would like start with the principle that the service of authority, as its own name indicates, is a means for animation, growth and development of the brothers and the community.²⁶ Keeping in mind everything that we have been saying about the plans, we will have to conclude that

²⁴ Cf. *Enlarged General Council*, Poitiers, 1998; Enrique Losada ss.cc., *9th Circular Letter*, Rome, 1999.

²⁵ Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, *36th General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

²⁶ Cf. arts. 90-92 of the *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

one as much as the others share in this same purpose of animation and service to the brothers and the communities.

In this sense, it is appropriate to remember what the General Chapter says, when it stresses some of the aspects which should be considered when characterizing the type of leadership the Congregation needs at this time: *the foundation of leadership is to be discovered in a profound and personal experience of faith which permits the understanding that the exercise of authority is an aid to community and the brothers as they discern among themselves the will of God in the sense of being co-responsible for the common vocation which all have received.*²⁷ In the context of what we have been saying about the plans, it seems clear that this instruction of the Chapter regarding the service of authority, makes clear the relationship between the two, that is to say, between what a plan is, and what authority is called to do with regard to it: helping the brothers and the community to give a response to what God is asking of us, here and now, from our Vocation and Mission.

If we continue reading the Chapter document, which we have been referring to, we go into greater depth in that relationship, in as far as frames leadership in service of authority within the General Plan of the Congregation, as expressed in the Constitutions and General Chapter, in a circular dynamic which involves interaction and interdependence.²⁸ It is clear that neither the service of authority nor the plans can be realized without a common reference to our Vocation and Mission, which gives them meaning and their deepest content, as we have already indicated above in referring, as a last resort in the development of the PARLs, to religious obedience, as understood in our Constitutions²⁹.

As we have said above when speaking of the meaning of the plan for religious life, what comes into play is, the personal response, which requires confronting oneself, and at the same time the quality of communication that allows us to journey together. Therefore, the Chapter invites those in authority to know and strive to know the anxieties and in-depth searching of the brothers and in this way, to continue preparing them to receive the orientations of the Congrega-

²⁷ Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, Decisions No. 1a, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

²⁸ Cf. Ibid. No. 1b.

²⁹ Cf. arts. 31–37 of the Constitutions, Rome, 1990.

tion and the Church.³⁰ In this the General Chapter followed very closely what the Constitutions already said in a very clear way, that *"Superiors, and those who participate in the instances of government, must always keep in mind in the exercise of their office: respect for persons, the fundamental equality of all in the religious vocation, subsidiarity, the possible gifts of leadership of each brother and the responsibility of all – although it be in different ways – to further the mission of the Congregation."*³¹

In any case, it is in the following point of the Chapter decisions where the relationship of what we have been talking about becomes most explicitly defined, in saying that the characterization of the service of authority that the Congregation needs in these times must keep in mind: *the relationship which exists within the religious community between authority and obedience, understanding obedience as a commitment which impels one to an active participation in the life and mission of the community as expressed in PARL.*³²

Already in the first section of this letter, following the indications of the General Chapter, we have tried to underline how the PARL can be an adequate means to express and live the animation of the radicality of our religious consecration. It is clear that the service of authority has an inexcusable role in it, which the Chapter itself reminds us of in the orientations it gives on the development of the PARL. It asks that all levels of the Congregation revise their life of fraternity and their apostolic service, in an exercise of a constant communal discernment, that takes care to have the time and space necessary for fraternity, for prayer and for the balance between their common life and apostolic service; and here it asks that the animation of this discernment be a priority task in the service of authority.³³

In this, on the other hand, we are not especially different from the whole of Religious Life and a new quotation from the recent document of CIVCSVA can remind us of this: *in rediscovering the meaning and quality of consecrated life a fundamental task is that of superiors, to whom the service of authority has been entrusted, a demanding and at times disputed task. It requires a constant presence which is able to animate and propose, to*

³⁰ Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, Decisions No. 1c., 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

³¹ Cf. art. 95 of the Constitutions, Rome, 1990.

³² Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, Decisions No. 1.d, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

³³ Cf. Chapter Document No. 2, Orientation 2.4, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

recall the raison d'être of consecrated life, and to help those entrusted to them to live in a constantly renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit. A superior cannot renounce the mission of animation, of brotherly/sisterly support, of proposing, of listening and of dialogue. Only in this way can the entire community find itself united in full communion and in apostolic and ministerial service... A personal and confident participation in the community's life and mission is required of all its members. Even if, in the end, according to proper law, it is the task of authority to make choices and decisions, daily living in community requires a participation which allows for the exercise of dialogue and discernment. Each individual, then, and the whole community can work out their own life with the plan of God, together carrying out God's will.³⁴

5.2 Congregational Experience

After these considerations on the relationship between the service of authority and the PARR, heavily based on the Chapter texts, it would not be appropriate to leave aside the intention this letter had of desiring to keep a reference to the experience of the Congregation in each section, in trying to be as practical as possible. In this regard, taking advantage of your patience, I will come back to the information in the "Guides for an exchange of experiences".³⁵

I have already indicated the wealth of contents that we can find in that material at a time of understanding and appreciating the experience of the brothers and communities on the elements and the forms of developing the plans. But, it is clear that the "Guides" have been material concretely directed to the brothers who actually exercise the service of authority at various levels. Therefore, when we speak of the relationship between this service and the plans, we can find many aspects of that relationship there and, at the same time, have the opportunity to appreciate and evaluate whether that relationship is growing among us in the most suitable form.

Without trying to simplify all the contents of this Report, which I stress, seems very rich, I would invite everyone, but especially those who have been called to exercise the service of authority, to go through the responses to the questions 2.8/2.6/2.8 of the respective guides for local

³⁴ CIVCSVA, *Starting afresh from Christ. A renewed commitment to Religious Life in the Third Millennium*, Rome, May 19, 2002. Cf. No. 14.

³⁵ Cf. note 4.

superiors, those responsible for apostolic works, and Major and Regional Superiors. It is about the establishing, in a closed form, the degree of importance that is given to some general dimensions in the exercise of leadership, keeping in mind the needs of the congregational community, as the General Chapter has indicated. Aspects such as vision, creativity, relationship, communication, accompaniment, style of personal leadership, trust, support, team, planning, critical analysis, SS.CC. spirit and charism, signs of the times, facing conflicts, leading decision making processes, "agents of change", administration... all appear, rated in order of importance by the brothers.

With regard to these questions, on my part, I am not going to make note of any consequence, as I did with respect to the questions, which had the plans as their direct object. Nevertheless, I believe that, in the context of the relationship between the service of authority and the plans, it could be very illuminating if we draw out those consequences among ourselves, in order to see in each one of us and in each one of our communities, which dimensions in the exercise of leadership are more present, which are more absent, and in the final analysis which are becoming more necessary, whether or not they are now present, in order to carry forward the animation of our communities and apostolic works, in the life of the Congregation and the Church at present. I believe that doing this exercise would be a good practical consequence of what has been said in this letter.

5.3 Interdependence and Network of Sharing

The Chapter document on "*Leadership and the Service of Authority*" explicitly asks for the promotion of an awareness of the interdependence on all levels of the Congregation in the exercise of leadership.³⁶ I especially want to hold up here for your consideration decision No. 3.2.e of this document which says: *establish a system of communications between the various levels of the Congregation which allows an interchange of news and points of discussion as a way to make stronger co-responsibility for the common mission.*

In this sense and in the context of this point about the relationship of the service of authority and the plans, and, even more, in the general context of the present letter, I would invite all of you, especially those

³⁶ Cf. Chapter Document No. 5, Decision No. 3, 36th General Chapter, Rome, 2000.

who in the service in authority at its different levels, to take advantage of those channels of communication which already exist among ourselves, to also make "circular" your reflections and experiences around this subject that we have attempted to develop in this letter.

At times a false conception of humility can lead us to think that what our community has done in terms of plans is not interesting for the others. I believe that is not so. All the communities and all the brothers can shed light on this with concrete examples. Therefore, it would be interesting if, in the sphere of our meetings at the provincial or interprovincial level, an exchange of information on the subject of the plans might occur. We could also take advantage of the Web Page of the Congregation, by presenting concrete examples of what a plan can be on it, whether personal, communal or provincial; or, using any other form of communication in this respect. I think that in acting in this way, we would be widening and above all, giving greater content to the practical dimension that this letter desired to have and promote.

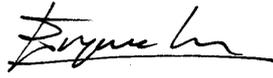
6. Conclusion

As I end I would like to renew the wish that I expressed at the beginning of this letter. I would be very happy to contribute, by means of it, to all the efforts that we are making, in the midst of the Congregation, toward the renewal of our life in order to be creatively faithful to our Vocation and Mission.

I want to stress, though briefly, something that I tried to communicate during the celebration of the General Chapter itself. Whatever we can do to promote the PARL at its different levels, should precisely be a guarantee that, from our charismatic conditions, we are serving more, and better, the churches and people to whom we are sent. I want to especially call to mind here our option to build a more just world in solidarity with the poor. The animation of our religious life and the radicality of our consecration will have its clearest verification in the fulfilment of this option.

May the contemplation of the Love of God manifested in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary inspire and sustain us.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a horizontal line underneath.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

Other letters



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Casa Generalizia
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00166 Roma (Italia)

Rome, March 18, 2004

After the Enlarged General Council of Lima (2003)

Dear brothers,

Greetings from Rome where we have just finished four weeks of General Council meetings. After each session of the Council, from now until the next General Chapter, we are going to be in communication with you so that all of you can be current on what we are studying, working on and deciding. This letter is the first in the series.

For almost two months after the Enlarged General Council in Lima we did not have any Council meetings as we had to visit some of the communities. In our December meetings we began to study the decisions made in Lima but because of the number of other topics pending, some of which were quite urgent, we were unable to give the decisions the time they demanded.

It was during our meetings in February and March that we were able to give more time and attention to the results of the Enlarged General Council. In order to concentrate on the matter at hand we spent some days in Florence praying, studying and reflecting on how we could respond to what has been asked of us as the General Government. Being in the Monastery of Santa Marta of the Benedictine nuns allowed us to spend some quality time by ourselves as well as enjoy the beauty of the city.

As I said in the letter introducing the decisions of the Enlarged General Council, "*The Enlarged General Council opened new doors and gave reason for hope. Now it will depend very much not only on the General Government, which was entrusted with many – possibly too many – tasks, but also on all the brothers especially those who have the responsibility of government.*"¹ We realized that we have a certain responsibility and that

¹ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Enlarged General Council, Lima 2003*, Asunción, October 12, 2003.

we must find ways to do what has been asked of us, without ignoring other things we have been working on since the last General Chapter.

As we studied all this we also took into account something which appears in several of the decisions made in Lima. And that is that implementing those decisions means looking towards the next General Chapter, as in one way or another, the Chapter will be when the decisions of Lima are actually accepted or rejected.

After three and a half years working in this ministry, we have enough experience as a government to know how very important the animation of the Congregation is. We are conscious that we all need to renew our enthusiasm for our congregation's vocation and mission. We have to deepen our love for the Congregation and have a healthy pride in being members of this religious family, whose charism continues to be valid and useful for God's people. This is not out of some childish narcissism that leads us to think only of ourselves and consider ourselves the center of the universe. Rather we do it so as to renew our commitment to ministry among the churches and the people where we are, a commitment based on the same certitude which gives us confidence in our vocation and charism.

The prime objective of any process of renewal, reflection, study and decision must be the following of Jesus as religious of the Sacred Hearts in the world today. That discipleship is the best context for appreciating new forms of living community in mission, the stress the young and different cultures place on incarnating the charism and the diverse situations of our brothers as regards age, sensitivity, and health. That is why the ministry of animation is so important.

Another aspect we consider very important is the strengthening of communion among brothers and communities in the service of our common mission. In the last few years we have tended to speak of that commitment as "interdependence." While we use the word frequently, it has a variety of meanings and it does not have the same importance for everyone. In the discussions and decisions of the last General Chapter,² the Plan of the General Government³ and the decisions of

² *Thirty-sixth General Chapter*, Rome, 2000.

³ *Plan of the General Government*, Rome, June 29, 2001.

the Enlarged General Council in Lima⁴ interdependence is very present both as a concept and as something that we want to implement in the Congregation. As a result, the decisions made in Lima concerning common mission, formation, structures and finances seem to strengthen interdependence. We could even say that the desire to live the common mission and formation in a more interdependent way led to those decisions.

After the meeting in Lima, in which the expression was first used, it has become common for the members of the General Government to speak of common mission and formation as the organizational "backbones" of the Congregation. In other words, animation for living more interdependently must focus especially on the fundamental areas of common mission and formation, and formation understood in its widest sense as both initial and ongoing. These "backbones" also span all levels of the community: general, interprovincial, provincial, regional and local. The General Chapter of 2000 and the Enlarged General Council in Lima made decisions concerning government structures and financial solidarity, which we all have to implement. These must help us in the task of animation and create greater interdependence.

Structures are always a means and never an end. However that does not mean that they do not demand particular attention especially if we want to reach the end we desire. Lima emphasized strengthening interprovincial structures so that we can have common mission and formation that are more interdependent. As we strengthen the interprovincial level, we could also free the General Government of interprovincial tasks and commitments so that it can focus more at the general level, especially the animation of our religious life from our congregation's charism, which is so important, as I indicated above.

These were the topics that the General Government studied and reflected on in the meetings we just finished. From our study and reflection we began outlining a framework for addressing these different themes. Eventually we came to the conclusion that the framework could be the preparation for the next General Chapter, which will take place within two and a half years.

⁴ *Decisions of the Enlarged General Council of Lima*, Rome, October, 2003.

That preparation will be the focus of the General Governments work in the time between now and the end of our term. Clearly we see this preparation as a process in which we want to involve the whole Congregation, as is only logical. And so from the very first we wanted to communicate not only the reasons for the process but also its general outline, which will become more concrete as we take the next steps. We will speak of those below.

The rationale for the process has been outlined above. As I indicated, it is the result of our experience since the last General Chapter as well as the decisions of the Enlarged General Council, namely:

- To renew enthusiasm for our Congregation by coming to a new understanding of our charism in the church and the world today so as to respond to the challenges they present.
- To live communion more interdependently especially with reference to common mission and formation.
- To develop the structures and financial solidarity required to do the above.

As we see it the basic elements of the process would be:

- The inspiration coming from our charism. This energizes our life as a Congregation as we respond to the challenges presented by the peoples, cultures and churches among whom we live.
- The decisions regarding common mission, formation, structures and finances that we must develop as a result of Lima.

We are thinking of a process which will involve developing an inspirational document and also some steps that will help us finalize the decisions of Lima that I referred to.

The document would be the work of various brothers and groups in the Congregation. After it could be studied by all the communities so as to enrich it with everyone's input. It could then come to the General Chapter for study by the capitulants. Eventually it could become a Chapter decision and serve as a helpful reference after the Chapter.

As we work on the decisions made in Lima on common mission, formation, structures and finances we will develop them further. That could become a process of animation and lead to decisions that the General Chapter could make in those areas.

We are aware that, as the General Government, we have a responsibility to begin this process and to propose ways to move it forward. Given that we must develop a sense of coresponsibility in the Congregation and, considering that any process of animation and decision making necessitates interaction and dialogue, we see it as absolutely necessary that all levels of the Congregation participate in the process of preparation for the General Chapter.

We also think it would be good to have some experience of government structures such as were proposed in Lima. As I already indicated, the proposal emphasizes the interprovincial level and the role that the Coordinators of the Interprovincial Conferences could have in the animation and government of the Congregation. To that end, we will have a meeting of the Coordinators of the Interprovincial Conferences, the Coordinator of ASAP (the Assembly of Superiors in Asia and French Polynesia) and the Provincial of Africa in September.

That meeting will be an important opportunity for the General Government, in dialogue and collaboration with those participating, to further develop the process, modify it as necessary and improve it with their input. The letter calling that gathering is being sent at the same time as this one. We are certain that such a meeting can be an opportunity for communication and interaction involving all the provincial, regional and local communities. The letter of convocation encourages movement in that direction.

Among the decisions of the Enlarged General Council on finances, it asked the General Government, assisted by a commission of experts, to study the financial situation of the Congregation in order to seek alternative ways of financing the Generalate, Initial Formation, the ordinary expenses of Africa beginning in 2006 and some special projects that may be proposed for the aid of the whole Congregation. Accordingly the General Government has asked some brothers to form an advisory commission to begin and to direct such a study. The members of the commission will be Gerardo Joannon, of the Chilean Province, Bill Penderghest, General Treasurer, Santiago López of the Spanish Province and Franz Koll of the German Province. The letter calling their first meeting will also be sent shortly.

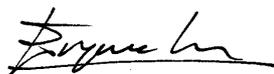
In addition to the above, the General Government approved the decisions of the Provincial Chapter of Brazil and the first Vice-

provincial Chapter of Colombia, which were both held in January. We also studied the report on the establishment of ASAP (Assembly of Superiors in Asia and French Polynesia) which met in Manila in February and we approved its statutes. This is the first step toward the formation of an Interprovincial Conference for Asia and French Polynesia, as the Enlarged General Council in Lima requested. As is almost always the case, we also responded to different requests for permissions and dispensations.

That is all for now. As I said, when we have sessions of the General Council from now on we will be in communication with you. By being in closer contact we want to involve you more and more in the process of governing and animating the whole Congregation. We would especially invite you to participate actively and enthusiastically in the preparation of the next General Chapter, which can be an opportunity to practice that creative fidelity that must characterize us as religious of the Sacred Hearts today.

As we contemplate the pierced heart of Jesus during this time of preparation for Easter, may we discover the attitudes, options and tasks that must be ours in order to follow him always and everywhere. May Mary accompany us on our journey.

Fraternally,



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



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Rome, June 15, 2004

The Implementation of the Enlarged General Council of Lima and Preparation of the General Chapter

Dear brothers,

Cordial greetings from the city of Rome. Just a few days ago we finished another four-week series of Council sessions. As I told you in my last letter, dated March 18th, we wish to keep you informed of what we are doing in the Council sessions, thence my reason for writing to you once again.

The Council agenda has been very full and the bi-monthly "Info SS.CC." has kept you somewhat informed on some of the agenda items. Even so, in this letter I will try to give you an account of all the subjects discussed. However I will dwell on those aspects that are especially related to the process which was begun from the decisions of the Enlarged General Council of Lima, and similarly, as I explained in the last letter, the preparation process for the next General Chapter.

Visits and Chapters

During the first week, our work revolved around the reports from the visits that the General Government carried out during the months of March and April. General visits were made to the German Province, including the Region of South Belgium and the Community in Norway, as well as the Irish-English Province. Sérgio Stein and Javier Cerda made the former visitation and Alphonse Fraboulet and Willie Donegan the later. Our sessions studied the development of these visits as much as the drafts of the respective reports. The reports were then rewritten as the definitive reports which were sent to the respective communities visited.

In the same way, the decisions of the Provincial Chapter of Hawaii, and those of the Chapter of the Vice-province of French Polynesia,

were studied and approved. Willie Donegan represented the General Government in Hawaii and Alphonse Fraboulet in French Polynesia. Information from the March meeting of the English-Speaking Interprovincial Conference in Wareham was also shared. Enrique Losada attended this meeting.

Advisory Commission for Finances

The first meeting of the Advisory Commission for Finances took place during the second week. As you know from the announcement in the last communiqué, the members of the Commission are: Gerardo Joannon, Provincial Econome of Chile, Bill Penderghest, General Econome, Santiago López, from the Spanish Province, and Franz Koll, from the German Province. In the first meeting, the General Government explained to the Commission the reason for it was formed, noting the decision of the Enlarged General Chapter of Lima; and the objectives the General Government expected of it.

From the beginning, it was pointed out that the Commission would be advisory and not executive. The Commission is dependent on the General Government and, as such, its work is oriented toward informing and interacting with it. The Government may then make pertinent decisions based on the information presented to it by the Commission. However, the Commission has the freedom to ask questions, make requests, do studies and make the suggestions and proposals which they consider to be appropriate.

As has been said repeatedly, the fundamental work of the Commission is defined in the first decision on Finances from the Enlarged General Council, "*study the financial situation of the whole Congregation, in order to find alternative ways of financing: the Generalate, Initial Formation, the ordinary expenses of the Province of Africa starting in 2006, and some special projects that could solicit help from the whole Congregation.*"

Hence, we think the Commission needs to work on questions of economics and finances, studying the current situation of the Congregation on these levels and presenting us with some alternatives. We are aware that these alternatives will deal with the management and administration of the Congregation's assets: looking for new resources, greater or better returns, etc. But, it could also make proposals about

resources outside of the Congregation: foundations, donors, assistances, etc.

After an extensive and detailed dialogue, the Commission began its first study of the economic and financial reality of the Congregation. It started from the reports which the General Econome presented at the Enlarged General Chapter in Lima, the contributions of the Provinces to the General House and the model used for accounting reports. After two days of work, the Commission presented an outline of its objectives to the General Government.

In this document, they started from a "*status questionis*" on the general situation of the Congregation in terms of personnel and finances. Then they pointed out some methods and instruments that might be used in facing a situation of great reductions in personnel and resources: sharing information to raise the consciousness of the brothers, examining our life-style, streamlining and reducing costs along budgetary lines, and performing audits of each Province and of the whole Congregation. The reorganization and restructuring of the Congregation was presented as a way of helping to streamline and reduce costs. There was also a proposal for studying eventual outside assistance: consultants, foundations, resources from international solidarity organizations, etc. A forthright study of the financing of the General House, international formation, and the ordinary expenses of the African Province was also proposed.

Keeping all of this in mind, and after dialoguing with the General Government, the Commission assumed a number of tasks that were deduced from the document they presented: preparation of information for the meetings of Provincial Economes; studying the economic and financial functioning of the General House, PPCs and International Solidarity; studying possible auditors, foundations, etc.; and reviewing the investment policies. Once this work is completed they will prepare a series of proposals on the contributions to the General Government, a plan of formation for economies, alternatives for the General House, Initial Formation, the African Province and others.

The deadline for the Commission's work was set for December 2005 or early 2006. Afterward, the General Government will see how it can transmit this study to the Congregation, as well as the eventual

consultations that will be done before the General Chapter in regard to the decisions that the Chapter must make.

The Commission will meet with the General Government again from December 7th to 9th.

First draft of the "Proposal for Government Structures"

Subsequently, the General Government worked on its first draft of a "Proposal for Government Structures". This draft was prepared by Enrique Losada prior to the meeting and it allowed the Government to discuss concrete proposals at each level of government: general, interprovincial, provincial, viceprovincial, and regional. The starting point was the discussion at on changing the structures of governance in the Congregation to make them more suitable to the necessities of interdependence, above all in the areas of Common Mission and Formation that took place in the Enlarged General Council of Lima.

As in Lima, the figure of the Interprovincial Conference Coordinator was one of the aspects of the draft that was most discussed. Given the current reality of the Congregation in terms of strengths and resources, as well as in terms of the requests and necessities that come to us from the people and Churches where we are present, interdependence in Mission and Formation lead us, more and more, to promote projects and activities that have an interprovincial character and which depend on adequate personnel and resources.

This would seem to be the fundamental reason for the Interprovincial Coordinator to assume more authority in the areas of Mission and Formation. That is to say, watch over and take care that they live in an interdependent way in the area of the Conferences. It follows from this that the Interprovincial Conferences should be seen as governmental structures and not just structures of communion and collaboration.

Therefore, starting from the proposal of Lima, the draft suggests a homogeneity between the different levels of government that allows for clear institutional dialogue and immediate interaction, particularly in the areas of Mission and Formation. The Lima proposal tried to foster a circular movement around the areas of Mission and Formation at the different levels of government within the Congregation. This does not

preclude a sufficient flexibility in to proposed structures in order to integrate other possible areas of interdependence in the future.

The draft on governmental structures proposes changes in the Constitutions and General Statutes. It is clear that the intensity and extensiveness of these changes will depend on the options that are chosen through the process of study and decision-making. At the beginning, the General Government's position was that the changes at this level be only those that were strictly necessary for making the proposed structure a juridical possibility.

With this in mind, we have already initiated a dialogue with the Holy See on the proposed structural changes to ensure that they be legally valid. This dialogue will be maintained through out the process. From this dialogue we can say that it is not possible to reduce the number of counselors, as we had first thought of doing. Nevertheless, the distinction made in Lima of a reduced team working more at the General level, with other components of the General Government in closer relationship to the interprovincial level, continues to be valid. In fact these consultations have clearly left the door open for this possibility. Therefore we are trying develop it.

After a detailed study of the first draft, and including the suggestions that have continued to surface, we have decided on a second draft. It will again be the subject of consultations with the Holy See, and will be an item for discussion in the upcoming September meeting of the General Government with the Interprovincial Conference Coordinators, the Coordinator of ASAP and the Provincial Superior of Africa. We hope that this meeting will produce a new draft which can be studied by the whole Congregation.

The draft which has served as a basis for the Council's discussions in these sessions uses terms like Common Mission, Formation, Interdependence, which are principle components of the decisions made in Lima. On the other hand they are also very present in the language of the Congregation, Religious Life and the churches these days. For this reason it seemed advisable to dedicate a few sessions to seeking a common understanding of these terms. The truth is we don't always use these terms univocally; thus, this kind of reflection seemed necessary. From the outset we can say that it was very useful for this Government. We also believe it would be advisable for everyone to have

a clear lexis around the words that we use so often, which are basic to the processes we are developing in the Congregation. At the moment this remains an internal task of the Council. However, we believe that with further development we will be able to offer the Congregation something more mature in the form of a document or subsidy.

An Inspirational Document

In the same sphere of carrying out the decisions of Lima and preparing for the General Chapter, we have continued to reflect on the *inspirational document* that was proposed in the previous letter. That is to say a document that could be used in the preparation process as well as in the celebration of and later carrying out of the Chapter decisions. A document that could inspire the brothers who are called, through the Congregation's Charism, to live the Congregation's Vocation and Mission with creative fidelity.

An *Instrumentum Laboris* was prepared for the celebration of the 2004 Congress on Religious Life to be celebrated in Rome this coming November. The slogan of the Congress is, "*A Passion for Christ, a Passion for Humanity*". The *Instrumentum* has received positive comments among us. It could not only be used as a model for the inspirational document, but also as material that could be a help for our own document. As such, it would be good to dialogue on this subject in the aforementioned September meeting.

Proposal on Common Mission

As was announced in the last communiqué, in these sessions we worked on the proposal presented by the General Mission Secretariat for carrying out the Enlarged General Council's decisions on Mission. The proposal, which the General Government began to discuss in the in its sessions last December, were modified and enriched by Councilors, Willie Donegan, General Mission Coordinator and Alphonse Fraboulet, member of the General Mission Secretariat. In its current form, it starts from a list of the characteristics of a "community in mission" that is based on the Constitutions and General Chapters of 1994 and 2000, as well as the directions of the Enlarged General Council of Lima. The proposal also includes a process for community reflection, in the form of a "life review", that will allow the communi-

ties to see their present situation, and look at the future, using the above indicated characteristics as points of reference.

The General Government adopted this proposal in order to carry out, to a large extent, that which concerns the General Government in the first decision from Lima on Mission: *"That the General Government, through the General Mission Secretariat or other appropriate structures, move forward a process of practically accepting the criteria that must orient all our apostolates. Among these criteria we would note the following:*

- that the presences and works manifest our charism in a courageous and significant manner;*
- that they be the responsibility of a community and not of one individual;*
- that they have a clear option for the poor and marginalized."*

As I write this letter, the General Mission Secretariat is meeting in Madrid. Among the items on their agenda is the perfecting this proposal and sending it to the communities as soon as possible.

We have also reflected on the second decision of Lima in the area of Common Mission. It makes reference to an inventory of the meaningful presences for the Congregation's mission, and the new and equally valid initiatives which run the risk of disappearing because of a lack of personnel. At present the General Mission Secretariat is also working on this subject as well as the development of decision three of Lima, which has to do with a *"profile of the SS.CC. presence in a parish"*. We hope to share all of this at the meeting with the various Coordinators this September.

A Calendar for the process of preparing the General Chapter

As one can see, the series of steps that have been taken in relation to carrying out the decisions of Lima and preparing for the next General Chapter require a more precise calendar. This will also be another object for our attention in the September meeting. The General Government will make a proposal.

Each time we hold sessions, the Council normally reviews the geographical areas and areas of animation and service that are the divisions of the work of the Government team. Each of the Councilors has

assumed delegation for some of these areas. We reviewed them again in these sessions.

Area: Initial Formation

Given that the Coordinating Commission for Initial Formation was to hold its second meeting here in Rome immediately after these sessions, we gave Sérgio Stein, the delegate of the General Government for this area, some suggestions about the Report that needed to be made at their meeting. The agenda of this meeting had already been studied in previous sessions. Sérgio and Javier Cerda, who collaborates with Sérgio in this area, met with the members of this Commission over a two-week period and the results of this meeting will be made known later.

Area: Service of authority and leadership

Likewise we studied the proposals for the development of a process on "*Service of authority and leadership in the Congregation*" that were presented by Javier Cerda, the General Government delegate for this area. As you already know, the General Government has undertaken the process of defining and characterizing the type of leadership needed at this time in the Congregation. It has done so in dialogue with all the brothers using the various methods that have been developed over the past three years. As a result of this, we have already offered a "vademe-cum" on the service of authority at the local level. The question remains of preparing a document which can help the Congregation to define and characterize the service of authority in apostolic ministry.

As was the case for authority at the local level, it started from the "*Guide for an Exchange of Experiences*" which was sent out two years ago. The Guide has been a communication channel with the Congregation for gathering input and experiences. Javier presented the outline of a document for animation at the apostolic level during the sessions last December. The outline was approved and Javier then developed a series of materials around the features of apostolic leadership which are based in Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Good Father, the Constitutions, Rule of Life, other Congregational documents and current reflections. Consultations have been carried out on this material with ten or so brothers, spread over the whole geographical area of the Congregation. They were brothers who could read the documentation in Spanish, and

who represented different ministries as well as different geographical areas.

A Commission will write the final draft of the document over the next few weeks in light of the results of the consultations. The Commission members are: Manfred Kollig, of the German Province, Felipe Félix Lazcano, of the community in India, and Sandro Mancilla of the Chilean Province. Javier as well as Enrique Losada are collaborating with the Commission in writing the final version of the document. Later on, it will be translated and sent to the communities.

We have decided to stop the process of definition and characterization of the service of authority and leadership once the fundamental documents on the local level and apostolic ministry are finished. We have judged that, what can be said at the level of provincial authority or at other levels of authority from the point of view of definition and characterization, would only be a repetition of what has been said at the local and ministerial level. However, given the work we are doing on the proposal for government structures from Lima, we think we will be able to introduce elements of the characterization and definition of the service of authority into this proposal, which might complete the process on this service as well as the structural aspects themselves. In the end, if the governmental structures are not animated by the values, which give content to the service of authority, they are empty structures. At the same time, the service of authority must be supported by structures, which are suitable to the character and characteristics of the type of service of authority to be exercised.

Geographic Areas

On the subject of geographic areas, we studied a request from Manila concerning an eventual purchase of property for the Novitiate. We have been renting a house ever since the house we bought together with the sisters became too small for both groups. It is clear that by paying rent we are losing money each year, and this definitely makes the cost of the Priority Project of the Congregation located there, more expensive. We have made some suggestions, which are in reference to the future of Manila. The issue needs to be seen in the broader framework of the future of ASAP (Assembly of Superiors in Asia and Polynesia) and the possible CAP (Conference of Asia and Polynesia). At

present, therefore, we see that whatever the solution may be, including that of buying property, it must fall within the limits of the Congregation's financial contributions to the PPC. Finally we made some suggestions with regard to the all of the formation and the environment in which our houses are located.

Similarly, we talked about the process that is being carried out between the Province of Brazil and the Region of Paraguay. In this process Paraguay will become a Region of Brazil rather than Spain. After the General Government's visit to Brazil and Paraguay, the Provincial and Regional Governments were invited to finalize the process in one way or another. However, given the ongoing dialogue between them, it seemed better not to interrupt the process, even if it might take a little longer to conclude. In any case, it is clear that it is important to facilitate the full integration of the Region of Paraguay into the context of the Interprovincial Conference of Latin America.

Visits to the communities

At the end of our sessions we reviewed the progress of the visits that being made to the provincial, viceprovincial and regional communities. The method we are using needs revision. First of all, we were concerned that the visit not be something that is punctual with no follow-up afterward. We spoke about various ways of ensuring this continuity: meetings with the respective governments after a certain amount of time has passed; having one or both visitors attend some event in the community after the visit, such as a Chapter, an assembly; etc. It was thought that the final report could be used as an element for dialoguing with the communities that were visited, especially in using some points of the report that could be reviewed periodically.

We discussed the type of interviews we are using with the brothers, and the convenience of everyone using the same or a common outline for making our visits. The outline could then be adapted to each circumstance, keeping in mind the uniqueness of each person. It also seemed of interest to use care in the local community meetings we try to have. It would be important for us to be in contact with the significant missionary presences of the communities visited, taking special care in the distribution of our time. In the report, it would also be important to stress those aspects which can open the community to

the future, and to assure that the options chosen be assumed by the whole community.

At the end of this review we analyzed the pending visits on the calendar. It is clear that we still have many visits to make and that we cannot do all of them in pairs. So we considered asking a brother from outside the General Government to be a delegate for visits to particular communities. In addition we want to maintain an organization of the visits that will allow us to have a common vision of a Conference or geographic area.

In October and November of 2004 we will finish the visits of Latin America with the visit to Chile; and begin the eventual CAP, with visits to Indonesia, the Philippines and India. The visits of CAP will continue in March and April of 2005 in Japan and French Polynesia. Africa and France will be included in this time period. In October and November of 2005 we will visit the ESIC (USA-East, USA-West and Hawaii). Finally, in March and April of 2006 visits will be done in Spain, Andalusia, Netherlands and Flanders.

Calendar of Council Sessions

We also set our Council sessions for the year 2005. We want this letter announce this to everyone, especially Provincial, Viceprovincial and Regional Superiors, so that they don't organize activities that require the presence of the General Government during these times. These sessions will be: February 7th to March 4th, April 25th to May 20th, and October 31st to Christmas.

Meeting of the sisters' and brothers' General Governments

On May 7th the General Governments of the brothers and sisters met to discuss the status of the preparations for the next General Chapters. These will be celebrated at the same time, during the month of September 2006, and in the same place, the General House of the brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome. Clearly there are themes that must be discussed together, as they depend on both branches at the same time: the Secular Branch, structures of communion, etc. But we must be attentive to the overall preparation of both Chapters, as certainly other topics could be the objects of joint consideration.

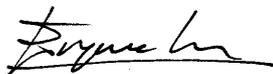
We looked at the status of the book on the first chapter of the Constitutions titled, "*The Lord Led us by the Hand*", which should be published shortly. We spoke about the possibility of having Bill Moore provide some illustrations for the book. He is a brother from the USA-West Province and is known for his paintings. We also talked about the number of copies that should be printed and the financial cost of the publication. The book is a joint project of the two General Governments, done in the framework of collaboration on Congregational Spirituality.

Lastly, we spoke about a series of subjects in regard to the Center of Communications, in which both General Governments also collaborate. We dealt with the consultation that was carried out in the Congregation on Info and Com-Union and its respective results. Since the Communication Center has taken responsibility for the information, I will leave it to them. We also discussed and approved the themes for the next issues of Com-Union.

The information, up to this point, has been about the work done in the four weeks of these sessions that seemed convenient to communicate to you. We hope that this communication will be useful not only for keeping you up-to-date on what we are doing, but also helping you to feel somewhat involved, and in so far as possible, provide some interaction with us from your own situations.

The last General Chapter tried to make a synthesis of your activities and orientations with the words *radicality* and *circularity*. From here, I wish to join with you in a prayer to God Our Father, that he give us the Spirit of Jesus, allowing us to put interaction, interdependence, circularity ...-always words which can never demand the category of definitive or ultimate for themselves- in service of the Common Mission, that it might be a humble, generous and enthusiastic contribution, that we as Congregation offer to our world and our churches. May Mary accompany us on this path.

Always at your disposal, fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', written in a cursive style.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.

Superior General



Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori
Casa Generalizia
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Rome, December 14, 2004

A Letter on the Occasion of the Congress on Religious Life

Dear brothers,

Advent greetings from Rome as we await the Lord who has come, who comes today and who will come again. I am writing to you to share my impressions of the Congress on Religious Life, that I had the good fortune to attend during the last week of November here in Rome. Along with this letter you will receive the final document of the Congress. Even though it will be published in various places, I think it is good that you already have a copy of it.

My Perceptions of the Congress

The Congress on Religious Life was an extraordinary event. It was extraordinary in two ways. It was the first congress that was the result of the collaboration of the two unions of Superiors General, the women's' and the men's' and it brought together men and women religious from five continents and widely diverse situations and ministries. If I had to put in one phrase, I would say it was an intense experience of unity in diversity. Unity and diversity were both clearly evident at the congress and it was an expression of what religious throughout the world experience.

Unity was clear in the very theme of the congress: "*With a passion for Christ, with a passion for humanity.*" There was a strong sense that the religious present and those they represented experience that as the one and only basis for their lives. And you can appreciate how the word "passion" came to be more clearly understood as a result of times of shared prayer, passionate talks by the different speakers and the many other contributions to the Congress in word and deed.

During the Congress, the Samaritan woman and the Good Samaritan were our companions on the journey, as they were during the

months of preparation as the two icons in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. I would also say they were an expression of the unity to which I referred. It was an achievement in itself to have found in those two images an inspiration for reflection and contemplation, an incentive to unleash energies present in religious life and a stimulus to quench our thirst for God and attend to wounded humanity lying by the side of the road in our personal lives and in our societies. As the final text says very beautifully, *the Samaritan woman and the Good Samaritan become for us a mystagogy of contemplation and of commitment to contemplative mercy*. Dolores Alexander, a Spanish Religious of the Sacred Heart and theologian, masterfully led us to that awareness.

Confronting a world affected by globalization, with its positive and negative aspects, was also a source of unity. The sociocultural impact of globalization on religious life were presented very intelligently by J.B. Libanio, a Brazilian Jesuit theologian. "September 11" made clear that our world is one in which so many peoples are "homeless." They are without a "history" which extends from the past and into the future. Ours is a world in which the anxiety to be in control of everything is interwoven with the inability to be responsible for our own lives. Timothy Radcliffe, an English Dominican and former Master General of the Order, invited us as religious to be signs of hospitality, hope and freedom for such a world. Sandra Schneiders, an Immaculate Heart Sister from the USA and a theologian, called us to offer an alternative vision of evangelical poverty and prophetic obedience.

It almost goes without saying that those who spent five days in the large meeting room in the Ergife Hotel, not far from the via Aurelia here in Rome, experienced diversity. To get some idea of that diversity all you had to do was look around the room at the 80 tables with about ten participants at each. Each table, a reflection of the larger group, took an active role, responding to speakers' interventions, suggestions of the coordinating group and the liturgy team.

Faces, expressions, languages, dress and behavior were different and this was without a doubt a great richness. We were looking at the new face of religious life in all its expanse and complexity. In a talk toward the end of the Congress, Jesus Maria de Lecea, Superior General of the Pious Schools, called us to this realization. While it is something very evident, we need to reflect on explicitly. If one thing was clear

from the Congress, it was that when we speak of crisis, or aging or the diminishment of religious life, expressions which religious in Western Europe and the United States often use, we should not think that they capture the rich and diverse reality that is religious life internationally.

Diversity was also evident in the reflection and the approach to each topic treated during the Congress. Some examples will show what I mean: a Vietnamese religious, who had spent a good part of his life in prison, speaking of the cross, an African religious speaking of chastity and fertility, some of the comments of Latin Americans on the conference "Religious Life after September 11," and the interventions of some young religious on the importance of interpersonal relationships within community. The impact of the cultural context was evident in each of the continental groupings. Again, all this spoke to me of richness. Diversity in unity can be an inestimable strength for our religious life when we are able to experience it and express it in each of our communities and also when *we understand that "consecrated life" must reach beyond the boundaries of our institutes, of our Catholic faith, of our Christian faith* as the final document reminds us. Willma Esperanza Quintanilla, President of the Conference of Religious of Latin American, called conferences of religious to collaborate more, especially at the continental level, in facing common problems together.

Toward "a Samaritan Religious Life"

The objective of the Congress was to recognize the action of the Spirit today in the consecrated life, to discern and articulate what God is saying to us, and to encourage one another to action. We tried to identify what is new, discern where the Spirit is leading us and see how we might respond in a new way to that call.

I have to say again that our "*dear Samaritans*" were a great inspiration. I would say that the title of the talk by Bruno Secondin, an Italian Carmelite theologian, and Diana Pappa, an Italian Poor Clare theologian, suggest the direction we must take as we try to live "*Samaritan religious life*." The life that the Spirit is stirring up demands that we discern and articulate our attitudes, convictions and plans of action. Yes, we must go "*from the well to the inn*" and we must also go "*from the inn to the well*." We must go from merciful contemplation to contemplative mercy and vice versa.

On the last day the Congress divided into fifteen working groups. I believe that the material they produced brings together many important suggestions as to how to incarnate this passion for Christ and this passion for humanity that the Samaritan woman by the well in Sicar and the Good Samaritan on the way to Jericho helped us understand so well.

Profound evangelical discernment, hospitality and gratitude, non-violence and gentleness, freedom of spirit, boldness and creativity, tolerance and dialogue and simplicity that values the resources of the poor and little ones are the "seven contemporary virtues" of which the final document speaks. The document also says that they enable us to *quench thirst, to heal wounds, to be the healing balm on open wounds, to respond to the longings of our brothers and sisters for joy, for love, for liberty and for peace*, as John Paul II asked of us in his message to the Congress.

We will have to go back over and over again to the input on signs of vitality, obstacles, convictions and lines of action that were the result of participants' reflection on various topics related to contemporary religious life: justice, peace and human suffering; inculturation, interreligious dialogue; art, the media, freedom to be prophetic; solidarity with the marginalized; consecrated celibacy; letting the word of God take root, the thirst for God and the search for meaning, Ongoing Formation; the culture of a Congregation; community as mission, collaboration with the laity; government and authority; and the ecclesial dimension of religious life. And then let us go where the Spirit lead us, as the final document says.

The Congress and the Congregation

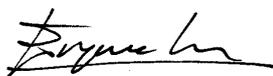
Three members of the Congregation were among the 847 religious from five continents walking along the Via Aurelia each morning and afternoon toward the Hotel Ergife to attend the Congress. Among the participants were Superiors General, theologians, directors of journals on religious life, presidents of conferences of religious and a significant number of young religious, who were invited to the Congress as the voice of their generation. The three SS.CC.'s were: Jeanne Cadiou, Superior General of the sisters, Eduardo Pérez-Cotapos, Provincial of Chile participating as president of the Chilean Conference of Religious and myself.

As I have already said, being there was a great privilege but it came with a responsibility. With my fellow participants I have the responsibility to communicate the results of the Congress, which can be a major milestone for religious life at the beginning of the third millennium. For that reason I wanted to write this letter and send along with it the final document.

I would also like to emphasize another point. The objective of the Congress was to recognize the action of the Spirit in religious life today in order to discern how to respond to what God is asking of us as religious and to inspire one another to action. Within a few months, at Easter 2005, we will begin the preparatory process for the next General Chapter. Looking once again at the main themes of the Congress, the insight into God's word that resulted, and the sense of being part of a family that extends beyond the limits of any one institute and that does not just have *a glorious history to remember and tell, but also a great history to be accomplished* (Vita Consecrata 110), could be a way of concretizing for our Congregation the Congress's overall goal: to discern the action of the Spirit and to respond.

May Christmas which we celebrate as the birth of Jesus and the birth of the Congregation, be a time to renew our faith and hope in religious life and the vocation which we have been given.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', written in a cursive style.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General



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Rome, December 19, 2005

Beatification Process of Father Damien

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Today, December 19, 2005, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI received His Eminence, Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in a private audience. In the course of the audience, the Holy Father authorized the Congregation to make public ... (among other things) the decree of a miracle attributed to the Venerable Servant of God, EUSTAQUIO VAN LIESHOUT, a priest professed in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Picpus) who was born November 3, 1890 in Aarle-Rixtel (Netherlands) and died August 30, 1943 in Belo Horizonte (Brazil)”.

This news was just published in the electronic edition of Osservatore Romano on the web page of the Holy See.

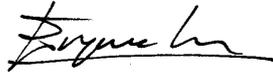
It seemed fitting to communicate to all of you, brothers and sisters of the Congregation, this wonderful news that culminates the beatification process of our beloved brother Fr. Eustáquio. After many years of waiting, we can finally say that the Church has recognized Fr. Eustáquio as blessed. We realize that this is a cause for giving thanks to God, great joy for all of us, and renewed enthusiasm for our congregational charism that, once more, we see recognized as a root of blessedness in one of our own.

Starting now, interviews will be taking place with the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte and the Holy See to establish the place and time for the beatification ceremony.

We would like to add one more item to the good news that has occurred today. Precisely, the Congregation of the Saints sent us the decree of the juridical validity of the processes held in the Diocese of Honolulu in 2003 and 2005 on the supposed healing miracle attributed

to the intercession of Fr. Damien. Starting now there will be a study of the supposed miracle by the experts and theologians of the Congregation of the Saints. We will continue to inform you about this development as it unfolds.

Hoping that this news will help us to experience the mystery of Christmas with deeper joy, I remain always at your disposal, fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enrique Losada', with a horizontal line underneath.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

Joint letters
to the Congregation

Enrique Losada ss.cc.

and

Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.

Superiors General

Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori

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Rome, April 15, 1995

Father Damien's Beatification

To the brothers and sisters of the Congregation.

With the official announcement of February 20th by the Episcopal Conference of Belgium and the letter of February 27th from the Commission for the Beatification of Father Damien we have all been invited to Brussels on June 4, Pentecost Sunday, for the recognition by the Church of our Brother Damien as blessed.

The way leading to this day has not been easy. Until just recently it was complicated by successive changes and delays. This caused a certain disillusionment and lack of interest. Such was to be expected, given the problems that many had to face. Last year trips and celebrations that were already scheduled had to be cancelled. There were also some that had to come anyway from quite a distance because it was too late to change their arrangements.

With all that behind us, it is necessary that we prepare once again for the celebration of the Beatification of Damien. This is an important event for the universal church, for the Congregation and for the world.

First, it is an important event in the life of the Church. It is the Church which publicly proclaims the blessedness of one of its members. In this case it is Damien, apostle of the lepers, servant of humanity. The Church gives witness that our brother was a worthy follower of Jesus, the one who went about doing good and who proclaimed blessed the poor, those who weep, peacemakers, the pure of heart, those persecuted for justice sake...

It is an important event for the Congregation. Damien lived in openness to the mystery of God, a relationship with Jesus the Christ and a commitment to the spreading of the Kingdom. This all had its

source in his life as a religious of the Sacred Hearts. From the time of his profession he contemplated and experienced the God who is mercy, the God whose heart is open and surrendered. This contemplation and experience of God, especially centered in the Eucharist, he knew to be so necessary from his personal experience and the tradition of our Congregation. This would be what would inspire his generous heart and tenacious personality to proclaim the goodness of God and to serve all people unconditionally especially the most excluded and needy.

The cry of those with leprosy confined on the wretched island of Molokai reached the ears of Damien and moved him to go to live among them. With the strength of the Eucharist, and the hearts of Jesus and Mary as model, he gave his life to those who had become victims of disease, exclusion and injustice. He became one of them. He did this in the most natural and simple way, one not exempt from suffering. From his master he had learned to accept suffering as a consequence of being faithful to the will of the Father in a world where the mystery of pain and sin is present.

However as Damien said and as his friends confirmed he was "*the happiest missionary in the world*". It was not a shattered life that was inspired by our Congregation's charism but one that was full and happy.

The Beatification of Damien is also an important event for all people who recognize human dignity as something which is nonnegotiable and always to be respected, promoted and served. Damien was committed to assuring that those women and men confined at Kalaupapa did not lose their human dignity on account of their sickness. Damien reminds us always that behind faces disfigured by sickness, pain, discrimination and hatred there is always a person worthy of respect, a human being who must be affirmed beyond all that can deny one's dignity. The recognition by the Church of the person of Damien is therefore a celebration for all those who believe in the human person.

The celebration of this event is much larger than what will take place June 4 in Brussels. Many of our brothers and sisters are not able to be present. The significance of the event of which we have been speaking calls us to go further.

To recognize Damien as a model of Christian discipleship, as an outstanding brother of the Congregation and as an exemplary human being can and must have consequences for the Church, the Congregation and the world.

The consequences for the Congregation merit special attention on our part. Those of us who believe that the famous question of Ghandi as to the source of Damien's heroism finds its answer in the charism of the Congregation cannot let the Beatification of our brother go by without examining our own lives and the life of the Congregation in his light. It is not that the light of Damien blinds us by its brightness but rather it illumines our present and orients our future helping us to be faithful to our Congregation's vocation and mission.

Damien is presented to us as a model of that which our charism has to offer. Let us try, as he did, to serve out of love. As Damien, let us seek the "Molokais" of our world. Leprosy continues to be a problem for many people. However there are also many other forms of "leprosy", some possibly worse: AIDS, drug addiction, immigrants trying to survive outside their own culture, the loneliness of so many elderly, the precarious situation of so many children, the suffering of women who are exploited...We do not have to go far to find such need which simply asks of us a little more love and solidarity.

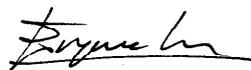
Without a doubt, the Beatification of Damien can be a moment of grace in which we are once more invited as individuals and as a community to conversion. It is a moment which gives new meaning to our lives. It is a time to overcome our laziness, mediocrity and our lack of freedom and generosity. May it be a moment of joy and gratitude for the gift which God has given us in our brother Damien.

From Rome, the 15 of April, 1995, the 106th anniversary of the death of Damien of Molokai, in the hope of Easter.

Your brother and sister,



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

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Rome, 1st Sunday of Advent, 1998

The Preparation of the Bicentenary of the Congregation

Dear brothers and sisters,

The opening of the third liturgical year in preparation for the great Jubilee 2000 seems to be a meaningful time to address this message. The Word of God heard today tells us that "*the day is near,*" that we must be ready and active and "*walk in the light of the Lord.*" These are so many invitations which we take up as we begin the preparatory year for the bicentennial of our religious family. The jubilee year will be celebrated from Christmas 1999 until Christmas 2000.

Our first wish is that, from now on, each and every one of us feels involved in the celebration of our bicentennial anniversary. Why? Because it is very appropriate to celebrate anniversaries and, in this case, to commemorate two centuries of the life of the Congregation, honoring the lives of thousands of sisters and brothers. It is also a joy to share with others the basis of our faith and what drives us to mission. It is a unique occasion for different generations, nations and continents to share together the basis and motivation for our hope as Sacred Hearts brothers, sisters and laity. As with our ancestors Abraham and Sarah we can reflect on our "wandering" through time and space, and interiorly capture what moves and enlightens our vocation as pilgrims on this earth. These "wanderings," yesterday, today and tomorrow pass over the most ordinary roads in the daily life of persons and communities. If the Congregation awaits the year 2000 and its Christmas, so too, the Church awaits the year 2000 and its Christmas. Therefore, Christmas 2000 is truly a moment when the world and the Church call each one to "*return to his/her country of origin*" (Lev. 25, 10). That is why our jubilee ought to move us and make us progress as Church in knowing, following, and proclaiming Him who is "*true light, who enlightens all people.*" (Jn 1, 9)

Christmas 2000 is also a summons of the Congregation to engage in concrete actions for effective changes and for involvement "*with all those who, led by the Spirit, work to build a world of justice and love.*" (Constitutions No. 4) With the General Chapters of the year 2000 in view, the time has come for the Congregation to pull out of its store "*the new and the old*" proceeding with confidence that "*something new is springing forth.*" (Cf. Is 43, 19)

How will we prepare ourselves for Christmas Night 2000? We have already written in our August 11, 1996 letter to you that the 200th celebration will be made in the context of a vibrant personal and communal renewal in the heart of each one. That is the essential. All the local, provincial or continental initiatives are most welcome. They can come from brothers, sisters and laity and can be carried out together. It would be very good if ideas and information on this subject are circulated throughout the Congregation thus making the celebration of our "holy year" all the more universal. We have already had echoes of plans being made here and there. Suggestions have come to us; all are interesting, we will have to see how to follow through. On the part of the General Governments, we have retained some concrete means: a calendar of our jubilee year with monthly themes, press releases in different languages with Congregational material usable for community animation, a special number of Com-Union which will recount our 200 years and our outlook for the future. It is also good to recall that one of the goals of the Cahiers de Spiritualité is to help us in the bicentennial preparation. The celebration of the bicentennial of our religious family can witness to the energy that circulates in our Institute, and of the enthusiasm we have for our vocation-mission received from God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Co-responsibility from all is needed if this year is to become a year of grace for the life of the Congregation.

May the anniversary of our foundation be an effective "refounding" in fidelity to our origins. Let us continue journeying together joyously along the SS.CC. road which stretches from Christmas 1800 to Christmas 2000. May the wind be at our backs!



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.



Enrique Losada ss.cc.

Superior General

Superior General

Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori

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Rome, May 10, 1999

The Preparation of the General Chapters of 2000

Dear brothers and sisters,

The two General Governments met May 5 and 6 to continue our work of preparing together the upcoming General Chapters of 2000. As you know, we had already begun this task in December trying to be faithful to what had been asked of us since the last General Chapters in 1994. However it was only now that we arrived at some conclusions which, given their importance, we thought best to tell you about as soon as possible.

First of all, one can see a common desire for collaboration between the two chapters which is made particularly clear in the choice to celebrate them at the same time in the same place and to prepare them together.

Secondly, the fact that our chapters are celebrated in the context of the bicentennial of the Congregation is in itself a call to express the unity of the two branches, which have the same vocation and mission.

Thirdly both General Governments have expressed a clear desire that the two chapters be real opportunities to make decisions that lead to action. This should take place in a climate of discernment and against a horizon of refoundation or of creative fidelity, such as was communicated to the Congregation in the recent documents: *"Journeying toward the Year 2000"* for the sisters and the *"Ninth Circular Letter of the Superior General"* addressed to the brothers.

On that basis we consider it necessary to plan times together so the Chapters can treat at least three points:

- The Missionary Projects of the Congregation or the Priority Missionary Projects: Africa and Asia.
- The Secular Branch.
- Appropriate structures for the service of authority in projects that involve collaboration at all the levels. This means developing what article 8 of our Constitutions asks of us when it says: "*The governments of both branches on their distinct levels are especially responsible for promoting this unity.*"

Commissions made up of members of the two General Governments are already working on these points in order to develop common proposals, which will be presented to the Chapters. We think it will also be very helpful to have an inter-capitular commission, which will be attentive to the development of each of the Chapters separately in order to assure a good coordination between them. This should facilitate sharing information and, should the need arise, the two Chapters treating other points together.

Finally we have come to a common slogan which is an attempt to express in a synthetic way many of the aspects already present in some way in our hopes for these upcoming events in the life of the Congregation. Given the importance that we attribute to these elements, along with the slogan, we offer you an exegesis of it that can help all of us personally and communally enter into the preparation for the chapters.

"Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk!" (John 5:8)

Various times in the Gospel, Jesus appears concerned about those who are deprived of life: the sick, the blind, the lame, paralytics, and even the dead. It is the poor who merit his complete compassion. It is to them that he speaks his word and they are the primary focus of his activity and his call. "*I do will it. Be cured*" (Mark 1:41) "*Stand up, pick up your mat and go home.*" (Mark 2:11) "*Follow me.*" (Mark 2:14) "*Stand up here in front.*" (Mark 3:3) "*Stretch out your hand.*" (Mark 3:5) "*Come out of the man.*" (Mark 5:8) "*Your faith has cured you. Go in peace.*" (Mark 5:34) "*Little girl, get up.*" (Mark 5:41) "*What do you want me to do for you?*" (Mark 10:51) "*Young man, I bid you get up.*" (Luke 7:14) "*Your sins are forgiven.*" (Luke 7:48) "*Woman, you are free of your infirmity.*" (Luke 13:12) "*Receive your sight. Your faith has healed you.*" (Luke 18:42) "***Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk!***" (John 5:8)

The setting of the synoptic text (Mark 2:1-2 and parallels), is the context of a community of different persons: some look on and listen, others carry the paralytic and look for a possible way to get to Jesus; the paralytic lets himself be carried and gets the complete attention of Jesus. Jesus bestows on him a salvation that is total. In the text of John 5:1-8, Jesus is on the way to the Temple where he is going to celebrate the feast, but he veers off from his path because of the poor who are by the pool. His option for the poor "*Do you want to be healed?*" provokes a response from the poor man, "*Sir, I do not have anyone.*" And Jesus acts, "***Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk!***" Present (Stand up!), past (your mat) and future (walk!) make up one and the same movement.

These events not only arouse surprise, admiration, esteem or faith but also rejection and condemnation. Whether it is by the fact that the messianic claims of Jesus are discussed (Mark) or his innovations as regards the sabbath are not accepted, before Jesus no one can remain indifferent or inactive. Jesus leaves no one paralyzed.

These are texts that recall others from the Old Testament, such as 1 Kings 19, which tells of the flight of Elijah and how he takes refuge on Mount Horeb. In the midst of his despair and his desire to die, God addresses him, "*Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you.*" (1 Kings 19:7) In his fear and desire to escape, God challenges him, "*Why are you here, Elijah.*" (1 Kings 19:9). In the midst of his indecision, God calls him, "*Go take the road back.*" (1 Kings 19:15)

Imprisoned in Poitiers from October 10, 1793 to September 11, 1794, in the midst of the upheaval of the revolution, the young Henriette de la Chevalrie finds herself poor and deprived of all that had made up her life to that point. And, it is precisely at that moment that she hears the call of God, "*it is time to stand up and to go out.*" As she goes out, Henriette is another person; she walks in a new way.

The Good Father says to us, "*In Jesus we find everything.*" Without any doubt that is a certitude rooted in his personal experience in the granary of la Motte d'Usseau, when in some way he heard the Lord say to him, "*Stand up and go forth.*"

In short, the various contexts in which the words of the text that we have chosen as slogan for our General Chapters of 2000 appear speak to us of certain basic elements of our apostolic religious life.

These are things such as: the community, the poor, solidarity, reparation of life, the vocation to faith and to mission, new life, conflict, the challenge of a different future, the committed response of each person. And all of it, pointed toward Jesus, as the nucleus of all of history.

Fraternally,

Handwritten signature of Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. in cursive script.

Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General

Handwritten signature of Enrique Losada ss.cc. in cursive script.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

Congregazione dei Sacri Cuori

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Suore dei Sacri Cuori
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Rome, November 23, 1999
Feast of the Good Mother

The Unity of Brothers and Sisters and Collaboration in Mission

Dear sisters and brothers,

The meeting of the General Chapters of brothers and sisters September 14, 15 and 16, 1994 arrived at decisions, suggestions and recommendations, which were included in a letter that was a Chapter document of each of the branches of the Congregation. One of the recommendations was addressed directly to the Superiors General of the sisters and brothers. It asked them to prepare and publish a joint circular letter that would explore the topic of *"the unity of the two branches and their collaboration in mission."*¹

Conscious that *"The General Governments of the brothers and sisters are jointly, in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the whole Congregation,"*² this issue has been a concern of ours throughout the five years since our election. In order to prepare this letter we studied and shared quite a bit. For us and for our two councils that has been an opportunity to observe, to reflect on and to challenge ourselves on how we understand, live and promote the unity of the whole Congregation.

Let us tell you something of our journey. The topic was included on the agenda right from the first meeting of the two councils. However, it was in 1996 that the process picked up steam. After studying the issue together we were able to establish a methodology that has served as a basis for our work and reflection as well as providing an

¹ *Letter to the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts, Decisions of the Thirty-second General Chapter of the sisters, Rome, 1994; Decisions of the Thirty-fifth General Chapter of the brothers, Rome, 1994.*

² Chapter 1, article 8, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

outline for the letter. We chose to use the process of "see- judge- act", already a classic in church circles. Inspired by the pastoral practice of Jesus himself, it had been taken up and proposed by Vatican Council II as a way of discerning, interpreting and responding to the signs of the times.³

By the end of 1996 during our visits to the Provinces and Regions, we had met groups of brothers and sisters who were collaborating in ministry, formation and animation. We thought it would be helpful and necessary to ask some of these groups to make a contribution from their experience. We wanted to choose as broad a cross-section as possible, trying to gather experiences of how this fundamental aspect of our charism, the unity of brothers and sisters collaborating in mission, is lived out. Most of those asked did not take long in sending us a written account of their reflection.

There experiences of collaboration that have been contributed are not the only experiences of unity. Our visits to communities in different parts of the world and the different activities called for by our ministry have been incredibly helpful in coming to see the joys, the opportunities, the challenges and the possibilities involved in collaboration. All of that was helpful as we prepared this letter. It allowed us to give special attention to different aspects of collaboration in itself, relationships, common life and structures of animation and formation. We thought that one way of speaking about collaboration of brothers and sisters would be to begin with our own personal experiences in this area and so we decided to share those with you. Finally we took time to evaluate how we share information, dialogue and arrive at decisions in our respective governments, to look at what kind of relationships we have among us, and where we are with respect to the unity that the common Chapter document of 1994 said must be a goal for all the members of the Congregation.⁴

It is in the light of this reality we have referred to above and given our specific service within our religious family that we offer the part of our letter on "seeing." This section will offer insights from the input, our own personal experiences and an evaluation of the collaboration between the present General Governments. We have tried to look at

³ Cf. *Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 4 and 44.

⁴ *Letter to the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts; Chapter Documents, Rome, 1994.*

these situations openly and critically and to reflect on them contemplatively.

In the second part of the letter we attempt to present the rational and evangelical aspects of "*judging*." We take as our basis the classical criteria from article 8 of our Constitutions. These allow us to open up new horizons. We present something of a small database that can include many things. We can then evaluate before implementing anything. On the other hand we do not want to fall into relativism.

The third part develops the principal objective of our letter namely "*acting*." We also look at the changes in our reality and the process of conversion that entails. This process will be characterized clarity, realism, seriousness, risk and audacity. Taking into account the process set in motion by the General Chapters of 1994, we are called to move forward together. The journey will mean living unity as we stand on the threshold of the third SS.CC. century.

One more word on the way in which we conceived this letter. From what we have said so far you will see that we have tried to synthesize what is happening today. We have based our work on our present Constitutions and the experience of unity lived today in the Congregation. We have not tried to do a historical study. We did not have either the time or the means to begin such an undertaking. But we would appeal to anyone who would have a desire to do research on this particular topic to do so. Nor is our letter intended to be a doctrinal or theological exposition of the particular aspect of the charism that is the unity of brothers and sisters. A deeper study by someone in the family could be an object of interesting research from which everyone would profit.

One more detail: four hands write our common letter. You will probably have no problem figuring out the author of each section. That's alright, this is a joint letter! And it is thus that we offer it to you as part of the preparation and celebration of our religious family's bicentennial.

Experiences of Collaboration

a) Echoes of the Contributions of the brothers and sisters

First we would like to list the teams that responded to the call that we put out in 1996 and so furnished material for reflection and for developing this letter:

- Marcela de Taboada (Peru), Javier Cerda (Chile) and Enrique Moreno (Chile), leaders of the ENCLAVE, the international renewal experience offered to brothers and sisters in Latin America.
- brothers and sisters committed to the mission of Mozambique which is part of the Priority Mission Project/Mission Project of the Congregation of Africa.
- Bill Heffron (USA-East) and Helene Wood (Pacific-USA) leaders of the SS.CC. Experience that has been held in recent years in Wareham, USA.
- Carmen Rosa Cornejo and Bertrand Cherrier, responsible for Youth and Vocation Ministry in their respective Provinces in France.
- brothers and sisters collaborating in a Project of SS.CC. Apostolic Religious Life in the Valdivia region in Chile.
- María Pía Lafont and Miguel Díaz, responsible for Ongoing Formation in their respective Provinces in Spain.
- brothers and sisters involved in the common mission project of SS.CC. Religious Life in the Province of Sandia (Peru) in San Juan del Oro for the brothers and Putina Punco for the sisters.
- The novice master and novice mistress of the Asian Novitiates in Quezon City in the Philippines.

Naming all of these we can not pass over in silence our brothers and sisters who are in Kinshasa. We had asked their collaboration but due to the political problems, the war and the pillage they hardly had the time or the energy to put in writing how they are collaborating in mission from day to day. We want everyone to know how grateful we are.

The experiences reported have value in themselves. They are common to the brothers and sisters and they have been evaluated together. We can not include everything. What follows is a short synthesis of the principal observations and questions from each area of collaboration.

As regards Ongoing Formation, mutual enrichment is evident. Often sabbaticals and other programs, always well prepared, have allowed participants to appreciate the other branch and above all to know it better. Participants come to see themselves as complementary. They learn from the other gender. They note the fragility of real experiences of collaboration. Such experiences have sometimes been an occasion to acknowledge prejudices on both sides, to forgive one another and to set out again with greater trust. A question remains: how can what is begun during Ongoing Formation be followed up when one returns to the "normal life" of a community or of a pastoral commitment? Some brothers and sisters say that they have simply formed a friendship with a member of the other branch. A serious question to look into would be: how can we follow-up and deepen common experiences of Ongoing Formation "on site"? Small results are evident here and there.

Other groups of brothers and sisters (can we think of them as avant-garde?) have gone so far as to develop common apostolic or pastoral projects. The quality of what has been accomplished seems to depend on the amount of time taken to get to know one another, to meet together and to lay the bases for the project. Taking quality time for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist comes up in all the testimonies. Mutual support is a source of strength. Complementarity plays a positive role in maintaining and continuing any project of life and mission. Relationships between brothers and sisters are characterized by simplicity and they treat one another as equals. The group in San Juan del Oro - Putina Punco (Peru) notes that one of the riches is *"complementarity at all levels even household responsibilities...It is a lifestyle that lets us feel like normal human beings and that also helps us live the vows better ...and with our feet on the ground, it allows us to envision and create a new style of SS.CC. religious life."*

The recognition of the breadth of the challenge involved in apostolic and pastoral collaboration often comes up in the reports. It is difficult to fully appreciate one another as brothers and sisters. Difficulties in interpersonal relationships can so affect a project that it can be seriously compromised. It is evident that coordination is fundamental in modifying or evaluating a common project. The question of initiatives is often delicate. Where do they come from? Who takes them? Who proposes them? How are they studied and

implemented? The situation can become very sensitive. Rivalry can even develop.

There is also the whole area of Initial Formation. It is normal today to present the SS.CC. family as a Congregation of brothers and sisters, without denying the difficulties of history. In general the young people who are coming to us value highly the unity of the two branches. If certain young women came to know the Congregation through the brothers' branch, it also happens that some young men became acquainted with the Congregation through the sisters. Some novitiate programs include gatherings of the female and male novices the main purpose of which is sharing community life and reflecting together on our common SS.CC. spirituality. The novitiates in Quezon City, Philippines are organized at two levels. The brothers and sisters have liturgy, some courses, meals, house work and recreation in common. Other classes, studies, one meal a day, evaluations and finances are separate. All the brothers and sisters appreciate this double rhythm and find it to be way of learning openness, respect, freedom and harmony as they continually share the gifts of masculinity and femininity. However, they are also still "*trying to find the original vision of the Good father and the Good Mother, they recognize that there are many risks, they experience hurts and wounds.*" But they continue to believe in the basic value of unity for the Congregation, the world and the Kingdom. And so they continue to share responsibilities in communion.

b) Personal Experience: Enrique Losada

On another occasion, I wrote about my time in Initial Formation.⁵ I explained that all my formation took place after the Second Vatican Council. However given that the proximity of the Council and the evolution of the Spanish Province, in my first years I experienced the kind of formation characteristic of the brothers' Provinces after World War II up until the crisis that took place during the years in which I began my life in the Congregation.

It is not necessary to dwell on the fact that, as everyone is aware, identification with a Congregation of brothers and sisters was very weak in that type of Initial Formation. One identified with the male branch of the Congregation, which for all intents and purposes was seen as a

⁵ Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Fifth Circular Letter to the Brothers*, Rome, 1996.

religious institute separate from that of the sisters. Reference to the history of the Congregation was not excessive. It focused principally on the Good Father, Father Damien, the missionaries of the Pacific, the particular history of the provincial communities and their missions. The books, articles and documents which were used in the formation of candidates either did not mention the female branch⁶ or such a reference would have been considered difficult for someone just entering the Congregation to understand.⁷

But that is not all. One of the documents which had a major influence in Initial Formation in our Congregation after the Council, one that had much deeper repercussions in my own than those mentioned above, was the Rule of Life.⁸ However it says nothing of the unity of the brothers and sisters. Someone like me, who was an assiduous reader of this beautiful document that was an instrument of congregational renewal, could feel one with the Congregation presented in the Rule of Life and not realize that one of the most basic characteristics of that Congregation was the unity of brothers and sisters.

This was not all the result of negligence or forgetfulness, even though some things could be attributed to that especially in the male branch. It was rather a result of directions taken after the Congregation suffered through the schism in the middle of the last century.⁹ The orientation taken was that the brothers and sisters would live the unity of the charism but preserve the distinction and even the separation between the two branches. More than anything the result seems to have been that emphasis was placed on the second and very little attention was given to the first, especially among the brothers.

Coming back to my personal experience, I really did know of the existence of the sisters even before entering the Congregation. In my

⁶ Bernard Garric ss.cc., *The Religious of the Sacred Hearts*, Fairhaven, 1954.

⁷ Hulselmans, Antoine ss.cc.: *Le Chapitre Préliminaire de la Règle de la Congrégation des Sacrés Cœurs*, Braine-Le-Compte, 1948.

⁸ *Rule of Life*, Rome, 1970.

⁹ Ignacio de la Cruz Baños ss.cc., "Le Très Révérend Père Euthyme Rouhouze", *Annales* 1963, Volume VII, No. 33. I refer to paragraph five of the study of Fr. Ignacio de la Cruz published in *Annales* in the years 1958 to 1963. The whole paragraph is dedicated to the two branches of the Congregation. It is the last conference that Fr. Euthyme gave to the sisters' meeting in Chapter in Paris in August 1854 and which is particularly significant in this respect.

last year as a student at Villanueva-Claudio Coello, one of the brothers' schools in Madrid, we had some activities with the Paraiso school staffed by the sisters. So I can not say that I did not know them, even if it was only by sight. However when I entered the novitiate it was just something that had no importance for me.

Let me give an example. Given its connection to what I just wrote, I think it merits being shared. During my novitiate something occurred that was quite unusual at the time. Villanueva-Claudio Coello organized a vocations week and they invited the novices, who had been students there, to participate and speak about the story of their religious vocation. Of the sixteen novices in our class, four of us came from the college and so with special permissions we travelled to Madrid from San Miguel del Monte three hundred kilometers to the north of the capital. After many months of being "far from the madding crowd" we really found it to be a great adventure. We enjoyed seeing our families, friends, schoolmates and former teachers and we gave our witness. The day of our return, when we were already on our way out of Madrid heading for San Miguel, our car broke down. As the nearest religious house was in fact a house of the sisters, the brother who was driving took us there. It was the novitiate. The novice mistress was happy to welcome us and took great care of us. As she was showing us the house she spoke to us with great love of the Congregation's history emphasizing the point that the brothers and sisters formed one religious family. It made a great impression on us. But as far as I can remember, it was the only clear explicit mention of this aspect of our religious life in my whole novitiate.¹⁰

During my years in the scholasticate there was not great progress. Surely having a community of sisters some two hundred meters from our house meant that their existence was obvious and there was a certain relationship with them. At least one of our teachers went to that community every morning to celebrate the Eucharist and once a year, around Christmas, all of us went up to sing Christmas carols. Afterward the sisters served us afternoon tea. Towards the end of my years as a student the sister novices and temporary professed visited the scholasticate various times. However they were rather formal visits. They were

¹⁰ The novitiate house of the sisters was located on Romero Girón street in Madrid and the Novice Directress was María Dolores Martínez.

received by the formators and some of the more illustrious students, among whom I was not numbered.

I must also mention the three summers during theology that I spent in England working and learning the language.¹¹ Much to my surprise, the relationship between brothers and sisters in England was much more familiar and regular than in Spain. The wonderful welcome that the sisters gave me was a blessing and since then I have had a very cordial relationship with them. That experience raised questions for me about this characteristic of our Congregation. As it had, or at least seemed to have, so much more importance for the brothers and sisters of another Province that at that point was the only one other than my own that I knew.

When I finished Initial Formation my apostolic commitment was completely centered on university studies and the world of education. They were ten very active years of much activity. It was a time in which I grew and matured in my identification with the Congregation. At the same time I recognize lacunae in that identification and I have already referred to them.¹² Without a doubt, one of those was the integration of this very important aspect of our religious family: the unity of brothers and sisters in the same vocation and mission or what was called in former times "the end of the Institute."

During those years I was a member of the Provincial Government of the Spanish Province. The Provincial Governments of brothers and sisters had some meetings, which were an expression of a shared desire of both branches to collaborate. It was really a consequence of the process, which had been initiated by the sisters, that was underway in the whole Congregation. Since their General Chapter of 1968, and in the following ones in 1971 and 1975, they had been rethinking the definition of the female branch of the Congregation in more apostolic terms. Connected to that was their relationship with the men's branch. Until that time the congregation's mission had been carried out by brothers and sisters separately with distinct and well differentiated tasks. Now that mission was to be conceived more in terms of collaboration. At the same time the growing autonomy of the women's branch

¹¹ I was at Epsom living with a family whose house was located close to the convent of the sisters.

¹² Enrique Losada ss.cc., o.c.

in relation to the Superior General (of the brothers) was being accentuated. New forms of relating the two branches and insuring the unity of the Congregation were being sought. In large measure that initiative of the sisters accepted by the brothers' General Chapter of 1976. The Chapter of 1982 went into it greater depth. Finally it was enshrined in the first chapter of the new constitutions.¹³

The truth is that those first meetings of the two Provincial Governments were not satisfactory. For all the good will that existed with respect to collaboration, it was evident that we could not erase history at one try. It was also obvious that collaboration between brothers and sisters meant we had to take into account not only of the history of the Congregation but also the capacity of men and women to collaborate in a changing ecclesial, social and cultural context that still included much exclusion, prejudice, misunderstanding and hurt. All of that was not going to be easy to change or heal so quickly. What's more it was necessary to be conscious that collaboration between human beings, whatever ones sex or condition, is more difficult than each one working on his/her own.

Faced with so many difficulties and problems, which we experienced right off in this new world of collaboration, we ended up tactfully pulling away. There were enough difficulties in one's own branch. Why complicate things with new and more difficult problems by collaborating with the sisters?

However the dynamism unleashed by the Chapter decisions and by the work of the General Governments, especially the Superiors General,¹⁴ would continue to make a strong impression on the new generation. Young people of both sexes coming into contact with the Congregation, through youth ministry and Initial Formation, were pushing us to value and express ourselves as a Congregation made up both of men and women. They even saw that this characteristic of our religious family could become a prophetic sign "*in a world wounded by*

¹³ Édouard Brion ss.cc., *Les Soeurs des Sacrés-Coeurs: nouvelle optique missionnaire et transformations institutionnelles (1948-1979)*, Rome, 1997.

¹⁴ Special mention must be addressed, as did Patrick Bradley ss.cc., Superior General at the time of the General Chapters of 1994, to Maria Paloma Aguirre ss.cc. and Jan Scheepens ss.cc. former Superiors General, for their vigorous witness in favor of the unity of the Congregation even in the face of a certain lack of understanding and critique.

injustice and inequality."¹⁵ as the General Chapter of the brothers said in 1982.

Returning to my personal journey, in 1984 I was called to work as formator with the professed students. After some years with a very small number of candidates, there was a slight upswing in vocations in our Province. This coincided with our reworking the plan of formation. We also increased collaboration in this area with the brothers' Province of Andalusia and, in line with what I just explained, with the sisters. Taking on the role of formator meant not just that I had a certain pedagogic task as regards the students but that I had to learn some things myself. The formation of new vocations inevitably became an occasion to rethink many aspects of my life, if I wanted to be faithful to the task which had been entrusted to me.

One of those aspects was the relationship with the sisters. Even if attempts at collaboration between the Provincial Governments had produced more reticence in me than anything else, I was convinced that the relationship with the sisters was a dimension of formation that could not be neglected in the new context in which the Congregation found itself. Even I am just speaking of a few years, I recognize that they had such a positive affect on me that I came to value the unity of the Congregation and I developed a conviction that I have maintained ever since: the unity of brothers and sisters as members of one religious family is a very important aspect of our charism and it affects the Congregation's mission.

Saying that they were very good years does not mean that they were without problems and difficulties. However I could see that the problems and difficulties were part of the journey to be undertaken and so I should not pull back as I had one previously.

It's also true that the experience of those years helped me to know and to love the sisters. Of course the relationship between brothers and sisters is not based on sentiment but rather on conviction. But if there is no feeling we run the risk of unity becoming something merely theoretical. In this, as in so many other things, the affective is the effective. In other words, if we do not integrate the values for which we will live and die on an emotional level, we run the risk that the

¹⁵ *Thirty-third General Chapter of the brothers, Chapter Decisions, Rome, 1982.*

conviction dissipates and we abandon it for another. I must be aware that I did not choose either the sisters or the brothers. They have been given to me by the Lord who has called us "*to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message with power to drive out the devil.*"¹⁶ Therefore the relationship with the sisters is not a result of my own decision but of being consistent with the call experienced in the depth of my heart. That consistency is expressed in different ways and one of those is learning to know and to love the sisters.

Of course I can not say that I fully developed such attitudes during those years, nor do I think I have done so even now. But I can say that it was the beginning of something that has lasted until now and which I hope will continue.

A short time after that I was elected Provincial, which meant I had to consider the collaboration of the two Provincial Governments once again. Difficulties were once more evident but this time I did not withdraw. Without a doubt it was an opportunity for me to develop the attitudes I referred to above that had begun in my years as a formator. More than once I could see that even if I had been "converted" to the value of collaboration, many of my brothers neither saw it as a value nor were open to changing their attitudes toward the sisters. These real difficulties made me want to agree with those who were resisting collaboration and many times I was tempted to retreat to my "winter quarters." However, when I brought all that to personal prayer and reflection, I realized that fidelity to the Congregation prevented me from throwing in the towel and I had to continue moving forward. The support of certain brothers and sisters was very important and they already know how grateful I am to them.

The truth is that the difficulties were real. Some were the result of our Congregation's history and others were of a more general type. The brothers suffered from a superiority complex, very marked by our androcentric vision and the fact that most of us were clerics. Given the brothers' superiority complex, the sisters became defensive and, in some cases, vindictive. They also tended to be unrealistic and want to escape toward the future. The styles of government were very different. At the official level information and communication between the two branches was not all that fluid. Informal communication was more

¹⁶ Mark 3:14-15.

open but always tinged with individual subjectivism. As far as I can see such difficulties are still present, however it seems that we are becoming more capable of recognizing them. We seek solutions and, above all, we are more patient with one another, brothers with sisters and sisters with brothers. I'm not all that sure about this last statement but I make it more as a way of encouraging than stating objective fact.

In 1994 I was elected Superior General of the brothers. It was actually the first time that a Superior General of the brothers had been elected. I am sure that for various reasons that went unnoticed by most of the members of the Congregation. However from a juridical point of view that was the case. In 1990 the Holy See approved the new Constitutions of the brothers that have the first chapter in common with the sisters' Constitutions. Until that time, the Superior General of the brothers was the Superior General of the whole Congregation. With the new Constitutions "*The General Governments of the brothers and the sisters are jointly, in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the whole Congregation.*"¹⁷ There lies the difference. There would no longer be a Superior General of the Congregation, but two Superiors General who with their respective Councils guaranteed the unity of the whole Congregation.

From the very first moment I was conscious of this position that was mine as a result of the election. In my very first act as Superior General of the brothers¹⁸ I wanted to make clear in gesture and word that I was assuming the responsibility of being Superior General of one part of the Congregation. I intended to commit myself and the General Councilors, those forming the brothers' General Government, to collaborate closely with the sisters' General Government headed by their Superior General so that we could fulfill our responsibility of guaranteeing the unity of the whole Congregation.

c) Personal Experience: Jeanne Cadiou

Historically and biblically, celebrating a jubilee always invites us to renewal and conversion but also to pause, to go back to our heritage¹⁹ and to look at the journey taken. This is what I was able to do in 1999

¹⁷ Chapter 1, article 8, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

¹⁸ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Homily*, September 28, 1994.

¹⁹ Leviticus 25:10.

after twenty-five years of commitment to the Congregation. When reading any process there are different perspectives from which it can be interpreted. In this circular letter I want to share my experience of discovering and identifying with the Congregation as a religious community with two branches, a male one and a female one.

When I entered the community in 1973, the little world in which I lived was still feeling the effects of the events of May 1968. The Council had brought fresh air to the Church. For some years, there had been movement and great changes in the Congregation. The way people spoke of them to me depended on whether the speaker had integrated the innovations or not. As much as I can recall, we did not speak of the brothers. We certainly had enough with our own problems of *aggiornamento* without looking for more problems from our neighbor. From being "mixed"²⁰, the Congregation had become apostolic. The long laborious special Chapter of 1968 had drafted the decrees, "*Our Consecration to Redemptive Love.*" We even had time to discuss all these texts in community and to become conscious of the richness of their content.²¹

The Second Vatican Council had given all religious congregations this task of renewal. It demanded that we listen to the world and also return to the sources so as to "*faithfully maintain the spirit of the Founders.*" The General Chapter of 1971 spoke of "*a unanimous and profound agreement each time one of the essential elements of our patrimony was brought up.*" What was there of this when it came to the brothers and sisters being one Congregation? Mother Brigid Mary McSweeney, Superior General at the time, wrote in 1968 in her letter presenting the decrees, "*The text concerning 'The vocation of the Congregation' has been taken as is, from the Constitutions elaborated by the Fathers in 1964.*"²² The text really is the same. It does not speak either of sisters or brothers but rather designates us all under the common term "*members.*" The term "*religious*" (the feminine form) is found only once. The next Chapter, a decree on the spiritual unity of the Congregation, is more explicit. "*The Founders willed that this Congregation be double-branched. In the intimate union of brothers and sisters, they saw an element of the highest importance – one closely bound up with the specific end of the Institute they had founded*

²⁰ The term "mixed" refers to the classification made before the Council by the Holy See.

²¹ Cf. *Letter of Promulgation of the Decisions of the General Chapter of 1971.*

²² *Documents of the Special General Chapter, Rome, 1968.*

and with the very basis of its existence." ... "The Hearts of Jesus and Mary symbolize the bonds of love which unite them. It is this mystery of love which the Congregation intends to honor and portray in its very structure and works. This is why our Founders wished that it be composed of brothers and sisters who form one single religious Institute (Cf. Mémoires of Fr. Hilarion.)"... "It is clear that, according to the intentions of our Founders, this unity of the Congregation is truly essential, since it is only in the union of the two branches that the end of the Institute will be fully realized: the spiritual union between the brothers and sisters will symbolize the perfect union of the Sacred Hearts and will perpetuate the ideal so dear to both Founders."

Even if this was in the Rule that was given to me the day of I entered the novitiate, it was not what caught my attention. I made my first steps in the Congregation very ignorant of the existence of a male branch. I was also just as unaware that congregations had different charisms and my ignorance continued. The novitiate was located at a large school where the sisters worked in close collaboration with the laity and where the community and the school chaplains were secular priests.

From time to time a priest dressed in white would come to give the monthly community retreat. His ministry consisted in giving conferences to the sisters and the rest of the time we hardly saw him. It was only the third or fourth time that I made a clearer connection. This man must be an SS.CC. brother, one of those the Rule speaks of. That really awakened my interest and I began to realize that I had entered a Congregation with two branches. However practically speaking it was not all that obvious. We heard little information about what was going on in the male branch. In the intercongregational groups in which we participated there were many men but the SS.CC. brothers were never present. The first real contacts I had with the brothers of our family were through the chaplains in one or another community of the French Province. Meeting them and speaking with them I felt that we had many things in common. Each one of them, by his very being as well as by his words, said something to me of our SS.CC. charism. This was to such a point that one day while participating in a workshop on the charism, I was asked who the person was who most incarnated for me the SS.CC. charism. Without much hesitation I named an SS.CC. brother.

I had great access to the novitiate's well-stocked library. Reading a large part of the *Annales* allowed me to delve into the detailed history of the schism and I became conscious of the difficulties inherent in revising the Rule of the Founders. It was only later that I understood the importance of those events and especially their consequences for the history of the relationship between the brothers and the sisters of the Congregation.

The 1973 and 1976 Provincial Chapters of France had a great impact on the Province's life and mission. However neither of them made the least mention of collaboration or even the relationship with the brothers. It is evident that back then we functioned practically as independent congregations, at least in my SS.CC. world. We put a plan in place and we proceeded to make new foundations but we never considered that a criterion might be the proximity of a brothers' community or a common apostolic activity. However some sisters did work with the brothers, particularly in Youth and Vocation Ministry. More often than not the brother was seen in his role as a priest.

During my years in temporary vows, my relations with the brothers were rich but rather circumscribed. Clearly the relationship that affected me the most was with a brother who was spiritual director of the community to which I belonged. His close yet demanding style made me see him as a true brother and especially allowed me to get to know the brothers of his community. I also came to see them as real brothers, through a nice combination of spirituality and simple fraternal relationships. Such had been my experience when I made my definitive commitment in the Congregation. The only SS.CC. brother present that day among the crowd of sisters, family and friends was the celebrant. Rather symbolic and revealing of the situation at the time.

A short time later I was to have some memorable experiences that deepened my sense of belonging to a Congregation made up of sisters and brothers. Elected a member of the 1979 General Chapter, I was surprised to note that the brothers' whole General Government was present and participated in the assemblies from the first to the last day. That Chapter gave itself as a task of "*constructing the ideal image of the Congregation for the near future (1990) and comparing that with the reality.*"²³

²³ *Introduction to the Chapter Documents of the Twenty-ninth General Chapter of the sisters, Rome, 1979.*

It was there that I felt for the first time the equality of brothers and sisters, when we were invited to dream about the ideal community. In the group that I was in the conversation was quite frank. We talked about the difficulty in giving women a real role in the Church and civil society. We spoke of male domination and the prejudice and discrimination on both sides. We tried to listen to one another more and it was proposed that we start collaborating respectfully on common projects. In certain groups they went so far as to speak of mixed communities. In end we accepted one objective that was formulated as follows: "*Create structures of fraternal communion and of apostolic collaboration with our SS.CC. brothers.*" Steps for implementation were specified: "*Deepen together, as brothers and sisters, our fraternal communion and common Mission, [B]uild together forms of fraternal communion and collaboration in view of the same Mission, and [T]ogether commit ourselves to the effective realization of community and apostolic projects.*"²⁴ Without knowing how or why, I had the intuition during the Chapter that this aspect of collaboration was going to take on greater importance in the Congregation' life and consequently in my own life. It was just at that time that I had become a member of the Provincial Government and I had been entrusted with responsibility for the novitiate. I was also asked to be part of the process of writing the new Constitutions. In each of these services I was confronted in different ways with the question of the collaboration of brothers and sisters.

In France the Provincial Governments began to visit one another and to invite one another to congregational celebrations. We were still far from sitting down at the same table to dialogue about a common pastoral presence but those responsible for formation made some small timid steps to allow the young to get to know one another and even to share something of their experiences as novices. This was very good for young people who were rather used to mixed situations from their experience as students in an academic setting. Some had also had experience in this area in Youth and Vocation Ministry with sisters and brothers.

My journey in the Congregation did not afford me the opportunity to experience apostolic collaboration with the brothers since I worked as a teacher in schools where the brothers were not present. However I

²⁴ *Decisions of the Twenty-ninth General Chapter of the sisters, Rome, 1979.*

must admit that formation ministry put me deeper in touch with and made me share more deeply the conviction that the unity of brothers and sisters is an essential element of our Congregation's charism. This was particularly evident when I embarked on the adventure of founding a formation community in Essen, Germany. The brothers had been inviting the sisters to come to Germany for a long time. They were intent on doing everything they could to welcome us and to provide everything we needed to settle in. It was something similar to what happened in the early years of the Congregation. Very quickly there began an intense collaboration in the area of Initial Formation. Attempts at youth ministry in common, presentations together on the Congregation, working on projects and retreats together were moments when the unity of the two branches was made concrete. We never got to the point of developing an apostolic project together and the question remains with me: was that not one of the principal reasons why we had to close the Essen community in 1991 and leave Germany? The enormous difference in structures was also clearly a handicap. The brothers were a Province of some 100 members and we were a novitiate community with four perpetually professed sisters. From that experience I cherish memories of wonderful times in an SS.CC. family and of strong constructive friendships. In many ways it was one of the outstanding experiences of my life.

It was during that period of my life that I participated in the mixed commission established for the 150th anniversary of the death of the Good Father. Our Superiors General, Patrick Bradley and María Pía Lafont, in presenting of the first fruits of the commission's work said, "*We hope that this initiative will strengthen the unity of the two branches of the Congregation.*"²⁵ I believe that I can say that such had already happened to some extent within the group. For after a time of doubt, misunderstanding and mutual criticism we arrived at a certain equality when it came to writing our articles. Since my experience on that commission I have certainly asked myself several times: didn't the founders take a great risk in founding one Congregation of men and women? Ever since having that question and similar ones in my mind, I can see why I have reacted strongly at times when a publication, an event or a decision about our Congregation's origins, charism or history only reflects the reality of one of the branches.

²⁵ *Cahier de Spiritualité* 12, p. 4.

The respective General Chapters of sisters and brothers in El Escorial (Spain) in September 1988 studied, approved separately and finally approved together the first chapter of the Constitutions, *"The Vocation and Mission of the Congregation."* As a consequence, steps were taken almost everywhere to find places and ways to express the common mission. The terrain had been prepared when I was named Provincial of France in 1992. Likewise, one of my first gestures after the Provincial Chapter was to enter into dialogue with my *"colleague"* in order to see how and especially where to open a new presence in a disadvantaged area where the brothers and sisters could collaborate. Those were the criteria established by the Chapter. We were not accustomed to meeting at that level, we had prejudices. In our respective counsels there were people who said *"let's be prudent"*, *"no romanticism"* *"let's keep our feet on the ground."* Happily others supported the project and even went further. And so the first community of sisters in Nancy was born. Collaboration there had its high points and its low points, which is the lot of any group of human beings. For whether we are of the same sex or not, we know that working together is never only a fun time.

We come to September 19, 1994 and my election as Superior General. During the first hours and days I was kept busy just thinking of the ministry the sisters had entrusted to me and that I accepted to do with and for them. It was in the course of preparing and celebrating the joint closing of the brothers' and sisters' Chapters that I became really conscious of my situation compared with those who had preceded me in the position, including the Good Mother. I thought of some of the norms for the application of the Decrees of 1968 concerning the juridical ties uniting the two branches. The first says, *"The Superior General of the sisters makes a vow of obedience into the hands of the Superior General."*

It is true that since 1968 there had been some changes. In 1975, the Sacred Congregation of Religious, in the person of its Prefect, Cardinal Tabera, had invited the sisters' General Government to study the relationships between the brothers' branch and that of sisters in a General Chapter. The study was proposed in terms of the juridical bond and Chapter decided that *"the General Council of the sisters will see with the General Council of the Fathers how to study the juridical bond*

between the two branches of the Congregation."²⁶ A final decision would have to be taken in the respective General Chapters. But the delicate point of the sisters' Superior General making the vow of obedience into the hands of the brothers' Superior General remained in abeyance and we kept to the status quo. However something changed when Mother María Paloma Aguirre, just elected as Superior General, pronounced her vow during the closing Mass of the Chapter and used a formula she composed herself.

In 1983 and 1988, María Pía Lafont did the same at the beginning of her two terms. Actually, it was only from July 9, 1990 with the Decree of approbation of the first Chapter of the Constitutions common to brothers and sisters that "*the General Governments of brothers and sisters are jointly, in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the whole Congregation.*"²⁷ Juridically speaking, therefore I am the first Superior General to be fully the Superior General of the sisters. Henceforth the male Superior General is Superior General of the brothers' branch of and the female Superior General is Superior General of the sisters' branch while the ninth article of the preliminary Chapter of the 1817 included in the Decrees of 1968 said, "*We lead a community life ...under obedience to the Very Reverend Father Superior General of the Congregation, [and] the Very Reverend Mother Superior General of the sisters...*" Number 18 of the Decrees of 1968 concerned the male Superior General and included six norms for application.

This is an aspect of the Congregation today that I have reflected on often. I gladly summarize it as follows: men and women of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, we are called together and sent forth on the same mission. Neither branch can respond by itself to our mission "*To contemplate, live and announce the love of God incarnate in Jesus.*"²⁸

At times I envy my colleagues who are Superiors General of Congregations with only one branch, thinking that they have it easier. However I am conscious of the responsibility of the sisters' government that I lead to collaborate with the brothers' government in guaranteeing the unity of the whole Congregation. Since November 1994, we have made decisions and done so many concrete things in this perspective.

²⁶ *Chapter Decisions of the Twenty-eighth General Chapter of the sisters*, Rome, 1975.

²⁷ First Chapter, article 8, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

²⁸ First Chapter, article 2, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

For example, aside from the exceptional situation of Japan, the recent implantations of the sisters everywhere fulfill the adage, "*no houses of men without houses of women.*"²⁹ The sisters have joined the brothers in Mozambique, in Indonesia and in Charleroi (Belgium). In closing the mission of Bangolo in the Ivory Coast, one of the determining criteria was the absence of the SS.CC. brothers.

d) The Experience of Collaboration Between the General Governments

Writing of the experience of collaboration by General Governments we are going to limit ourselves to the experience of the authors of this letter, in other words, to the experience of the present General Governments. We could have appealed to the memory of past General Governments but when we determined the objectives of this letter, as we said in the introduction, we did not consider that necessary as that would seem more appropriate to a historical study. And, as we also already indicated, even though the previous General Governments experienced the juridical situation introduced in the new Constitutions, it was more toward the end of their term. For that reason it has been to us to work with the new situation right from the beginning.

We have to begin by saying that, except for one sister, there was no one on either General Government with prior experience at this level of the service of authority.³⁰ What we did have was good will to pursue collaboration taking as our guide the Constitutions and the orientations of the brothers' and sisters' General Chapters that had just concluded. There was a joint letter of the two Chapters,³¹ which without a doubt could and would shed light on that collaboration.

Hardly a few weeks after the conclusion of the General Chapters both General Governments began their respective work. Joint meetings began immediately. Throughout the time between that moment and the publication of this letter, we have had fourteen joint sessions. At least

²⁹ *Rule of the Order of Zealots of the Love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Perpetual Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.* The same for the Zelatrices.

³⁰ Beatriz Montaner is the only one among the sisters who had such experience. On the brothers' side Mario Illanes had such experience, but his sickness and death, prevented the others from profiting from it.

³¹ *Thirty-second General Chapter of the sisters and Thirty-fifth General Chapter of the brothers, "Letter to the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts", Rome, 1994.*

five times we have taken two or three days of continuous meeting, a few times outside of Rome, so that the joint could include time to be together in community. It has always been important not just to have time to work together but also for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist. Perhaps we have not taken enough time just to be together without any other purpose than to get to know one another and share life.

In our first joint meeting³² we completed the task entrusted to both General Governments: the final redaction of the Chapters' letter to the brothers and sisters of the Congregation: "*To the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts.*" It was also a perfect occasion to study and plan together how we might respond to the orientations given in that letter, especially those to the General Governments. From there we developed criteria for ourselves, which at least for the time being would guide our collaboration: open, ongoing, mutual communication; assurance that unity and autonomy be respected; reflection together in order to assist inter-provincial government structures; joint visits where it would be possible and the General Governments as guarantors of the unity of the two branches.

Early on we exchanged the plans that each of the two governments had developed. They both expressed a desire for collaboration with the other branch.³³ We also sought ways in which the two General Curias could collaborate through the secretariats, archives, communications, translations, etc. We even intended to establish a fixed rhythm of meetings of the two General Governments. At the beginning we thought of four times a year. However, it soon became evident that this rhythm would depend on the calendar of each of the governments. We decided to share our calendars with one another. But since the calendars responded to government needs in each branch, they continued to be developed separately.

Soon a series of specific topics filled the agenda of our joint sessions. There were the tasks that the letter of the two Chapters had asked of us: a common Spirituality Commission for the whole Congregation, a common Newsletter, a Circular Letter of the two Superiors

³² *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. Councils*, Rome, November 30, December 2, 1994.

³³ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. Councils*, Rome, January 17, 1995.

General on the unity of the two branches and collaboration, treatment of common topics as an integral part of the General Chapters and joint planning of new implantations. There were also other aspects that did not appear in the letter but are important in themselves: the Secular Branch, youth and vocation Ministry and the bicentennial of the Congregation.

In principal we have accomplished what the letter of the two Chapters asked. The Congregation Spirituality Commission was an object of study, reflection and decision by the two Governments together.³⁴ Its results are available for the whole Congregation to see and evaluate. The joint newsletter *Com-Union* followed upon previous undertakings. There was between collaboration *Info* and *Entre-Nous* and that led to a team being formed of brothers and sisters from the two Generalates. The fruit of that is the common newsletter.³⁵

You have in your hands the Circular Letter that was requested by the Chapters. It is the result of a long process of reflection, gathering input and information from the various parts of the Congregation, preparing an outline and writing. Except for the outline and writing, which was done by the Superiors General, both Governments have participated the whole process.³⁶

The collaboration of the General Chapters of 2000 has been a topic on the agenda of our meetings since very early on.³⁷ The fact that they coincide with the celebration of the second centenary of the Congregation has also played a role as we have tried to relate both aspects in so far as possible. We communicated the results of all that in the letter we sent for this years' feast of Blessed Damien.³⁸

³⁴ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, February 27, 1996. Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc. *Spirituality Commission*, Rome, May 10, 1996; Rome, August 11, 1996.

³⁵ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, June 11, 1996.

³⁶ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Governments*, Rome, December 23, 1996. *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, March 20, 1997. *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Torricella in Sabina, December 19-21, 1997.

³⁷ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, December, 1995, Torricella in Sabina, December 19-21, 1997; Torricella in Sabina, December 21-23, 1998; Rome, May 5-6, 1999.

³⁸ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *Letter to the brothers and sisters of the*

Attention to the common implantations has been mainly focused on the Mission Projects of the Congregation (the sister's term) or the Priority Mission Projects (the brothers' term) of Africa and Asia. But we must admit that much of the work and time of our joint meetings has focused on the Philippines.³⁹ The Philippines has also been a theme of meetings of the two Superiors General and of other members of the two Councils. We must also mention the joint presence of the General Governments in the Philippines on different occasions and also the mutual information each time a member of the governments visited those communities, visits which were rather frequent.

Even if less frequent, the Congregation's Projects in Africa have also been an object of common study and reflection.⁴⁰ The two General Governments were also in Africa together and separately on various occasions and always have had a constant interchange of information on Africa. Meriting special mention is the two governments' ongoing shared concern during the difficult moments experienced in Kinshasa during the war in 1997.

As the Secular Branch depends juridically on the brothers' and sisters' branches, it has been another topic that has come up frequently in our meetings.⁴¹ In order to monitor this topic we put together a working group made up of two Councilors, one from each government. The result of that has been the letters, which the governments have published, to the whole Congregation and to the SS.CC. laity.⁴²

Youth and vocation Ministry has also been a topic treated in our joint council meetings. We also put together a working group on this

Congregation, Rome, May 10, 1999.

³⁹ *Joint Meetings of the General Governments*: Rome, December 2, 1994; Rome, April 3, 1995; Rome, September 21, 1995; Rome, December 21, 1995; Rome, February 27, 1996; Rome, June 11, 1996; Rome, March 20, 1997; Torricella in Sabina, December 19–21, 1997; Rome, March 31, 1998.

⁴⁰ *Minutes of the Joint Meetings of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, January 17, 1995; Rome, September 21, 1995; Rome, June 11, 1996; Rome, March 20, 1997.

⁴¹ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the SS.CC. General Governments*, Rome, December 23, 1996.

⁴² Lourdes Fernández-Loeches ss.cc. and Manfred Kollig ss.cc., *Some Elements for Reflection on Place of the Laity in the SS.CC. Community*, Rome 1995; "Some New Commentaries on the Secular Branch" in *Com-Union* No. 2, Rome, 1997; María Javier Echeopar ss.cc. and Manfred Kollig ss.cc., *The Mission Unites and Distinguishes Us: Letter to the Laity of the SS.CC. Secular Branch*, Rome, 1998.

topic and we even dedicated one council meeting, offering sort of a monograph, to the strictly vocational aspect.⁴³ The sisters had a clear mandate from their General Chapter concerning this point while the brothers had no such mandate. For that reason not all the work on this point was done jointly. However a letter was published and sent to the whole Congregation on Vocation Ministry as a consequence of the collaboration in this area.⁴⁴

As regards the preparation of the Congregation's Bicentennial, we wanted the long-term orientation to come from the Spirituality Commission, which had that among its objectives.⁴⁵ Although, as we already indicated above, we saw it related to the General Chapters of 2000 and we treated it explicitly on various occasions.⁴⁶ As Superiors General of the whole Congregation, we sent you a letter at the beginning of Advent last year calling you all to celebrate our Bicentennial. In that letter we said what we believe should be the celebration's objectives.⁴⁷

Finally, there have also been other events that have involved the collaboration of both governments. One was the Beatification of Blessed Damien.⁴⁸ Another was the campaign to cancel the international debt of the poor nations in the context of the Jubilee of the Year 2000.⁴⁹ We have spoken of these in letters and other joint communications.

⁴³ *Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the two SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, January 17, 1995; Rome, April 3, 1995, Rome, December 21, 1995; Rome, February 27, 1996; Rome, March 31, 1998; Torricella in Sabina, December 21-23, 1998; Rome, May 5-6, 1999.

⁴⁴ Beatriz Montaner ss.cc. and Manfred Kollig ss.cc., *To the brothers and sisters*, Rome, February 2, 1997.

⁴⁵ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *International Spirituality Commission*, Rome, May 10, 1996; Rome, August 11, 1996; Joint Meeting of the SS.CC. General Councils, Rome, June 11, 1999.

⁴⁶ *Joint Meeting of the SS.CC. General Governments*, Torricella in Sabina, December 19-21, 1997; Rome, March 1998.

⁴⁷ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *To the brothers and sisters of the Congregation*, Rome, First Sunday of Advent, 1998.

⁴⁸ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *To the brothers and sisters of the Congregation*, Rome, April 15, 1995.

⁴⁹ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *To the brothers and sisters of the Congregation*, Rome, April 15, 1998.

As can be seen by this long list we have lacked things to be concerned about or work to be done in the area of collaboration.

We have to recognize though that the most delicate subjects for us have always been those that touch on collaboration as such. Examples would be the circumstances and the resources that make our collaboration possible. For from the very beginning we have considered as one of our primary obligations assuring the unity of the two branches in service to the Congregation's mission. It is true that these circumstances and resources came up from time to time in reference to specific matters under consideration. At the same time we thought it was necessary to treat them in a more reflective way both as regards our own collaboration as General Governments and also as regards the Congregation as a whole.

We were aware of the importance of such reflection from the outset. For example, we determined criteria for our collaboration. However there were also other occasions for such reflection as when we looked at the best methodology for working together.⁵⁰ But it was especially in preparing this letter that we all confronted this question. That involved gathering experiences of collaboration from throughout the Congregation and, of course, that included our own experience.⁵¹

We have worked together as General Governments on many occasions. We took upon ourselves this shared task we clearly desired to be *in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the whole Congregation*. We have been determined to overcome the difficulties and the problems which, like the other brothers and sisters, we meet when it comes to collaborating. We referred to them above. These difficulties are the results of history and our history as a Congregation. There are differences that come from the fact of our being men and women. There are other differences which come from the simple fact that each of us is an individual human being.

Surely we have not always found it easy to know the differences and recognize them. We have not always been able to see what can not be

⁵⁰ *Joint Meeting of the SS.CC. General Councils*, Rome, December 1995; Rome, February 27, 1996.

⁵¹ *Joint Meeting of the SS.CC. General Governments*, Torricella in Sabina, December 1997 and 1998.

changed and therefore must be accepted and what can be changed and fight to change it.

We certainly do not consider ourselves models but we have invested good will and commitment in keeping with what the Constitutions and General Chapters have asked of us. We have found light and inspiration in those foundational texts of our Congregation. While we can not say that we have also found shadows, we have to say that those documents lack sufficient clarity on some questions.

A clear example of that would be the way the General Chapters of 1994 treated the Mission Projects of the Congregation or Priority Mission Projects where they asked for collaboration of sisters and brothers. This has caused headaches for the two governments. There is already a difference in the terminology used and when we are speaking of them it is always necessary to use the two terms. But the difference is not just a matter of words. We have had real problems trying to implement the orientations each Chapter gave the respective branch regarding the projects and at the same time assuring the collaboration of brothers and sisters.

But perhaps there is something even deeper. We could say that article eight of our Constitutions is the fundamental statement of the unity of the Congregation. As such it is beautiful and inspiring. We always refer to it as the basis of our responsibility to guarantee unity. However we must recognize that it is not enough if we have to provide orientations for collaboration as an expression of that unity. At least it does not seem clear enough.

Taking into account our difficulties as a group of specific individuals and other the structural difficulties that we have just mentioned, we would say that our two General Governments' experience of collaboration has been a learning process. At times it has been like we have been feeling our way. Successes and errors have been constant. Along the way we have failed due to own limitations but also because the necessary structures were lacking.

The following sections of this letter are meant to encourage the Congregation to concretize the fundamental orientations as much as possible. We invite the upcoming General Chapters to take up this task.

Commentary on "article 8"

Article 8 of the first chapter of our Constitutions, a chapter common to both the sisters' and brothers' Constitutions, gives expression to the unity of the Congregation.⁵² The first article⁵³ already presents the Congregation as composed of brothers and sisters united by one charism and one mission. The fundamental characteristics of that common charism and mission are described the remaining articles of that first chapter. It is within that context that article 8 must be read and understood.

We would like to share with you our reading of this article, how we think it inspires the unity of the Congregation and the type of unity the article suggests. Before this there have been other readings. Some of these have been very inspiring.⁵⁴ One of the more outstanding, given the character of the document, was that made in the letter of the 1994 Chapters: *To the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts*. As we offer our commentary we will refer to that letter. We will see to what extent it completes and expands the meaning of unity presented in the Constitutions.

The first paragraph of the article emphasizes two aspects that will have important consequences for the whole Congregation: the unity and the autonomy of the two branches. They are two poles that the Congregation has to move between in order to live the type of unity to which the Constitutions call it. On the one hand we are conscious of

⁵² Art. 8: "*The brothers and sisters of our religious family constitute one Congregation. Each branch has its own juridical autonomous personality, legislation, structures of government and formation, community life and temporal patrimony. Since its foundation, our religious family has had but one charism, one mission and one spirituality. Aware that it constitutes a significant value, the brothers and sisters assume together the responsibility to maintain and strengthen their unity. The governments of both branches on their distinct levels are especially responsible for promoting this unity. The General Governments of the brothers and sisters are jointly, in the final instance, the guarantors of the unity of the whole Congregation.*"

⁵³ Article 1: "*In the communion of the Church, People of God, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is an Apostolic Religious Congregation of Pontifical right, founded by Pierre Coudrin and Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie. Brothers and sisters, united in the same charism and the same mission, form a single Congregation approved as such in 1817 by Pope Pius VII.*"

⁵⁴ Patrick Bradley ss.cc., *Our SS.CC. Vocation and Mission*, Rome, 1992. The whole book is a commentary on that which unites us as brothers and sisters and in particular Chapter 20. María Paloma Aguirre ss.cc., article: "Una sola familia de hermanos y de hermanas" in the book *Un Carisma en la Iglesia*, Rome, 1998.

the value of unity and on the other hand we want to respect the autonomy of each of the two branches.

Both these aspects have played a very important role in our understanding of the unity of the Congregation and the service that we as General Governments have tried to offer. However we have experienced the difficulty in achieving the right balance between the two. It is quite easy to fall into one of the two extremes. We either accentuate unity at the cost of autonomy or emphasize autonomy at the cost of unity.

Some brothers and sisters have gone so far as to ask that the article be reformulated. They would emphasize unity and remove everything they would see as unhelpful, such as autonomy in government, community, patrimony and formation. The autonomy of the two branches does introduce an element that conditions the way we understand and live unity. We can even say that it makes exercising unity more complex and difficult. However we believe deeply that autonomy can make unity richer and more meaningful.

This understanding of unity based on two autonomous branches, each possessing the ability to have its own community, apostolate, formation, organization and administration, means that the unity to which both branches are called must be more the result of conviction than of a juridically imposed structure. Both branches must accept the responsibility of living unity. We speak of responsibility because we are speaking of freedom. To put it another way, we are speaking of subjects, be they individual or corporate. Experiencing themselves as autonomous, they feel called to the same mission flowing from the one same vocation.

Growing in this understanding of unity and autonomy is one of the tasks to which article 8 of our Constitutions invites us. Far from seeing autonomy as an impediment to unity, we see it rather as a challenge to live this unity in its richest and most profound sense. Unity does not happen because it is imposed on us, either out of necessity or dependence. It is rather the fruit of our fidelity to our common vocation and mission.

The second paragraph of article 8 emphasizes that the unity of the Congregation is based in one charism, one mission and one spirituality. There is absolutely no doubt that this principle has been clear since our

beginnings. Even in the difficult period of the schism it was upheld and attempts were made to preserve it in the face of all kinds of doubt and conflict.⁵⁵ As we indicated above, the fact that the first Chapter of our Constitutions is the same for sisters and brothers demonstrates that we are united around one charism. The charism of a religious community finds expression as a way of understanding the events of history. This happens under the power of the Spirit of the Risen One, who leads us to serve the Gospel in particular circumstances. This is what Joseph Marie Coudrin and Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie experienced. This is what they handed on to the Congregation: one vocation and mission that concretizes for each brothers and sister their experience of the Spirit and their service for the Gospel.⁵⁶

As we have already indicated above, this charismatic unity has been understood and lived in different ways in the course of the Congregation's history. The prominent place given this unity of charism in the first chapter of the Constitutions was a way of focusing attention on something that for many years was present but not so evident. This is an important step that is certainly a cause for rejoicing given the great value it has for our religious family. However we must recognize that this unity, lived in different ways in the course of history, must be given concrete form today. And this aspect is not evident in article 8. For that reason it would be helpful to continue our commentary with reference to the letter of the Chapters of 1994.⁵⁷

The letter was the fruit of the meeting of the sisters' and brothers' Chapters in Rome in 1994. Clearly it is not just the concrete result of those three days during which the two Chapters collaborated. It is something more. In a certain sense it gives the state of the question of the Congregation's unity over these last twenty years. It considers history but also emphasizes recent efforts to underscore the foundational intuition of being one Congregation with a common mission. It also brings out the significant and even prophetic value that the unity of sisters and brothers can have for the Church and the world of today.

⁵⁵ Cf. note 9.

⁵⁶ Brian Ganly ss.cc., "What is a Founding Charism?" In *Un Carisma en la Iglesia*, Rome, 1998. As the name indicates *A Charism in the Church*, the whole book, which concerns our SS.CC. charism, is interesting to read. Already published in Spanish. It will be published shortly in English and French.

⁵⁷ *Letter to the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts*, Rome, 1994.

It is an invitation *"to follow a path of awareness, of understanding and of mutual respect step by step. However this path also requires clarity, decision and audacity."*

The letter stresses common mission. As we said above, this is something the Constitutions had already underlined. Even more than that, it says that mission is the basis for our relationship and those experiences of collaboration, even small ones, can help us move forward.

As we can see, the letter represents some progress and a development of article 8. In other words, the unity of the Congregation leads to a relationship between the two branches that is oriented towards common mission. It is what we would call today "collaboration."

With the historical evolution of the Congregation we have clearly come to understand common mission more in terms of collaboration.⁵⁸ Our relationship and collaboration are considered means for facilitating and fostering the mission to which we have been called. The "family spirit"⁵⁹ is something that has characterized and continues to characterize our community. In the beginning and even today the relationships of brothers and sisters have been understood in the light of this family spirit. When speaking of collaboration, however, the family spirit must be understood as a characteristic of the Congregation that makes our mission more effective and not just a characteristic of the community's internal life. The brothers-sisters relationship is not an end in itself, but a distinctive mark of our SS.CC. community. Given our diversity and the autonomy of each branch this relationship serves our common mission.

Of course this relationship means that we will have to face the challenges that we referred to at length in relating our personal experiences. Some of these would be: the historical disparities in the condition of men and women, the problems that our Congregation has experienced in its development and the problems involved whenever human beings collaborate. This relationship can and must be a source of personal and communal maturity as we integrate masculine and feminine values. In this way we enrich and strengthen communion. Our communion enriched and strengthened by both women and men can

⁵⁸ Cf. notes 9 and 10.

⁵⁹ Cf. article 7 of the *Constitutions*.

and must be a witness and a service in our proclamation of the Gospel. This is what our charism calls us to. This relationship can and should lead us to better "*contemplate, live and proclaim the love of God, incarnate in Jesus to whom Mary has been associated in a particular way.*"⁶⁰ We can see the wisdom of the Chapter's call to follow "*a path of awareness, of understanding and of mutual respect step by step.*" At the same time there is the need for "*clarity, decision and audacity.*"

Besides being decisive and courageous, we must continue to pray for light as we make this journey. As we already said, this letter is not so much meant to settle a question but rather to be a call especially to the upcoming General Chapters. We must develop common perspectives on the Congregation's mission in different geographical areas in order to facilitate and even, in some cases, make possible collaboration in mission.

When we spoke of our collaboration as General Governments, we said that we found a lack of coherence in the last General Chapters when they called for collaboration in the Mission Projects of the Congregation or Priority Mission Projects but did not try to arrive at a common understanding of them. Along the way we must be careful not just to attend to the more subjective aspects of collaboration such as knowledge of one another, understanding, respect, clarity, decisiveness and courage. We also have to include the more objective dimension of defining, organizing and structuring projects in which we can and want to collaborate.

We are also touching on the last paragraphs of article 8, which refer to the role of the governments at different levels to promote the unity of the Congregation. Once again, in promoting unity we can not just seek subjective conditions that make it possible. We also have to provide the objective and structural means that facilitate unity. At times they are very simple things, such as coordinating calendars or defining terms. Others are more complex, such as clarity about collaboration in Projects of Apostolic Religious Life or pastoral projects at the provincial or regional level.

For that reason we believe that it would be good that the upcoming General Chapters treat the topic of appropriate structures for the

⁶⁰ Cf. article 2 of the *Constitutions*.

service of authority in projects of collaboration at all levels. This could be considered a development of what article 8 of our Constitutions says, "*The governments of both branches on their distinct levels are especially responsible for promoting this unity.*"⁶¹

Animation...women and men at the service of one Vocation and Mission

Without going back to the creation of heaven and earth, or dwelling on what some have called "women's great awakening," not to be confused with the feminist movement, in these last few pages we would like to provoke some reflection on the covenant of man and woman in the world today. As a religious Congregation of men and women don't we have something special to contribute to a new relationship between the sexes in the Church and the world? The majority of religious on the planet are women and yet theological and biblical reflection on religious life, including its canonical aspects, is largely dominated by men. The different journals on religious life that we receive from different parts of the world give ample proof of this. There exists a basic complementarity and equality between the male and female branches of the Congregation. And yet for a long time the sisters lived in a certain dependence on the brothers. Isn't there still today, perhaps in very subtle form, a rather clerical view of the SS.CC. religious life? As in other male congregations, doesn't this lead to a devaluation of the radical following of Jesus, which is really what religious life should be about?

As we have already said, over the course of the 200 years of the Congregation's history the missionary commitment of the sisters shifted. Until the female branch became "apostolic", the part it played in the mission was to pray, without however "*giving themselves up exclusively to the sweetness of contemplation.*"⁶² There is nothing strange in that given the times. The way the men and women of the Congregation share the mission has shifted but the essential, shared responsibility, remains. The same thing happened in most of the societies where the community is present. For ages human groupings functioned according to differentiation of tasks based on "natural" physical capacities or

⁶¹ Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc. and Enrique Losada ss.cc., *To the sisters and brothers*, Rome, May 10, 1999.

⁶² *Memoir of the Good Father on the title Zealots*, December 6, 1816.

societal interdicts. But today many taboos have been overcome and tasks no longer have a sex. Technical know-how, education and ability to adapt are and will be a better indicator than mere strength. Without denying the specificity of either sex, men and women can become real partners in almost all areas. Roger Garaudy writes, "*The great cultural revolution of all time will be the one that replaces a culture developed for millennia by the male half of humanity with a structure and a culture created by the whole of humanity women and men together.*"⁶³

What contribution can we make? Shouldn't our charism that calls us to live and affirm the unity of our religious family make us more sensitive to the riches that we can receive from the other sex? Working with men teaches women to manage their emotions and their affectivity. Women's most fundamental contribution to civilization comes from their close rapport with life and all that is human, which they listen to and observe beginning with their very own body. While men discuss great problems and handle abstraction skillfully, women can more readily go from decision to action. In general, men focus more on having and women on being.

Each man and each woman is created in the image of God, not in the image of another, as precious as that other might be. God does not love clones because He loves difference too much. Rather than imitating the other, let us choose dialogue without either a superiority or an inferiority complex and without fear of otherness. We should not deceive ourselves. This is surely a way of hope, but also of asceticism. We have a common call and sometimes that will mean denying ourselves so as to see things from the other's perspective. We may find it difficult to be really committed to the mission together. We will need a good dose of humility to simply be a worker chosen by God to build his kingdom. But can that be the way we grow as equals without eliminating differences? Isn't it a covenant that must always be renewed because it is never realized once and for all? This is all part of the very essence of our Congregation's charism and heritage. Father Antoine Hulselmans ss.cc. (Holland) in 1948 in his *Exposé historique sur le Chapitre Préliminaire de la Règle de la Congrégation des Sacré Coeurs* commented, "*The Good Father and the Good Mother are both 'Founders' of the whole Congregation, of the brothers as well as the sisters. Together they signed the requests to the Pope,*

⁶³ Roger Garaudy, *Pour l'avènement de la femme*. Ed. Albin Michel, Paris, 1981.

*in 1801 as well as 1814. At the beginning they redacted one rule for the two branches. Both of them were self effacing and attributed to the other the principal role in the foundation."*⁶⁴

Isn't this a call to us to live fully what is contained in article 8 of our Constitutions, to take the "marrow" from there and to make it "a dream" in the sense that Martin Luther King used the word? Some people question the paradoxical, even contradictory, character of this article. Isn't it something akin to the statute of the city of Hong Kong, "one country, two systems" as formulated by Deng Xiao-Ping? One Congregation, two branches. In reality, it is as important for us to emphasize being "one Congregation" as it is to defend the autonomy of each branch. The quality of our common mission and our unity is found in the balance of the two. Legislation, structures of government and formation, community life and temporal patrimony are proper to each branch. Commitments can be diverse. But isn't the Congregation nourished by its mission and by the zeal of each and everyone in the service of the Kingdom? Each Brother, each Sister has his/her place and personal identity. We have to go forward on this beautiful path toward holiness and unity as men and women who both individually and communally are becoming adults.

Collaborating equally as brothers and sisters in the service of the mission we must no longer waste time and energy in pointless discussions and arguments. It is much more urgent to live a life that "announces the universal communion willed by the Father,"⁶⁵ a life that nourishes hope and looks toward a world in which "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female—for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) The world Conference on Women organized by the United Nations in Beijing in 1995 used a Bahai maxim which said that this new humanity has two wings. One of these wings is woman, the other is man. Humanity can only fly when both of these wings are equally developed. If one is weak, flight will be impossible. And if one is very weak, the other will suffer the consequences and become sick. In the midst of the jubilee celebration of 2000, don't we find here good reason to awaken missionary zeal to

⁶⁴ Cf. note 7.

⁶⁵ *Sisters' Constitutions*, Rome, 1990, article 49.

go forth beyond borders to proclaim the love of God revealed in Jesus the Christ?

If history seems to have picked up speed in the course of the last century, changes in the condition of women are just as evident. While relations between women and men in the contemporary western world are not the only norm, people almost everywhere on the planet are trying to learn to live equally and differently. In the eternal quest to find an impossible balance, would we not have a prophetic role to play?

Within "*the prophetic school*"⁶⁶ which is the apostolic religious life, our belonging to a Congregation of men and women is reason to give witness based in equal rights and respect for difference. This demands of all of us "*the constant and passionate search for God's will, for self-giving, for unending communion in the Church, for the practice of spiritual discernment and love of the truth. It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history...*"⁶⁷ It is our responsibility to work in communion with the Church to make the fundamental equality of women a reality.⁶⁸ How can we promote this in our personal lives and not only in our apostolates? In order to be truly prophetic in this area, we have to begin by having just relationships that are respectful and loving. For we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3: 28). Just relationships are inscribed in the original plan of God (Gen 1:27, Mt. 19:1-9). We must be constantly attentive and creative so as not to support anything that tends to separate or compare men and women. This will certainly lead to changes of attitude and to personal and communal conversion. As a result prejudices will fall away and the way we look at "*the other branch*" will change. This serene way of looking at things and this spiritual attitude will lead to conversion which bears fruit and probably will lead to structural change.

This is the path of clarity, decisiveness and audacity that the Chapters of 1994 invited us to take. It is a journey that is made in stages, with times to stop and listen, moments to speak up and to open ones

⁶⁶ Bruno Chenu, *L'urgence prophétique*, Bayard Editions, Centurion, Paris, 1997.

⁶⁷ Vita Consecrata, No. 84.

⁶⁸ Message of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1995; Message of the Holy Father for the Thirtieth World Day of Social Communications, May 19, 1996.

eyes. It is a journey like that the one to Emmaus. It is a foretaste of a more fraternal world, closer to the Kingdom.

There are places in the Congregation where the brothers or the sisters can not collaborate because, for one reason or another, "the other branch" is not present. The absence of one branch does not mean that we are dispensed from responsibility for the unity of the Congregation. Living, promoting and affirming unity is much bigger than collaboration. What do we mean by this? Our covenant for mission takes shape in time and space, but it springs from a spiritual attitude which makes it grow. We must renounce the power of domination and at the same time allow confrontation when necessary. When we can not do this from day to day, it can be done by communicating and staying informed. This can strengthen the union of hearts and minds and arouse interest in common aims and objectives. Isn't this what the Good Father and Good Mother did when they began to live out "the dream" of the Motte d'Usseau and shared out the work and responsibility?

In one way or another each brother and each sister has a personal experience of the man-woman dimension of the Congregation. It is impossible for anyone to not be touched by what is of the very nature of our SS.CC. vocation. What more could we hope for than if after reflecting on this letter each member of the Congregation reread their personal history asking themselves something like "*how have I been responsible for maintaining and strengthening the unity of the Congregation?*"⁶⁹ It would be interesting to remember specific experiences of collaboration, encounters and conflicts but also to note how things have evolved. Why not share in community, in mixed groups like "*Rosa and Martin*" the column in the form of an open letter which appeared in the newsletter of the SS.CC. Provinces of Peru?⁷⁰

Coming out of the French Revolution, our Congregation was born not just to do things that no one else was doing at the time, but to be a witness of the Gospel and of the presence of God in a world undergoing profound change and becoming more inhuman each day. Today as yesterday, in a world more and more secularized, we are called to as

⁶⁹ Chapter I, article 8, *Constitutions*, Rome, 1990.

⁷⁰ *Newsletter of the Provinces of Peru*, Año 29, No. 154 (March 1996), No. 156 (May 1996) and No. 157 (June 1996).

brothers and sisters to "Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus"⁷¹ in whom "there can be neither male nor female."⁷²

During the Jubilee of the Year 2000 there will be many opportunities for reconciliation, return to the sources and forgiveness of debts. There will be innumerable requests for pardon for breaches of unity. This will all be part of a renewal in faith. Would it be possible for us to make some gesture of pardon and reconciliation? Could we forget the disputes experienced in living our unity as brothers and sisters so that from now on we only try to outdo one another in zeal for the mission?

As a new century of our religious family's history begins and as we envision refoundation, we must not get lost in thinking, reacting or going backwards. We have to move forward toward the future with zeal. We have shared with you our experiences, our convictions and also our doubts and our questions. May this letter allow each brother and sister to reflect deeply. May it help you come to a more profound appreciation of the gift of unity as brothers and sister that we have received from God and that is such a fundamental element of our identity and mission.⁷³

If we could take a fresh look at this aspect of our charism, our unity as brothers and sisters, if we could reshape it and let it reflect the face of the Christ of the Gospel today, wouldn't that be a beautiful anniversary gift for the Congregation. There is no doubt that such a gift would please the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

With our best wishes and united with you in mission,



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

⁷¹ Phil 2:5.

⁷² Gal 3:28.

⁷³ Letter to the sisters and brothers of the Sacred Hearts, Decisions of the Thirty-second General Chapter of the sisters, Rome, 1994; Thirty-fifth General Chapter of the brothers, Chapter Decisions, Rome, 1994.

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Rome, May 10, 2002
Feast of Blessed Damien of Molokai

Common Initiatives on Spirituality

Dear sisters and brothers,

Greetings to all during this Paschal season in which we are invited to give thanks for the Spirit of the Risen Lord who acts in our hearts and inspires us to be faithful to our congregational mission in service to the Church and the world.

It is precisely this Spirit living in our religious family and acting in persons and communities which we usually call our "congregational spirituality". This same spirit motivated Blessed Damien, our brother whom we celebrate today, in his generous commitment to the Mission in the midst of the sick and excluded people of Molokai.

Taking this aspect of our lives into consideration, the General Governments of the brothers and sisters have met twice lately to see how to collaborate in implementing the General Chapters' orientations and decisions regarding spirituality. (cf. Decisions of the 33rd General Chapter of the sisters Rome 2000 and Decisions of the 36th General Chapter of the brothers, Rome 2000).

Though the theme of spirituality was present from the beginning at our meetings together as General Governments, the many activities and urgencies of our respective calendars prevented us from treating all the themes we had.

Last March we met for two days at "Monte Cucco" Center in Rome. During that meeting we agreed on those things we wanted to work on together and those each branch would treat separately in the area of spirituality.

We started with the decisions of the respective Chapters and General Government Plans. Then, after having decided what we would do together, we sought ways to achieve these. This required checking with other groups. So the two governments got together again on May 3rd to hone our decisions and are now ready to communicate them to you.

In response to what our General Chapters asked: "*that our SS.CC. spirituality fosters our life and Mission*" (sisters) and that "*reading and reflecting upon our Constitutions is a privileged resource in animating and challenging us...*" (brothers), we want to publish a booklet on the first Chapter of our Constitutions. This material is intended to facilitate a week-long retreat or other times of renewal using the fundamental expression of the vocation and mission which springs from our charism. The title will be "*A Week Of Living And Discovering Our SS.CC. Charism*".

The content of the booklet:

- an introduction, a summary of the responses of some young SS.CC. religious and laity to the question on what touches them so much in our charism that they have chosen to live by it;
- seven chapters whose titles correspond to the numbers of the articles in the Constitutions with number seven corresponding to articles 7, 8 and 9;
- each of these chapters will include a theological and spiritual reflection on that aspect of the charism in the corresponding article, a number of biblical references and a few documents or texts from the lives of our Founders.

Work will be done by the Picpus Center using a proposal from the General Governments and will make up the common part of the booklet. Another part will be done in the Conferences, PPC, and geographic areas of the Congregation to capture the tone of the communities, the churches and the peoples to whom we are sent. It will have prayers, celebration outlines which permit an interiorization of the Constitutions in different cultural contexts, and concrete suggestions for living one or another aspect of our charism in these contexts.

A second project is offered to respond to what the General Chapters asked of us: to "*Deepen our understanding of our common SS.CC. Mission, its values and demands, being more available to be sent where there is*

a need and letting the charism find a home in diverse cultures." (sisters) and taking into account *"what is at stake... is the quality of our religious life..."* (brothers). This project will be called, *"A Spiritual Respite With A Witness For Our Times"*.

This means choosing brothers and sisters who have gone before us, not necessarily the most well-known, who in their time and space incarnated some aspect of our SS.CC. charism and who can accompany us when we pause along the way in order to deepen the charism's influence in our lives. The goal would be to walk with these persons by listening to their witness, their commitment for the mission and to meditate on how they *"contemplated, lived and proclaimed the Love of God incarnate in Jesus."*

For each one a small booklet will be written which contains:

- A characteristic phrase: a title which captures the life of our witness,
- a succinct biography with the most significant events of his/her life,
- texts written by or about him/her which show how he/she "contemplated, lived and proclaimed the Love of God incarnate in Jesus",
- texts or biblical references which enlighten his/her lived testimony and commitment,
- questions to help us continue along the way with our witness.

We wish to start with a series of brothers and sisters agreed upon by the General Governments after consulting a few people and communities. They will be presented by brothers and sisters who knew them well or who have access to biographical resources. This is just the beginning, because we hope that "new witnesses" will be suggested by the communities everywhere in the world.

On the other hand, if the first intention of this proposal is to stimulate "a respite along the way" in order to start up again with new strength, it is not limited to this. These biographies can be used for other purposes also, for example, in Vocation Ministry, adapting them to the situation.

Third and finally, we want to encourage and promote activities in different "historical places" of the Congregation with the help of

centers such as the Picpus Center and the Damien Center as well as the activities of the Province's Spirituality and Ongoing Formation Commissions. We believe that it is important to make these known and as far as possible to make them accessible to the greatest number of brothers and sisters.

These are the areas of collaboration which are possible for us to carry out in the area of spirituality. Obviously these proposals are not the answer to everything.

The creativity of the local and provincial communities is much more important at those levels. There, many other activities can be developed to respond to the Chapters' guidelines thus utilizing the spiritual wealth of our congregational charism expressed in our common vocation-mission. We hope that what the General Governments will promote, and what you will do, brothers and sisters, will help us all to deepen our spirituality and live it joyfully.

With God's help may it always be the source of the energy we need to live *"our consecration to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary radically with joy and enthusiasm, united by and for the common Mission, and make Jesus' option for the poor our own"*. (Cf. General Chapters 2000)

Remaining at your service, united in the Sacred Hearts,



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
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Rome, June 7, 2002

The Internet

Dear brothers and sisters,

Warm greetings from Rome in these days when we celebrate the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

"The consecration to the Sacred Hearts is the foundation of our Institute" as the Good Father said in his memo to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1816. To remember our consecration to the Sacred Hearts is to call on the deepest part of our life as a Congregation, it is to name the beginnings and source of our vocation and mission, our religious dynamism, our ecclesial service, and our evangelical witness (Constitutions, article 2).

Our Consecration to the Sacred Hearts is a way of expressing our belonging and charismatic identity. Moved by the Spirit we feel called to recognize in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary a beautiful expression of the Love of God, which has been conferred on humanity. This recognition leads us to contemplate, live and announce that Love, making our own the attitudes, options and tasks that led Jesus to the point of having his Heart transpierced on the cross. Mary precedes and accompanies us so that we can enter fully into the Mission of her Son (Constitutions, article 3)

Consecration, Vocation, Mission, Charism, are strong and powerful words, but we can run the risk of making them commonplace when these words are not expressed in a context of meaningful circumstances. This means that if we do not incarnate the substance of them in a meaningful and reasonable way in our lives, we run the risk that these words will lose their meaning, and what is even more serious, our lives, which claim to profess those words.

From this point of view may we continually work at re-thinking and expressing in every cultural context in which are present, the meaning of our charismatic tradition. The risk that our words and lives loose meaning can come from two different and not always clearly separable sources. One would be that the contents which give meaning to our lives would loose their value and the other is that our lives would not respond to the values that we say support them. We have to be alert to one or the other extreme.

For this to take place the processes of Ongoing Formation, which, if taken seriously, inevitably become processes of ongoing conversion, are absolutely necessary. Formation and conversion.. Openness to understand and assimilate the values, which give meaning to our religious life, incarnating them in the various cultures where we are present. A change of attitude and behavior in order to be able to express these values in our lives.

Truly the term culture is complex and it is not a question of entering into a definition of it here. In any case, without attempting to be precise or complete, we can say that culture changes over the course of time, that cultures are dynamic, that they are affected one another, and that certainly there are cultures with a greater capacity to affect the rest, for various reasons.

To speak now a days of a "global" culture seems obvious. To repeat with so many other people and institutions that the "global" culture includes possibilities and great risks, is only to repeat something already accepted, at least on the level of theory. In any case to count on that culture and on its influence which it has on other actual cultures for better or worse is something necessary if we want to be useful, as the Good Father used to ask us, for the churches and the people to whom we have been sent and among whom we want to incarnate the values which come for the gift received from the Spirit.

One essential aspect within the "global" culture is precisely that of the "means of communication". If there is something now a days which characterizes the dominant culture it is the capacity to be present, to control and use the communication media. Certainly one can think of an alternative culture which does not enter into play with the dominant one. It is possible that there are prophets who invite us to that culture and we will have to be attentive to that which the Spirit is saying to us

in the midst of this. Nevertheless, if we want to enter into dialog with the global culture and see how to express in it those values, which we profess, we can not leave aside the knowledge, the presence and the use of these means.

One of these means, perhaps the most powerful because of its utility, proximity and power, is the Internet.

"The Internet is certainly a new "forum", understood in its ancient roman sense as a public place where one can deal with politics and business, take care of religious obligations, develop a good deal of the social life of a city and show forth the best and worst of human nature. It was a very favourite and loved gathering place in the city, which not only reflected the culture of the environment but also created its own proper culture. This same thing is happening in cyberspace, which is to say, is a new frontier which is opening at the beginning of this new millennium. As in the new frontiers of other times, this opening has its dangers and its promises, in the same sense of adventure which characterized other great periods of change. For the Church, the new world of cyberspace is a call to a great adventure to use its potential to proclaim the message of the Gospel. This challenge is in the midst of what it means at the beginning of the millennium to follow the command of the Lord to «navigate the sea within»: «Duc in altum»" (Luke 5:4). (No. 2 of the Message of Pope John Paul II to the 36th World Congress of Social Communications)

Now a days access to the Internet is very common and on the increase, especially with young people, who speak of it not as anything extraordinary or to which few people have access. Increasingly more and more communities within the Congregation have access to this means. It is true that still many sisters and brothers have never used it, and surely some of them have already rejected it. Accepting and respecting many of the reasons of these brothers and sisters, we can not stop encouraging the whole idea and especially for those who have responsibilities in government, in formation, in pastoral work, and like the young people of today who "sail the sea within".

We can make good use of Internet for evangelization. Is there not here an important challenge, above all to be present in the world of young people? We just cited a number in the message of the Pope, but if we continue reading further, we will see how the Pope, on the other

hand a senior of 82 years, encourages us to go deeper than what we are suggesting here.

We can find in the Internet a means to be able to widen our knowledge of every kind and in a special way it can feed our spirituality if we are capable of using the means at our disposal. However, by means of the Internet there are many possibilities of communication within the Congregation. To this end, we are including the presentation of the Secretaries General concerning the new version of the Web Page of the General Governments which has just been re-done to improve and facilitate its use.

Allow me to insist on this point a little more. It deals with, as you know, a Web Page which the brothers launched in 1997. Then later on the sisters undertook the task as well. It has the possibility of communication, information, formation and exchange within the Congregation and also outside the Congregation. It does not claim to be a concentration of communication or formation. Nor even the pinnacle of a communication or formation pyramid. What it does is offer an open possibility to facilitate communications and interaction on all levels of the congregational community. Precisely one of the aspects of the Web Page, which we want to care for more, is its ability to facilitate the connection among the diverse pages which already exist in the Congregation.

Think about how important that is for an international community that wants to stress its interaction and its interdependence to be able to count on good, rapid and accessible communication. The use of the Web Page as well as electronic mail can facilitate this in an extraordinary way.

Certainly we do not want to hide the fact that at its heart this kind of communications can positively influence a new image of the Congregation, that would be neither that of a pyramid that could be an image of a stage of dependence, nor of water tight compartments, more related to an independent stage, but as that of a network, which is a good image to use as an interdependent community.

As in every enterprise of this type, good will is not sufficient. The collaboration among provincial secretaries and general secretaries is very important. But it is equally important to have the collaboration of

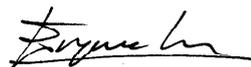
different groups, such as governments, formators, those in charge of apostolic and ministerial works, those in charge of youth and vocational ministries, these need to be aware of the value of these means and use them.

Finishing this letter, we want to express once again our best wishes to all the brothers and sisters. Let us ask God Our Father to help us to "launch out into the deep" in the Church, going deeper into the new culture in order to respond better today to our Mission.

Fraternally in the Sacred Hearts,



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

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Rome, June 1, 2003

Blessed Damien de Veuster ss.cc. and Venerable Eustáquio van Lieshout ss.cc.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Very warm greetings from the city of Rome, as the feast of Pentecost, which is the culmination of the Easter liturgical time, draws near. This is the feast in which we celebrate the gift of the Spirit of the Risen One which allows us to participate in the life which Jesus, the Christ has begun and which gives meaning to our condition as Christians and religious.

The Spirit is the one who gives the foundation and meaning to the Charism of the Congregation from which all of us, brothers and sisters, religious and secular, members of this one unique family, are called to live our vocation and common mission.

The objective of this letter is to look at that life and charismatic mission, which all are called to incarnate and which has been lived and expressed throughout our history. In effect in this letter we want to communicate to you some of the developments which have taken place recently and which have a great deal to do with two our brothers whose lives the Church has recognized as exemplary: Blessed Damien de Veuster and Venerable Eustáquio van Lieshout.

On the 9th of this past May the General Government of the brothers met with the Postulator General, Emilio Vega, ss.cc., to comment on the development of the causes for canonization and Beatification of Damien and Eustáquio respectively. On the 12th of May the General Governments of the sisters and brothers met together and commented on the content of that prior meeting and as a result, we believed it

important to write this letter to all of you so that all of you, brothers and sisters, might be a part of this.

Actually the Communication Center has already given a great deal of information about these developments, which are the motivation of this letter. First of all there is the Diocesan Process "Super Miro" (regarding the miracle attributed to Father Damien) in the Diocese of Honolulu, which began this past March 12th and ended on the 16th of April. This was immediately presented to the Congregation of the Saints in Rome and we are now awaiting some response from this Congregation. The Postulator General has told us, considering all the reservations, which are demanded in these cases, that the next steps could take place very quickly. Secondly, since the 15th of November of last year there has been a great deal of movement in the cause of the Beatification of Father Eustáquio, leading up to the signature of Pope John Paul II on the Decree on Virtues. Again one has to say that all indications point to the hope of a quick development of this cause.

Therefore it seemed to us not only useful but even necessary to make you participants in the state of the question of these two causes, which as we said, could undergo a very rapid development and therefore require a series of steps which with difficulty would have to be put together when the time draws near.

It is clear that this letter ought to develop also another series of communications, which continue to be organized and articulated in response to what we as a Congregation will be called upon to do around the event of the canonization of Damien and the Beatification of Eustáquio. Nevertheless it seems to us very important that all of us, sisters and brothers, be aware of how we will go about developing those things and that we be ready to collaborate so that those events that are coming be not only something that we have to do, but also truly an opportunity to renew our Congregational vocation and mission for the service of the Church and the people.

In the very near future we will have to see to the work of knowing and making known the figures of Father Damien and Father Eustáquio. If the Church presents them as authentic examples of christian and religious life, the first to recognize them as such are their sisters and brothers, and at the same time, we should contribute to the awareness

of them so that their exemplary character might result in the spread of the Gospel and the growth and development of the Kingdom of God.

We sincerely believe that in a very special way, as a result of the celebration of the centenary and Beatification of Damien, his figure is sufficiently known among his sisters and brothers. We can not say exactly the same about the figure of Father Eustáquio van Lieshout. It is clear that, in the communities of Brazil, Eustáquio is well known; we could say that as well for the communities of Holland and of course among many brothers and sisters throughout the entire Congregation who have studied and admired this brother. Nevertheless it seemed to us useful to contribute an attachment to this letter so that in a brief way we might have some data about the life of Eustáquio, which might serve the purpose of helping us to know and make known his figure.

It is true that first of all it deals with the awareness and the creation of awareness of their lives, their works and their service. But also we will have to see how these lives of our brothers, which have been situated in a precise historical context, continue to be valid today as inspirational for the faith, the hope and charity of many people, and first of all for their sisters and brothers of the Congregation.

We can all contribute to this task, each one from their community, their ministry, their activities, their state of health. We especially invite the young members in formation and their formators to discover the inspiring strength of our brothers for their congregational vocation. But we also invite Provincial, Viceprovincial and Regional Governments to go about animating their respective communities in this awareness and the spread of this awareness of the figures of Damien and Eustáquio. Therefore it will be important to establish a true communication network in which the initiatives coming from all over might be offered for the benefit of all, and be analysed by the various situations involved, and put into practice in so far as possible in each community at all levels.

It will also be very important to foresee who will take over the organizational responsibilities at the general, provincial and local levels. Certainly with this in mind there will have to be a dialog with the Provinces most directly involved in these eventual celebrations, as well as with other congregations, or church situations which also might be involved in these celebrations.

A little later on we hope to take advantage of the Council of the Congregation and the Enlarged General Council which will take place in Lima, to stress this aspect to the Superiors in the Congregation so as to be able to coordinate the activities which might be unfolding. This letter is only the first step in this process.

To speak of Damien and Eustáquio is to speak, as we said at the beginning, of the action of the Spirit, by virtue of the congregational charism, leading our brothers to an exemplary following of Jesus to its ultimate consequences. Let us all lift up our prayers to God Our Father that the testimony of both brothers might inspire and move us to a generous commitment to our Congregation Vocation and Mission for the service of the churches and the people where we are present.



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

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Rome, January 28, 2006

The Announcement of the Beatification of the Venerable Servant of God Eustáquio van Lieshout ss.cc.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Cordial greetings from the city of Rome, where on January 26th our Postulator General, Fr. Emilio Vega García, ss.cc. received a letter from the Vatican's Secretary of State in response to his letter of January 18th. The aforementioned letter stated that the His Holiness the Pope had granted that the Beatification Ceremony of the Venerable Servant of God, Eustáquio van Lieshout, ss.cc. take place in Belo Horizonte, Brazil on Thursday, June 15, 2006, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

This date had been requested in an agreement between the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte and the Province of Brazil. Obviously the two of them will be directly in charge of organizing the Beatification celebration for our brother Fr. Eustáquio.

Fr. Emilio Vega will go to Belo Horizonte to collaborate with the brothers in Brazil in preparing this momentous event.

Starting now, all of us, brothers and sisters, are called to participate, according to our possibilities, in this great celebration of the Beatification of one of our brothers. As we all know, the new norms for Beatifications tend to emphasize the role of the local Church in this step toward recognizing the holiness of a member of the Church. Therefore, the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte and the Province of Brazil will be taking responsibility for the preparation and celebration of the Beatification of our brother. However, they know that the General Governments, as well as the brothers and sisters of the

Congregation, are very much available to collaborate in any way necessary.

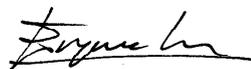
Certainly our most important collaboration will be jointly giving thanks to God Our Father for the gift that the Congregation has received in our beloved brother, Fr. Eustáquio, the acknowledgement of his blessedness on the part of the Church and the confirmation of our Congregation's Charism as a font of holiness and missionary service to the Christian community.

Thus we unite together in praying that this Beatification will be to the advantage of the Church, especially in the great country of Brazil, as well as for the many sick, poor and needy people to whom Fr. Eustáquio dedicated his ministry to in a preferential way.

Fraternally,

Handwritten signature of Jeanne Cadiou in cursive script.

Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General

Handwritten signature of Enrique Losada in cursive script.

Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

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Rome, February 24, 2006

The Beatification of our Brother

Fr. Eustáquio van Lieshout ss.cc.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings from Rome, city from which we write you this letter. We come once again to give you an update regarding the Beatification of our brother, Fr. Eustáquio van Lieshout.

Our previous communication was sent out last January. There we announced that the Beatification would take place in Belo Horizonte, (Minas Gerais) Brazil on June 15th, feast of Corpus Christi. We already have encouraged you to participate in this event by a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift received because of the Church's recognition of our brother's beatitude.

This celebration will certainly be a good opportunity to renew our religious identity as members of the SS.CC. Congregation, whose charism was the source and origin of Fr. Eustáquio's holiness.

In our next communication we will say more about this aspect. Today we want to inform you that the Brazilian Province of brothers - who are organizing the Beatification celebrations with the archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, the SS.CC. sisters in Brazil and the General Governments - invites you to participate in the June 15th celebration.

We are aware that all the brothers and sisters will not be able to be present in Belo Horizonte. However, we know that there will be representatives from the various communities throughout world. It goes without saying that our brothers and sisters in Brazil are ready to welcome you with open arms, but to assure a proper welcome they need to know the names of those who will attend the Beatification.

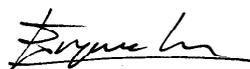
To organize all this it is necessary to receive all names and itineraries before March 31. That is why we ask the Provincial, Vice-provincial, Regional governments to send all the necessary information directly to secretariaprovincial@sscc.org.br. You can write in Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, German, Dutch or Italian.

Shortly we will inform you on the progress of events forseen for the occasion of the Beatification. For now, know that you have been invited by the brothers and sisters of Brazil and of the General Governments. We know we can count on your collaboration so that the organization will go as smoothly as possible.

Remaining at your service, with affection we bid you farewell!



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General

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Rome, March 15, 2006

The Preparation for the Beatification of Father Eustáquio

Dear brothers and sisters,

A very cordial greeting from the city of Rome. Once again after a few weeks we write to you about the beatification of our brother, Fr. Eustáquio van Lieshout.

As announced in our last common letter, we are conscious of the importance of the Church's recognition of the beatitude of one of our brothers. It is also a good occasion to deepen our religious consecration in which Fr. Eustáquio's holiness was rooted.

We hope that brothers and sisters from the different parts of the Congregation will be able to attend the beatification in Belo Horizonte. However, we cannot and should not reduce the Congregation's celebration to presence at that event.

As we have already said on other occasions, the beatification of Fr. Eustáquio leads us to three fundamental attitudes that can be expressed through various activities.

First, gratitude to God. Gratitude for the gift that our brother was for the Church and for humanity, for the goodness, truth and beauty of his life given to a world that seeks these. Thanksgiving for a life spent totally in service of others, especially for those who were suffering and in pain. Thanksgiving for having Fr. Eustáquio, proposed by the church, as a model of light and hope.

Second, our charism is recognized as a source and basis of holiness. It makes possible living as the icon of God with all its consequences: as

people baptized in the Spirit walking in the footsteps of Jesus as members of the Body of Christ.

During these months we are preparing our General Chapters which will collaborate in trying to deepen some fundamental aspects of our ss.cc. religious life as brothers and sisters. In this context, the beatification of Fr. Eustáquio can be an important impulse in our efforts to creative fidelity to our SS.CC. vocation-mission.

No doubt the beatification of Fr. Eustáquio can help us to identify more with our religious consecration and to share our vocation with other men and women. So we invite you to consider all possibilities that this event offers for the animation of vocation ministry.

Finally, Fr. Eustáquio is the model of a shepherd, integrating contemplation and action, spirituality and apostolic service in a very intense way. This integration is a desire and an ongoing challenge for all of us, brothers and sisters of the Congregation. Fr. Eustáquio can inspire our ministries, our pastoral activities or any other type of service that we perform in churches and communities throughout the world. Let this great man figure in the discernment of our communities and may his way of being and acting enlighten our choices and our commitments.

Keeping all this in mind, the two General Governments thought that we should invite the Congregation to take advantage of the little time that we have left until the celebration of our brother's beatification and we should animate this time around the three objectives indicated above.

Certainly we do not doubt your abilities, brothers, sisters, local and provincial communities, etc. but we thought that in collaboration with the brothers and sisters in Brazil, we would send you some material that could help you especially for times of adoration and celebrations.

With this letter you have received a model of an adoration which can be used by all the communities for the month of March. You can adapt it to your circumstances. Two others will come one each for the months of April and May. We foresee sending you a celebration model which can be used on the day of the beatification, June 15. This way, although not all the brothers and sisters will be able to attend Belo Horizonte, all will be able to have a celebration uniting them in spirit.

We are also looking into a way of getting other materials to you, either before or after the celebration, to promote the figure of Fr. Eustáquio.

Also, in the name of the preparatory commission in Belo Horizonte, we want to communicate to you that because the shortness of time does not permit all they would like to do before the beatification, plans for activities are foreseen afterwards, e.g., the solemn feast on August 30, the first anniversary of the death of Fr. Eustáquio after his beatification; the exhumation and the transfer of his body inside the church, to a more adequate place for prayer (the date will be specified subsequently); a week of study on ss.cc spirituality in light of life and the mission of Fr. Eustáquio, connected to activities of Initial and Ongoing Formation in Latin America as well as in other places could be held in 2007. As you can see, there is still much to do.

Brothers and sisters, we remain united with you in prayer that this event be a benefit to the Congregation, the church and especially Fr. Eustáquio's beloved, the ill and the needy.

As Fr. Eustáquio would say: Health and Peace to all!



Jeanne Cadiou ss.cc.
Superior General



Enrique Losada ss.cc.
Superior General