

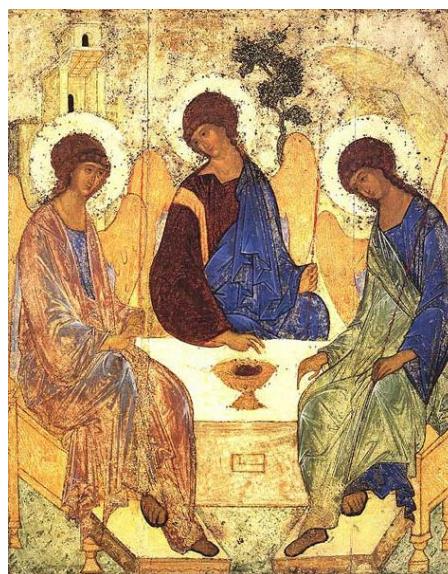
# COMPANIONSHIP OF GRACE

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## Companions of Grace



The Easter season that the Church invites us to experience up to the great Feast of Pentecost is a time of ever new joy and hope, a wonderful opportunity for the light of the Risen Lord and his close and faithful presence, as we prepare our hearts to welcome the Holy Spirit.

This beautiful Easter feast that we are experiencing, throws light on the subject that I now propose for our common reflection on leadership: *“Companions of Grace: a metaphor for religious leadership today”*. An invitation to experience the leadership of Jesus as He was with his disciples.

***“Suddenly Jesus met them on the road and said, peace on you”***

The Gospels of recent weeks are a clear and inspiring reference regarding the way Jesus accompanied his disciples : he goes out to meet them, *“Suddenly Jesus met them on the road and said, peace to you... do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me”* (Mt 28: 9-

10); he walked with them, *“while conversing and wondering, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them”* (Lk 24: 15); he spoke of the Father, *“no one comes to the Father but through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. But you know him and have seen him... whoever has seen Me has seen the Father... I am in the Father and the Father is in me”* (Jn 14, 7-10); He leaves them his Spirit, *“I told you this while I was with you, from now on the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of everything I have said to you”* (Jn 14: 25-26 ) and he assures them of his presence *“I am with you always, until the end of the world”* (Mt 28, 20).

This is the invitation and call to each of us, to be *“companions of grace”* on this path we have chosen together, in which we are intertwined by a call and a charism, by the love and hope we share. Our Congregational documents and in a particular way the decisions of the 35<sup>th</sup> General

Chapter, are asking us to take our life and mission together and in communion as “*companions of grace*”. We speak of a leadership that is relational, that accompanies, guides, listens...

The content that is presented below can help us to undertake together who we are “*companions of grace*” or partners in the Spirit. As you know, the goal of these formative reflections is the opportunity to acquire a common language and meaning, meeting points in our journey as an SS.CC. Family. If we have insisted in recent months on the subject of leadership it is due to the importance and need for us to live in constant conversion and renewal, so that by accompanying our sisters, we allow God's grace to reach every sister and community. Our reflection on this issue does not end here; it is the responsibility of each sister and community to continue deepening it.

**The decisions of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Chapter are asking us to take our life and mission together and in communion as “*companions*”**

This text is taken from: “Graced companionship: a metaphor for religious leadership today”, Sister. Mary Pat Garvin, R.S.M. IUGS Conference Assembly in May 2013.

### **Companionship of Grace: a metaphor for the religious leadership today**

Using the metaphor of “Companionship of Grace” we will explore how the mission of leadership is today, and has always been, taking on the mind and heart of Jesus; leading our communities as Jesus led his disciples: as a companion of grace!

Jesus was a companion of grace par excellence! He was a transformative leader who offered vision, energy, and courage to challenge those who were attracted to his way of being *with* and *towards* the people of God.

Similarly, the history of our own congregation is a history of wise women, companions of grace, transformative leaders who, following the example of Jesus, accompanied the sisters of their time with vision, energy, and courage to challenge the mission directed toward the people of God.

The words of Jesus and his relationship with the disciples modelled a new way of leading – a way that I call companions of grace. For three years Jesus was with his disciples as a companion of grace. While preaching, healing, and enjoying a good meal with friends, Jesus modelled a new kind of leadership; a way that he hoped would replace the experience of that the disciples had of absolute and unlimited authority and power.

To be a partner of grace, to relate to the members of our communities as Jesus did with the disciples in order to promote the dream of God, the Kingdom of God, has been the enduring commitment of our congregation. In season and out of season, we, as well as the companions of grace who have preceded us, we have worked and continue to work to carry on the mission of Jesus.

#### ***The Challenge to Graced Companionship in our Postmodern World***

In these challenging years at the beginning of the XXI century, wishing to lead as Jesus did, we ask:

- What type of leadership best enlightens our understanding of graced companionship?
- How does graced companionship promote and support the members of our communities, our charism, values and founding commitment of the congregation?

- Where can leaders and community members access this “glorious history” and move forward with confidence in the future, imbued with the Spirit and willing to meet the challenges of our day, with the wisdom and depth of the imagination of our founders?

Firstly, to lead as a companion of grace, we must believe deeply that leadership is primarily relationship. Secondly, companions of grace recognize that leadership is a common and shared task. Let us explore these two critical elements.

### ***Graced Companionship’s Relational Quality***

Leadership is best understood as a **process** that is not found in an individual leader or in the position of leadership in itself. Leadership is, rather, the dynamic relationship created and nurtured by leaders and community members.

The ability of Jesus to be a companion of grace is evident in his ability to create and nurture deep and lasting relationships with others; ties, as the Scriptures tell us, not even death can destroy. Also, Jesus always kept healthy ways of relating, even though sometimes conflict was present. As mentioned in the Gospels on more than one occasion Jesus could sense the emotions, thoughts and aspirations of others, in part because he was so in tune with his own inner life.

### ***Graced Companionship as communal and shared***

Effective leadership today is a communal and shared leadership. Leadership as communal and shared goes far beyond how we relate to our current councils or leadership teams. Leadership as communal and shared is all about generativity! It is about providing for our members what they need to develop their own capacities for leadership, be it leaders in their ministries and/or as future leaders of our communities.

It is precisely through relationships created and nourished between leaders and members that generativity is unleashed and the charism is quickened. Mentored, challenged and guided by graced companions members engage in the hard work of personal development and the development of skills necessary to become effective leaders. Furthermore, as members experience their own leaders as graced companions, be it on the local, provincial or congregational level, they may begin to envision themselves as graced companions to each other.

Our capacity as graced companions to lead in these uncertain times will be enhanced by the following:

*Firstly*, to have a sense of “at-homeness” with ourselves and a concomitant capacity for healthy relationships with others demonstrated in being approachable, flexible, and open to dialogue while remaining committed to the founding charism and values of the Congregation.

*Secondly*, leaders must have the capacity to be “critical realists”. That is, to look reality in the face and communicate joyful hope. This capacity is strengthened by the courage to act in spite of obstacles that arise from within our own communities.

*Thirdly*, the capacity to articulate the charism in fresh and compelling ways despite the shifting and complex times we find ourselves in, both in our world and in our Church. And lastly, our capacity to be attentive to the mystery of God wherever, whenever and however He chooses to make Himself known.

### ***Graced Companionship and Power***

As graced companions we cannot allow “power” to be a scary word! In Matthew 20:26 we see Jesus not abolishing the need for authority and power; but rather recasting these human dynamics so

as to ignite and release energy in service of the Gospel.

Jesus was clear when faced with the abuse of authority and power so frequent among the secular and religious leaders of his time. Noticing these same attitudes in the disciples, He was firm: “You must not be like that”. Jesus modelled a type of leadership that was highly relational and generative. He had immediate access to the courage and imagination of his disciples joining their present experiences to past experiences; and by recalling, he released their energy for discipleship.

Jesus experienced a healthy pace of contemplation and action. Centred in God and nourished through his times of prayer, solitude and communion around the table with his friends, he maintained his ability to face crisis and not break down, to face reality and communicate hope to his followers. He also used his power and influence, to train those willing to promote the Kingdom of God and God's dream.

Our leadership mission, inspired by Jesus, will support and sustain our sisters who serve the people of God in a fresh and compelling way. Is this to this kind of leadership that are called.