

JANUARY- FEBRUARY, 2008

List of contents

Spiritual Life

Letter of 1st January 2008
Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General

Letter of 2nd February 2008
Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General

Lent 2008
Father Gregory Gay, Superior General

“The other shore”
Father Javier Alvarez, Director General

Outline for the monthly day of reflection and prayer: “*He is risen, He is not here*”
(Mk 16,6)
Father Javier Alvarez, Director General

News from the Provinces

Beatification of Sister Lindalva and of Sister Giuseppina

Province of Recife: Homily given at the beatification of Sister Lindalva at Salvador de Bahia, 2nd December 2007
Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo, Archbishop of Salvador

Beatification at Salvador de Bahia, *An extraordinary experience...a sacred moment... a sacred place... God was there*
The Sisters of the General Council

Province of Sardinia; Beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli
Who is Sister Nicoli?

Province of Sardinia: Celebrations for the beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli, Cagliari, 3rd February 2008. “*I want to belong entirely to God.*”
Sister Maria Ida Cislighi, Daughter of Charity, (Province of Turin)

Sisters’ testimonies

Province of Mozambique: Meeting of the Provincial Councils of the African continent.
Sister Elsa Fatima Uassiquete, Echoes correspondent

Province of Peru: After the earthquake, love and hope spring up again
Sister Marina Isabel Melendez, Visitatrice

Province of Switzerland-Turkey: Health for all, respect for all
The Sisters of the Provincial House

History of the Company

Special centenary of the birth of Mother Guillemin

Mother Suzanne Guillemin, Daughter of God, Daughter of the Church, Superioress
General of the Company

VII The post-Conciliar period continued
Sister Claire Herrmann, Archives service.

EDITORIAL

The Assemblies, a time to recognise the work of the Spirit in our lives and in the lives of persons who are poor

In the course of his second homily for Advent 2007 and in the presence of the Pope and the Vatican Curia, Father Cantalamessa, a Capuchin, said, *“To be a prophet is to reveal the hidden presence of Christ in the world.”*

“Prophecy and hope now and everywhere!” This theme for the Assemblies invites each Sister to enter into a spiritual process, an act of faith, a Pentecost leading to a “rebirth” in the Company, allowing herself to be challenged especially about the way she **recognises** the action of God in her life, in the life of her Sisters and those who are poor. This perspective is important throughout our faith journey; it is at the heart of our vocation as Daughters of Charity.

Recognition requires a preliminary step: **welcoming the Spirit**. At the Annunciation, Mary experienced this sense of welcome, in response to the angel’s promise, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”* Like Mary, her contemporaries had to welcome the Spirit in order to recognise Jesus as Christ and Lord. As Daughters of Charity, we also need to welcome the Spirit in order to discern the action of God in the lives of our Sisters and those who are poor, and to recognise Christ in each one of them.

At the time of the Visitation, her heart enlightened by the Spirit, Mary greeted Elizabeth and recognised the work of God in her. After this faith-filled greeting, Elizabeth, who was also filled with the Holy Spirit, recognised Mary as the mother of her Lord. Then Mary, overflowing with joy, sang the Magnificat with Elizabeth. In

the same way, this recognition **allowed others to discover the marvels that God worked in them** and to give God thanks.

The Assemblies, lived out in a climate of thanksgiving, also promote recognition of who we are in God's sight: **sinners who are forgiven and called to conversion** to the Good News of the risen Christ.

This mutual "recognition", lived out in a spirit of faith now becomes a **pathway of rebirth** and a breath of prophecy to "*reveal the hidden presence of Christ to the world.*"

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 1st January 2008

Dear Sisters

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the union of the Holy Spirit be with all of us (cf. 2 Cor., 13: 13)*

These heartfelt greetings for a happy and holy New Year 2008 that I extend to each one of you in prayerful remembrance are borrowed from Saint Paul, with slight modifications. In fact, Saint Paul will be honoured this year as the Church celebrates from June 28th, 2008 to June 29th, 2009 the two thousandth year since his birth. This year has been designated a Pauline year and Pope Benedict XVI is dedicating it to the theme of ecumenism.

Before adding to my greetings for a holy New Year, I would like to express my gratitude for the many messages I received during this Christmas season. I thank you with all my heart for your warm remembrance. It was very moving to read your promises of prayers for our Sisters living in dangerous situations, a witness to your solidarity with them. May our sense of communion within the Company grow even stronger!

Several letters spoke about your Domestic Assemblies, describing the climate of prayer and listening and the missionary focus that they have. This is a cause for rejoicing with a hope that the Provincial Assemblies of 2008, as a result of the positive experiences on the local level of Assemblies, will plough new furrows, pathways of conversion for each of us and of hope for those who are poor.

Your messages also provide me with news of the women, men, elderly persons, young people and children you serve, whom you accompany in various ways along their journeys of life, in residences, prisons, refugee camps, schools, hospitals, etc. You repeatedly emphasise your joy in serving Christ in persons who are poor, "*an act of love--both affective and effective love -- which directs our entire life and is the expression par excellence of the 'state of charity'.*" (cf. C. 24 a) At times you also mention your feelings of powerlessness and poverty in the face of the amount and the seriousness of the distress that you encounter. I believe that the theme of our Assemblies, "Prophecy and Hope, Now and Everywhere", can help us to overcome this difficulty if, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we enter into the process of seeking to be deeply spiritual and courageously creative. In any case, all of this is included in my wishes for you that I send with a heart filled with hope!

I have highlighted several well-honed expressions from Pope Benedict XVI's recent encyclical *Spe salvi* in order to renew our sense of hope through our prayer life and service at the threshold of this New Year. When the Holy Father describes the settings in which hope is cultivated, he mentions first of all prayer, both communal and personal: *"In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings... thus we become ministers of hope for others. Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well... It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God."* (n° 34)

Constitution 24 f asks us to keep the world open to God as we consider it our *"responsibility to pray with and for those who are poor and in their name."* Constitution 33 reminds us that *"assembled in the Lord's name, we find His presence in a genuine community of prayer. This community draws its strength from a shared faith, from the Eucharist, and from praising the Lord. It finds its peace, its hope, and its joy in the Mystery of Christ, who died and rose from the dead."* May we indeed *"keep the world open to God"* through our life of prayer!

The Pope also cites suffering with people as a way of learning and practising hope. *"To accept the "other" who suffers means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word con-solatio, "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude."* (n° 38)

Christ recognised, loved and served in the person of the poor is the heart of our vocation as Daughters of Charity. Countless Daughters of Charity have lived out this mystique since 1633; and in our own day, Sister Lindalva lived it out to the utmost, shedding her blood for Jesus and for those who were poor in the ordinariness of her service to the elderly residents in the Abrigo Don Pedro in Salvador. For us as Daughters of Charity, our actions and suffering are interconnected with *"our proximity of life and heart with those who are poor"* which, fortunately, surpass the limits of the assistance that we are able to give.

Among the graces that the Lord has in store for us in 2008 is the beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli, in Cagliari on February 3rd this year. Father Gregory, Father Javier, two representatives from each Province in Europe and many Sisters from the five Provinces in Italy will be participating with the General Council, as well as several guests including Mother Duzan, Mother Elizondo, Father McCullen, Father Maloney and Father Quintano. We will truly discover this Daughter of Charity who was totally given to poor persons, her Sisters and her Lord. Another joy that this year holds for us is the beatification of Sister Marta Wiecka in Lvov in Ukraine on May 24th.

I would also like to confide to your prayers our decision to prepare a new implantation in Burkina Faso. This new mission is in response to the invitation from the Diocese of Nouna. We hope this will be a sign of hope for those who are poor and for the Company.

Once again, may I repeat my wishes for a happy and holy 2008 for each of you, each local community and each Province! Happy and Holy New Year to the entire Company, that work of God that Saint Vincent, Saint Louise and our first Sisters created little by little, and which depends on the creative fidelity of each of us!

May the Blessed Virgin, *"the star of hope, she who with her "yes" opened the door of our world to God himself..."* (cf. n° 49), accompany us each day of the New Year!

With affection and the assurance of my prayers,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 2nd February 2008

Dear Sisters

Happy and holy feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple! This February 2nd, we celebrate Mary's offering of her Son to God, when she learned through the words of Simeon that she would share in the mission and sufferings of Jesus, for like him, through her entire life she would carry out the will of the Father in a perfect way. The feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple in effect leads us from Christmas to Easter, reminding us that the Temple in Jerusalem is not too distant from the Garden of Olives and Golgotha.

This is the day that the Church invites us to celebrate the mystery of consecration: that of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and all those who seek to follow Jesus out of love for the Reign of God. It is the feast of consecrated life in general and so of course for the Daughters of Charity who "*give themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ in their brothers and sisters who are poor, in an evangelical spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity.*" ¹

In keeping with the tradition of the Company, I met today with our Superior General Father Gregory. With a sense of joy and humility, I transmitted to him the requests for renewal of vows that I received from all of you through your Visitatrices, along with my own request. I expressed to him how this process is, for each Daughter of Charity, a journey of faith that takes place through spiritual and apostolic sharing, prepared in prayer and in an attitude of interior poverty favourable to the reception of the Spirit. ² I told Father Gregory of our desire to be faithful to God's call, the joys we experience in our service to Christ in persons who are poor and in our community life, and also our difficulties and limitations. I also shared with him the hope-filled energy that is emerging in all the Domestic Assemblies that have already taken place.

¹ C. 7 a.

² Cf. C. 36 b.

Our Superior General granted us the grace of renewing our vows on March 31st the feast of the Annunciation this year. I thanked him in your name and asked for his prayers so that the eight weeks leading up to Renovation may be a time of spiritual renewal for each of us

May I offer you, as in previous years, some reflections on Action Lines from our Inter-Assembly Document of 2003. We have reached the fifth action line which addresses vocation ministry.

This text invites us to give new impetus to vocation ministry in a dynamic and creative way, in union with the Church. It begins with the following words:

“To be even more explicit in announcing the gospel to the young and help them to understand better the charism of the Company ...”

This simple phrase introduces very clearly for us the purpose of vocation ministry. Its focus is the proclamation of the gospel. In fact, vocation ministry is inseparable from the Church’s sole mission: *“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.”*³

All the members of the Church, according to their vocation and charism, are called to participate in an active and responsible way to its evangelising mission, and for this reason, to be involved in vocation ministry: *“The duty of fostering vocations pertains to the whole Christian community”*⁴.

Vocation ministry has its origin in the mystery of the Church:

*“The Church, being by her very nature a ‘vocation,’ is also a begetter and educator of vocations. This is so because she is a ‘sacrament,’ a ‘sign’ and ‘instrument’ in which the vocation of every Christian is reflected and lived out. And she is so in her activity, in the exercise of her ministry of proclaiming the word, in her celebration of the sacraments and in her service and witness to charity.”*⁵

Our Constitutions confirm the ecclesial reference of our vocation:

*“The Daughters of Charity form a Company recognised by the Church... The Company participates in the Church’s universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of its Founders”*⁶.

This reflection on vocation ministry, made in the context of our preparation for renewal of vows, will be developed in three parts. I will begin from the perspective of our vocation as a gift from God and an invitation to continue the mission of Christ. I will then address how we live out our vocation, in order to conclude with ideas for creative and dynamic vocation efforts in union with the local Church. Here then are the landmarks in the itinerary that we are going to follow:

³ Mk 16: 15.

⁴ Optatam Totius, n° 2.

⁵ Pastores Dabo Vobis, n° 35.

⁶ C. 1 a.

- welcoming the gift of our vocation
- living joyfully and wholeheartedly our vocation-mission
- participating enthusiastically in vocation ministry

1. WELCOMING THE GIFT OF OUR VOCATION

- **“In response to a divine call...”**⁷

Our vocation is a precious gift from the goodness of God, an incredible grace for which we can never cease thanking God. It is a personal and freely given invitation from the Lord: *“You did not choose me but I chose you.”*⁸

Saint Vincent reminded the Daughters of Charity that their vocation was an inestimable grace from God, that they should live it out with great joy, never tiring to thank God for it:

*“...from all eternity God had chosen and elected you for that...What happiness, Sisters, and how the thought of God’s eternal plan for you should oblige you to be grateful to Him for the choice He has made of you! Reflect well on that, Sisters!”*⁹

“Reflect well on that,” yes, let us reflect on the gift of our vocation and recall with joy all the graces that we have received along our vocational journey. Let us reflect on it that we might praise and thank the Lord and marvel that we have been chosen by Him... *“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”*¹⁰ *“We hold this treasure in earthen vessels...”*¹¹

“Reflect well on that” in order to recognise all that the Lord has accomplished in our lives, through us, for those who are poor, for all those whom we encounter in our lives. *“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.”*¹²

“Reflect well on that” in order to recall and relive the moment in which we heard the voice of Jesus inviting us to leave our nets on the shore and climb into the boat with him and follow him for the rest of our life. Does the joy of belonging to the Lord really dwell within us, the joy of serving him in persons who are poor, those whom the world has abandoned? Do we take to heart the invitation from psalm 100: *“Serve Yahweh with gladness”* ?

Do we live our vocation today with the energy of our first love, with our first fervour? Do we live it as grace, as an encounter with the Lord who is living and

⁷ C. 7 a.

⁸ Jn 15: 16.

⁹ Coste IX, p. 242: Conf. 13-02-1646.

¹⁰ Lk 1: 47-48.

¹¹ 2 Cor 4: 7.

¹² Lk 1: 49-52.

present and who is at the origin of our every heartbeat? Is the vitality of our first call reawakened in us each time the liturgy proposes Psalm 63?

“O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water... Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”

Let us reflect well on our own story, and perhaps during this time of preparation for Renovation, tell it again: the call we received, that became clearer over time, a call that continues, inflaming our heart as much today as when the seed of our vocation first began to grow.

• **“To follow Him and carry on His mission...”**¹³

Vocation and mission are inseparable. We have been called to continue the mission of Christ, *“to do what the Son of God did when He was on earth.”*¹⁴

We need to go back to the Gospel again and again, to be part of the group of those who follow Jesus in order to contemplate and learn how he would act, what responses he would give to those who are in need and abandoned.

I would like to reflectively reread with you the well-known and very moving text taken from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew:

*“Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”*¹⁵

*“Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority...These twelve Jesus sent out...”*¹⁶

We note with admiration and surprise that no human problem escaped Jesus’ notice. As he went along, he taught and proclaimed the Good News to the people who were waiting to be saved. He consoled those who were suffering and cured those who were ill. He was filled with compassion for those who wandered aimlessly, whose lives had no purpose. He was moved and he acted. He called and assembled the apostles to continue his mission, for the harvest was plentiful.

Our Founders, following the example of Jesus, discovered the misery of their times and knew how to respond...The response of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise is the Company, which has been striving for more than three hundred seventy-five years to be faithful to the vocation and mission it has received. We know well, the response of the Company in the future is rooted in our fidelity today.

So many poor persons pass before our eyes, live alongside us, all around us, persons trapped by all forms of misery: hunger and malnutrition, war and violence,

¹³ C. 8 b.

¹⁴ Coste IX, p. 15. Conf. 05-07-1640.

¹⁵ Mt. 9: 35-38.

¹⁶ Mt. 10: 1 ff.

ecological disasters, various social problems, exploitation, loneliness, helplessness... Their presence in our world, now and everywhere, from New York to Nairobi, Rome to Osaka, Manila to Caracas, show us that human solidarity according to God's plan is still a work in progress, yet to be achieved.

They are nameless faces, lacking histories of any significance, without a brochure to evoke compassion. Persons overwhelmed by various tragedies, lacking hope, fearing the future; young people disillusioned by everything, with no desire nor opportunity to overcome their difficulties, elderly persons crippled by loneliness, ill persons imprisoned by pain! There are multitudes of people who hunger and thirst for God!

These starving, confused, exhausted multitudes, whose cries reach us, wound us and rouse us, need new servants to heal and comfort their broken hearts, to reveal to them the merciful face of God the Father. They have need of new servants concerned about proclaiming the Gospel to them, and making the Kingdom present.¹⁷

What are our thoughts and actions, what are our decisions and responses in the face of the anguish and sadness of the people of our times? Do we have prophetic responses bearing hope, in keeping with our vow of service of poor persons?

Is our life nourished by the ever new strength of the Gospel, which continually recreates in us attitudes of humble availability, joy freely given, impelling us to synchronise our life to the radicality of the Beatitudes, through our vows of chastity, poverty and obedience?

This time of preparation for Renovation should mark a new step for us each year as we deepen our total gift of self to God, following Christ in order to carry on His mission¹⁸.

With the first Sisters, Saint Vincent stressed the importance of the spiritual growth required by the vows, and he encouraged the Sisters to make and renew them.¹⁹

The vows are nothing other *“than a gift you’ve made of yourselves to the Lord. He likewise has given himself to you, for He gives himself to souls who give themselves to Him by an irrevocable contract, which He’ll never break...”*²⁰

This irrevocable contract, a gift of Love, demands a response of love in service, *“an act of love--both affective and effective love -- which directs their entire life ...”*²¹ To be available for the mission of the Company, we choose to live the evangelical counsels of:

¹⁷ Cf. C. 10.

¹⁸ Cf. C. 8 b.

¹⁹ Cf. *Instruction on the Vows*, page 38.

²⁰ Coste X, page 138. Conf. 06-06-1656

²¹ C. 24 a.

Chastity, *“a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor.”*²²

Poverty, *“poverty of spirit is openness to the Spirit and to the love of all persons...”*²³

Obedience which calls for *“a common seeking and humble, loyal acceptance of God's will...”*²⁴

2. LIVING JOYFULLY AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY OUR VOCATION - MISSION

- **“To live fully her personal response to the Lord ...”**²⁵

Our Constitutions emphasise the role of witnessing to a generous and joyful commitment in the context of vocation ministry:

*“Each Sister, striving to live fully her personal response to the Lord, strengthens the fidelity of her Sisters and does her part to foster other vocations.”*²⁶

Joy flows from a life that is centred and unified in Christ and the mission. Joy radiates from it, helping to bring the most beautiful aspects of reality into focus, the most positive dimensions of events, the enchantment of being alive. At the same time, an attitude of joy helps to awaken the best in others, to transmit an enthusiasm for life and a desire to give oneself freely and generously. Our society today is sensitive to the signs that touch it at its deepest levels. One of these signs is the gospel radicality of a life totally given to persons who are poor. When someone is continually available to poor persons and takes their side, her life speaks volumes, she transmits a message, and she calls forth a response. “There is nothing more stimulating than a witness to one's own vocation, which is so passionate as to make it contagious. Nothing is more logical or coherent than a vocation which generates other vocations...Blessed are you, then, if you can express with your lives that to serve God is beautiful and fulfilling, and reveal that in Him, the Living one, is hidden the identity of every living person.”²⁷

“The Gospel witness of the local community...”²⁸

It would be well to study in all sincerity the climate that exists in our local community to see if it communicates a desire to give oneself to serve God in persons who are poor, as part of the Company. I also encourage you to see if your life style is attractive and compelling, or if at times it clings to a series of outdated practices that no longer speak to current generations, or even worse, if you have become settled into a comfortable and dull mediocrity, a life that doesn't awaken in anyone a desire to share in it.

²² C. 29 a.

²³ C. 30 a.

²⁴ C. 31 b.

²⁵ C. 59.

²⁶ C. 59.

²⁷ *New vocations for a new Europe*, n° 6.

²⁸ C. 59.

*“Consecrated persons are being asked to bear witness everywhere with the boldness of a prophet who is unafraid of risking even his life.”*²⁹

Do we speak a prophetic and hope-filled language that flows from a life centred on the essential of our vocation, or do we need interpreters to explain it to others?

We have abundant means to grow and be strengthened in our vocation. Ongoing formation, as presented in our Constitutions, is a pathway of progressive growth.³⁰ It is openness to the Spirit, reflecting the attitude of our heart wanting to respond faithfully to the echoes of our first call that arises at each moment in our day to day life. *“Formation allows the woman to live her vocation as a progressive modeling of herself on Christ, with renewed fidelity to the Spirit and to the aim of the Company.”*³¹ In the same way, we are all responsible for the growth of our Sisters: *“In simplicity and humility, the sisters help one another to advance towards the Lord.”*³²

“Faithful to this spirit, the Company makes every effort to be available and ready to respond...”³³

The Company exists today because of the efforts of all those past generations of Sisters to live the charism wholeheartedly in their day. The response that we give today, as we have said, will prepare the future.

On January 10th 1660, a few weeks before her death, Saint Louise wrote the following to Sister Marguerite Chetif who was on mission in Arras:

“...the business of the Company increases daily. This past summer, as I told you, three or four more works were established. Blessed be God for everything! May He grant the Company the strength and generosity to maintain within itself the primitive spirit that Jesus instilled in it through His Spirit and by His holy maxims. Let us often give ourselves to God so as to obtain from His goodness the generosity needed to advance His glory by fulfilling His designs on the Company.”

A bit later in the letter, after having addressed other matters, Saint Louise openly asked her: *“So you have not found any girls who want to give themselves to the service of Our Lord in the poor as members of the Company?”*³⁴

This “business of the Company”, the service of poor persons at the time of the Founders and all throughout our history, has been carried out with a desire to be faithful to the will of God for the Company. All our saints and “blesseds”, known and unknown, bear witness to this. The example of Sister Lindalva is a good illustration of this in our time. She didn’t want to exclude a poor person who could be dangerous

²⁹ *Vita consecrata*, n° 85 a.

³⁰ Cf. C. 50 and C. 58 b.

³¹ C. 49.

³² C. 32 b.

³³ C. 12 b.

³⁴ Saint Louise, L. 651 to Marguerite Chetif, *Spiritual Writings*, pages 673-674.

and she paid with her life for her loyalty to her commitment as a Daughter of Charity totally given to the service of poor persons.

So, we are responsible today for the future of the Company in the same way that past generations were in their day. Our Founders strongly motivated the Sisters with regard to this:

*“This is a work that God has placed in your hands. He will ask you for an account of it...It’s a treasure you have in your care and whose loss you must prevent...What a misfortune if the Company were to decline through our fault!”*³⁵

Our responsibility is great, as Saint Vincent so well explained to our first Sisters in this memorable conference of May 25th 1654. However, let us not take the work “decline” too literally! It is certain that our worldwide numbers are going to continue to decrease over the years, but we should envisage the vitality and future of the Company in other ways. Our Founders had two very clear ideas with regard to the vitality and future of the Company: maintaining its spirit and keeping the Rules. All the efforts at revision of life made during your Domestic Assemblies and soon in your Provincial Assemblies have, as their goal, fidelity in living our spirit in the context of our Constitutions.

*“If there’s anything in the world for which you should ask God, it’s your spirit...If you live in this spirit, dear Sisters, how propitious charity will be, how you’ll honor it, how it will grow!”*³⁶

3. PARTICIPATING ENTHUSIASTICALLY IN VOCATION MINISTRY

Vocation ministry has two purposes: that of responding to God’s will with ever-growing and ever-renewed fidelity and that of showing the way to others, being a voice that is prophetic and hope-filled, now and everywhere.

• **“The Daughters of Charity pray that God will send workers into the harvest...”**³⁷

Praying for vocations, as Jesus invites us to do in the Gospel, is deeply rooted in the Company. Saint Vincent expressed his conviction about the need to pray for vocations: *“...Our Lord has specifically recommended that we ask God to send good workers into His vineyard; for in fact there will be no good ones if God does not send them...”*³⁸

Saint Louise wrote to the Sisters: *“Pray for the entire Company and ask Our Lord to send labourers for His work if He wants it to continue. Requests come from so many places that it is impossible to satisfy all of them.”*³⁹

³⁵ Coste IX, page 539. Conf. 25-05-1654.

³⁶ Coste IX, page 477. Conf. 24-02-1653.

³⁷ C. 59.

³⁸ Coste VII, page. 626. Letter to Guillaume Desdames, 20-06-1659.

³⁹ Saint Louise, L. 391 to Cecile Angiboust, *Spiritual Writings*, page 440.

Frequent recitation of the beautiful prayer “O Hope of Israel,” woven with biblical images, is a fervent supplication, praying for new vocations and for those who have already responded to God’s call. The website of the Company with its news and its prayer corner also offers resources for prayer for vocations.

Our Sisters who are elderly and ill participate profoundly in vocation ministry, as they offer their sufferings with the prayerful force of their lives that have reached the stage of pure love. They continue their commitment, not in the monastery of the houses of the sick, but in that of confident love in the midst of their sufferings; not in the cloister of the streets of the city, but in that of weakness and fragility born with faith and patience. They often demonstrate as well, an incredible creativity in participating in community tasks and in the works of their Sisters involved in full-time service.

“WARMLY WELCOME THE YOUNG, OR THE NOT SO YOUNG,..HELP THEM IN THEIR VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT BASED ON GOSPEL MOTIVES”⁴⁰

Allow me to quote first of all the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI to the young people gathered in Cologne for World Youth Day (August 2005): *“I know that you as young people aspire to great things, that you want to commit yourselves to making the world a better place. Show this to humanity; show it to the world, who rightly expects this witness from the disciples of Jesus Christ and who, especially by your love, will be able to discover the star that we and all believers are following.”*

It is difficult to address vocation ministry in a very concrete way here, because it is carried out in connection with each local Church, often with the Vincentian family. It depends, therefore, on the circumstances of each Province and its formation plan. Moreover, the realities in the Company are so diverse; a vocation gathering might bring together one hundred young people or just three or four, depending on the Province. I would simply like to emphasise a few more general points. Vocation ministry must be “generous,” it consists of casting seeds broadly, at times relearning how to invite, overcoming an inferiority complex that can paralyse us if we live in an anti-vocation society. If we are on fire with love, like Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, we will know how to communicate it. The Company is beautiful and we can be proud to present it!

In addition to group sessions, personal accompaniment is of utmost importance for those who express an interest in vocation, because each one needs to be respected and understood in her individual journey.

It is good to have places where, as in the case of the first disciples of Jesus, “they came...and they remained with him that day.” In our case I am thinking of the way that local communities welcome others for daily liturgical prayer, times of specially prepared prayers, sharing the Word of God. The Spirit has a mission for those who come to us, and this mission becomes clearer with frequent contact with the Word, by participation in community prayer and by times of silence with God. It is important that those who are seeking find the pearl of great price and make it their priority. They need to encounter God and become inhabited by another presence besides their own.

⁴⁰ Cf Action Lines p. 10, 2-3.

Along with this interior discernment, it is necessary to provide those who come to us some opportunities to get to know the Vincentian charism. They live in a world marked by unacceptable inequalities; they are manipulated unscrupulously by the media, continually influenced by provocative advertising. They have a sense that *“Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away.”*⁴¹ They are looking for more truth, purity, clarity and justice, for effective solidarity. They need to see Daughters of Charity who are servants, close to the life and heart of poor persons, attentive to their full promotion. They need to see our communities shining with the joy of service and mutual support!

In concluding this reflection on vocation ministry, I turn to Mary whom we celebrate today along with her Son. May she accompany us as we prepare to renew our vows! May she who was always open to the Spirit help us to be open to the workings of the Spirit in our hearts, our communities and our Provinces to renew our vocation, as well as in the hearts of those who are called to follow Jesus in the vocation of the Daughters of Charity.

Tomorrow, we will be united in celebrating the beatification of Sister Nicoli. She who knew how to inflame the hearts of so many young people will help us in our vocation ministry, as a model of fidelity to the service asked of her and a model of creativity in responding to the needs that sprung up around her. In your name, I thanked Father Gregory for his attentiveness to the Company and his closeness to us. In the same way, I expressed our gratitude to Father Javier for his faithful accompaniment. I also send Father McCullen, Father Maloney, Father Quintano, Mother Duzan and Mother Elizondo cordial and appreciative greetings on the part of all of us, with promises of our prayers for their intentions.

Devotedly and affectionately, with prayers for each of you,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

⁴¹ Canticle of Canticles 8: 7.

FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Lent 2008

To all Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

Lent 2008 has come upon me quickly. So much so that I fear that many of you in far distant communities will not receive this communication at the beginning of the Lenten season.

What I would like to share with you this year comes from a dialogue I had via the internet with a confrere who had a legitimate concern about the quality of the communal prayer in his local community. In the back and forth comments, we each reflected on what we considered significant, with regard to our communal prayer life. At one point, because I liked the quality of his reflections, I asked that he put together some thoughts that I could incorporate into my Lenten letter for 2008. He agreed to that and I present to you here a combination of our reflections concerning common prayer.

As we prepare to celebrate the gift of Lent, the Word of God calls us to unite ourselves more deeply to the unselfish and obedient suffering and death of Jesus by a conversion of mind and heart and spirit. Just under two weeks ago all of us were reflecting on the meaning of conversion as we celebrated the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Paul's conversion had a great impact on the conversion of St. Vincent de Paul himself. This year for the foundational feast I was in Cameroon, and there is always something wonderful about the Word of God that no matter how many times we might hear a particular text, it is so dynamic that something new can touch our hearts and deepen our own reflection.

This year it struck me that the whole concept of conversion, using Paul's as an example, is intimately bound up with mission. The first Saturday following Ash Wednesday we have the call or conversion of the tax collector, Levi, known to be a notorious unjust sinner, and called so by the Pharisees. But it is such as him that the Lord Jesus has come to call. Levi became a disciple of Jesus responding to the invitation to "Follow me." I would hope that this Lenten season, as we are called both to personal and communal conversion, all of us might intimately link that with the desire to be more faithful in our following of Jesus Christ in the mission that he has given us: to evangelise and serve the poor.

As always, God invites us to holiness in community. We need to be careful, as we share the message of Lent with those we serve, that we always encourage Lent's effectiveness in ourselves. I would like to strongly recommend to you, my Sisters, that this Lent we share a common effort to improve our prayer in common. A number of years ago, Father Maloney called us to make our prayer more beautiful for God and attractive to the young. He meant that invitation to reshape all our prayer every day, not just as an occasional experience. I am repeating that call to you, a call to improve the daily prayer of your community.

And I would like to add another note: that we pray together so that our community life might be the better. St. Vincent asked you to live together as dear Sisters. In the past, fidelity was often measured by observance of a universally legislated rule with an order of day that was much the same throughout the world. Today, fidelity can be measured by a member's observance of the covenant that she has made with the other members of the house. The covenant, of course, embraces not only our common commitment to an apostolic mission, but also our pledge to support one another in life together and in prayer¹. I ask you to deepen your commitment to and cooperation with the members of your house to pray together in a true spirit of community as St. Vincent hoped for it. It was Vincent who said:

“Give me a man of prayer and he will be capable of everything. He may say with the apostle, ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me.’ The Congregation will last as long as it faithfully carries out the practice of prayer, which is like an impregnable rampart shielding the missionaries from all manner of attack.” (SV, XI, 83 Coste)

All would agree that saying prayers does not necessarily guarantee that we are praying. We need to pray together in a way that allows us to discover and share our inner selves, our faith and our doubts, our fears and our confidence, our stories of effectiveness and our failures, our commitment to be truly Vincentian. Prayer should help you to know and appreciate one another as individuals within community, to support one another gently and faithfully, to foster tolerance and openness to the different gifts given by the Spirit to each of you. It may very well be that the recitation of Office, as important as that is, does not always support the goals of your communal prayers as Sisters. Sometimes the recitation of the Office can be mechanical, lifeless, sometimes it is too fast or not in true unison, conditions we must remedy with unselfish dedication. The traditional way of saying Office does not always offer us space for interpersonal and fraternal sharing.

I encourage you to talk together as dear Sisters in your house and find ways to pray together meaningfully and fraternally as your Constitutions ask of you. (S. 3c) Many of us have collected prayer forms from Community meetings, from books, from parishes and others situations. They can be simple prayers, with periods of silence, and time to share our hearts with one another. Prayer can even be spontaneous when you are with your Sisters. Another helpful form of communal prayer is *Lectio Divina*, a very common form of prayer used throughout the Company of the Daughters.

¹ For a more extensive reflection, cf. Robert Maloney, “As friends who love one another deeply”, *Vincentiana* 2000 N° 4/5 e, pp. 336-354.

Once or more a week take the day's Scripture readings, or the readings of Sunday, and share what the selection mean to you personally. Some might find recorded music helpful to support their singing, or as a background to their quiet prayer. The Sisters of a house should openly and honestly discuss the time and place of their prayer to find the situation most conducive to good prayer.

Let each Sister participate in the house's daily prayer, using whatever creativity and experience she has, being humble enough to accept the choices of her Sisters and enter into the prayer with a full heart. Sisters who work with youth or who are young themselves can offer helpful insights into making your prayer attractive to youth. We need to find a working balance between patterns that make a familiar and comfortable space for our prayer and helpful variety that keeps us growing.

Besides Morning and Evening Prayer, there are other opportunities to make our family life more prayerful. For example, a house could add to their weekly schedule or on an occasion, prayers to our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, the Rosary, a house Penance Service, added prayer time on feast days, grace at table – all allow us to deepen our sharing of prayer and to fulfil our desire to live prayerfully within the living circle of our community.

Prayer forms can become less prayerful because of too much sameness. For example, if grace before meals is always the same, we might cease praying and just appear to be reciting words.

There is another dimension of our prayer that involves the Priests of the Mission most directly, but all of the faithful should take time to examine their participation in the Liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist. St. Vincent was a major force in the improvement of the Liturgy in his time. (See Coste I, XIII to get a view of the background of the liturgy in Vincent's time and his commitment to improving Liturgy among the clergy.) The retreats for ordinands, the Tuesday conferences, the work with the ordained and the seminaries all included as part of their goals the improvement of the Liturgical knowledge and practice of each individual celebrant. Like Vincent, we live in a time when the Church is experiencing the changes that follow new emphases of an ecumenical council. Some embrace these changes and some resist them. We should follow our Founder's example of commitment to the teaching of the Church to be men and women who, in our own practice lead by example in ourselves and in our work.

I know I ask a lot, but what is more important to any of us than the Eucharist, the "source and summit" of our Christian life? The Constitutions state clearly that the Eucharist is the centre of life and mission for the Sisters. (C 19b) And I would like you to take some time to examine yourselves to see how you live the celebration of the Eucharist. Workshops could be set up in order that the Sisters could deepen the sense of meeting each day with Christ in their brothers and sisters through the Eucharist.

Concerned as we are to animate the Vincentian Family, we should take special care to want to participate actively in the liturgy. You may be called upon to read at the Eucharist or be ministers of Christ's Body and Blood. The Eucharist in itself is a dialogue between the minister of God and his people. We are called to respond in a

participative way and at times spontaneously in and through moments such as the Prayer of the Faithful. St. Vincent was always dedicated to encouraging all members of the Body of Christ to share the Ministry of Prayer and Service. Therefore, we should not only prepare ourselves, but help to prepare the people that we serve so that they too might actively participate in the Eucharistic celebrations.

The celebration of the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday is our prime example of our relationship between common prayer (the Eucharist being the example *par excellence*) and mission wherein Jesus intimately links charitable service with the sharing of Word and Sacrament.

My Sisters, what a blessing for the Church if each of you rededicated herself to full participation in the Eucharist, joining voices with other brothers and sisters in prayer. To paraphrase St. Vincent de Paul, “Give me a community of prayer...”

On a practical note, by way of conclusion, during moments of your common prayer, I ask you to lift up your hearts and minds and voices to the Lord who hears the cry of the poor and pray particularly for our brothers and sisters in troubled places such as Kenya, Eritrea, the Middle East, Northern India and Colombia which at present are countries where our brothers and sisters of the Vincentian Family and the poor that they serve are suffering the most.

“... if we come together before the Lord as the first Christians used to do, he will give himself in turn to us, and remain in us with his lights, and will himself accomplish in and through us the good we are bound to do in his Church.” (St Vincent’s letter of Jan 15th 1650)

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Father G. Gregory Gay, CM
Superior General

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

“The other shore”

I would like to use this title for our reflection on the call that the Church makes to all Christians, to journey along the path of holiness.¹ This is a vast, reasonable and necessary project for all Christians who form part of the hierarchy of groups of

¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 39

consecrated people or the laity. The Church did not invent this project. It is Jesus who put it before us in Sacred Scripture, “*Be perfect, then, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” (Mt 5, 48). Saint Paul even goes so far as to say that it is God’s will that we should attain holiness (cf. 1 Th 4, 3; Ep 1,4). The call to holiness, therefore, is not something that is purely optional and reserved for those who have certain natural predispositions for following this path, nor for those who have chosen to follow Christ in a radical way. No, holiness is the natural horizon for every Christian: it marks out the final goal as well as the direction to be followed.

Naturally, this call affects the Daughters of Charity, too. Their unconditional commitment to the poor in the following of Christ that they undertake in the particular spirit of their Company, will make this sanctification possible. As we can see, there is nothing extraordinary about this. Perhaps the first idea that arises from this topic is precisely this: holiness is not built on heroic acts and extraordinary happenings but on the raw material of ordinary life when this is directed towards God. This is the fundamental requirement. We might put it another way and say that the Constitutions trace out the path of holiness for the Daughters of Charity. The final Constitution, number 96, is the key to understanding why this path leads to holiness: “*The Constitutions are to be faithfully observed by all the Sisters as being for them the expression of the will of God.*”(C. 96 a). All writers who have reflected on this theme make the connection between sanctity and doing God’s will. Saint Vincent does this throughout his conference of 6th January 1657 to the Daughters of Charity, entitled, *On the obligation of striving after perfection.*²

Why should we be reflecting on this theme which calls for so much commitment and at first sight seems rather remote and not at all easy to cover? I am using the occasion of the threefold beatification process that the Company will be experiencing in the space of six months: Sister Lindalva in Brazil, Sister Giuseppina Nicoli in Sardinia and Sister Marta Wiecka in Ukraine. This will probably be the first time that the Company will have three different beatifications in the short space of half a year. We all know that canonisation and beatification signify the Church’s official recognition that someone has lived in conformity with the demands of the gospel and the charism, and they are held up to the People of God as an example to be followed. Their cult is limited to certain places or specific people in the case of beatification and becomes universal when the beatified person is declared a saint.

My reflection is not confined to the specific case of our three new beatas. Thank God we already have in circulation among ourselves some short biographies that will help us to know more about their lives and understand their message. I will be more concerned with the universal call to holiness because behind the faces of these three particular Sisters who have attained sanctity, there are, as St. John says, “*a huge number, impossible to count*” (cf. Rv 7, 9). These are the many anonymous Daughters of Charity who have attained holiness by serving the poor, although most of them are not, and will not be, officially recognised by the Church as saints. This recognition is important but we know it is not essential. What is important is that they form the “other shore” of the Company, the Company triumphant. We honour them, remember them with gratitude and pray to them.

² Coste X p. 242

THE SAINTS AND THE “BLESSEDS”, THE SPIRITUAL PATRIMONY OF THE COMPANY

The first thing we need to say is that we are dealing with a living heritage even though it belongs to the past. None of us have any difficulty in saying that our Founders are alive because they have bequeathed to us a charism that continues to be relevant in the Church and also because their lives are essential markers for us as we live out our vocation. Many other Sisters have come after them. Well, every saint and beata of the Company reminds the Daughters of Charity that the Vincentian way of living is authentic. Indeed, a saint or a beata is a further proof that the Vincentian vocation, as it is lived out in the Company, leads us to God. And this is just the least we can say about it because each of these holy Sisters can shed light on some aspect of the Vincentian vocation with regard to the way we live our lives or practise particular virtues. So, for example, Blessed Rosalie Rendu can remind us of the importance of serving those who are poor in a selfless, ardent and unremitting way; Saint Catherine speaks to us of love and devotion to Mary, etc. From this point of view the saints and those who have been declared blessed have something to say to today's vocation ministry. With a good measure of creativity, these models of the Vincentian life can attract more than one young person today.

I would like to go back to the image of the river with two banks and an immense stretch of water. The two shores are the source of life, an abundant supply of service and sanctity. Or to put it another way, there is no absolute separation between the Company militant and the Company triumphant, leading inevitably to each being unmindful of the other, but there is a current of love positively flowing through each. In the chapter on fraternal life for the mission, Constitution 35c says that *“death does not put an end to this sisterly love: in the communion of saints, those who have died are present in the thoughts and prayers of their Sisters.”* There is no better way than this to express the relationship with the other shore. We should add, perhaps, that our deceased Sisters are real intercessors for the Company and for local communities. According to the Church's thinking, the other shore exerts a positive influence. The communion of saints represents a “coming and going” movement and it is a truth of faith even though we cannot explain it very well. It expresses the idea of “coming” because the prayers of the living benefit those who have died, and it symbolises a “return movement” because the dead become our intercessors before God.

The saints and the blessed cause us to look back to the past, to deepen our sense of history, to shed light on events and increase the number of bookshelves in libraries. All this is good if it moves us forward. The image of a river makes us understand immediately that stagnant waters serve no purpose. This forward movement may have its origins in the distant past but it needs to challenge and impinge on present day life. It must water the fields of our time. I say this because there could be a temptation to take too much pleasure in the past and become confined by it. History that is not prolonged in time is no more than archaeology and something that would not easily dynamise our Vincentian vocation and make it relevant for today. On the other hand, good history collects the messages of the past and brings them to the present. We will need imagination and creativity to be able to present, today, in the sensitive areas of formation and vocation ministry, the true greatness of the saints. The precious experiences of the saints cannot remain sealed up in history. They belong to today's world. It will certainly demand some effort from us to restore the

true colours of their lives and their message to make it easier for them to be meaningful for the eyes and ears of our contemporaries, be these young people, Christians, lay Vincentians or Daughters of Charity.

SANCTITY, THE GUIDING STAR THAT ILLUMINATES AND GIVES DIRECTION TO LIFE

Some philosophies view history and time as cyclic; what is happening today has happened before and will happen again. The image of the water wheel and the donkey going round and round the well can help us to understand this idea of history. Human lives are like snowballs which tumble down again and again from different mountains. This represents the eternal repetition of things, a situation where nothing and nobody have a clear destiny and a specific orientation. This is just a small step away from belief in reincarnation. On the other hand, the Christian concept of history is linear. This means that time is built on the past, the present and the future. These three stages are interrelated; the future will be the product of what is sown in the present and in the past; we can learn lessons from the past...But each of these stages is different. We have linguistic terms to describe each of these stages very precisely. In this linear concept of time, history never repeats itself, although of course different periods in history can share common characteristics. Human life is represented as unique, unrepeatable and original. In the distant past, that is to say, when the world and all human beings were created, God the creator was there giving life to all.(cf. Gen 1-2). And at the end of time for the world in general and for each human being in particular, the Lord will be there, too, to give meaning to all forms of existence. He is the “*Alpha and the Omega*” (Ap 1,8) the beginning and the end (cf. Col 1, 15-20). The two extremes come together because in human life departure and arrival have something in common, God. “*I came from You, Lord, and my heart is restless till it finds rest in You*”, was the prayer that Saint Augustine often said.

Sacred Scripture does not give many details about the next world or the other life. Theology finds some difficulty in presenting this Christian truth and we are here facing a mystery which, rather than providing us with explanations, asks us to exercise a spirit of faith. Looking at this final season, the “other shore”, the holiness which is recognised by the Church or unsung, we can reinterpret the whole of human existence so as to give each thing its proper value. We need to remember this often because in our times people, including Christians and perhaps ourselves, too, are surrounded by so much well-being, and are so preoccupied with and engrossed in the “penultimate realities” that the “ultimate realities” may escape us. These realities, however, are the ones that give genuine value to the small acts of service offered each day.

Thank God, and we have every reason to say this, life is orientated towards a final destiny. That destiny is God and the orientation is the call to sanctity, which consists in following Jesus Christ. In fact, the first Christians were called “saints” (cf. 1 Cor 1,2; Ph 1,1; I P 1, 15-16). Many spiritual writers have described holiness in terms of doing God’s will. This is another way of saying the same thing because God’s will is always understood in the context of following Christ. Saint Vincent, for example, was absolutely convinced of this. During repetition of prayer on 17th October 1655 when he put before the Missioners the obligation of striving for perfection, he says this: “*The practice of the presence of God is very praiseworthy but*

it seems to me that acquiring the practice of doing God's will in all our actions is even better because this latter practice includes the former. On the other hand, the person who continues to practise the presence of God may by so doing, sometimes not obey God's will."³ We all know, too, that St. Vincent's teaching on this subject, was very practical and to the point: he avoided all pretension and described things just as they were; the key to holiness is to conform oneself to God's will. This guiding principle underpins what he says about other matters. He speaks about mortification, receiving the sacraments and love of one's vocation, as efficacious means for growing in holiness.⁴

In his day quite a few people believed that holiness was to be found in certain external and rather ostentatious practices and this distorted the true meaning of things. Saint Vincent insisted: "*Perfection is not to be found in ecstasies but in fulfilling the will of God.*"⁵ On one occasion he asked, "*Who would be the most perfect person.*" He answered his own question by saying, "*The one who has best conformed his own will to God's; perfection consists in uniting our will with God's to such a degree that properly speaking, there is no distinction between them. Whoever excels on this point would be the most perfect.*"⁶ So, to Saint Vincent's way of thinking, holiness does not depend on theological training or acquired knowledge but on doing in the best way possible and in the smallest detail, everything we have to do. What we do is not as important as the manner in which we carry out our duties.⁷ Speaking to the lay brothers he said, "*Yes, my brothers, you can be as pleasing to God working in the kitchen or the pantry as we priests who preach or teach catechism.*"⁸ Saint Teresa of Avila used to say, "*God is here amid the pots and pans*", and this helps us to understand that sanctity does not mean doing extraordinary things but doing ordinary things with extraordinary dedication and earnestness.

The reflections outlined above lead us to see the connection between holiness and vocation. It would be a contradiction, of course, to think that a Daughter of Charity could attain holiness other than through her vocation. This is simply not possible for the two reasons mentioned earlier: for a Daughter of Charity God's will is expressed in the Constitutions and the demands of her vocation. She follows Christ but does so in the Vincentian tradition, that is, she models herself on the three aspects of the Vincentian Christ: Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan and Evangeliser of those who are poor. (cf. C8 a). Her vocation traces out a path of holiness, a path that has been well tested out in the course of history. So, service of the poor that is offered in a spirit of faith, together, of course, with the spiritual life and community living, will truly set the Daughter of Charity on the path that leads to God. It is up to the Sister to determine her rate of progress along this path. Giving herself to God and serving the poor are not two separate functions but are interconnected. As stated in Constitution 7b: "The same love inspires and directs their contemplation and their service." Community living is an indispensable part of the vocation of a Daughter of Charity and, from a practical point of view, the community

³Coste XI, 319

⁴ Coste. IX, p. 238-239/ 57-58/ 191-192

⁵ Coste XI, p.317

⁶ *Ibid*, p.318

⁷ Cf. Coste II, p.129 ; XII p.76-77 ; X p. 253, 254, 255

⁸ Coste XI p.320

offers the Daughters of Charity many different kinds of help in living their vocation (cf. C 9). To recognise this is simply a matter of justice.

In the past, formation put great emphasis on the need to strive for perfection. There was much talk of salvation, and therefore of damnation, too. Some people were seriously affected by this way of presenting things, so much so that it became for them a source of excessive anxiety if not actual suffering. What are we to say about this? The Church supports the idea that God will judge every human being, but adds that this judgment is a merciful one. God is merciful and He cannot be otherwise (cf. Lk 6, 36; Heb 2, 17). If we keep in mind these irrefutable statements from the Bible, and live a life dedicated to the service of the poor, there can be no room for fear of damnation in spite of our failings and our sins. We do not need to ask ourselves, “Will I be saved?” but should rather be asking a different question, “What is God asking me to do at this moment in my life?” The first question could cause useless anxiety. The other question, however, makes us keep our eyes wide open in discernment: it obliges us to know the Constitutions in depth and to be creative, willing to dialogue, receptive, give witness to solidarity and to be trusting. This question is as beneficial as it is challenging: it obliges us to give ourselves and to be consumed in the service of others, in the service of those who are poor, and at the same time it prevents us from becoming anxious about whether we can be sure we will be saved. Salvation is the natural consequence of an entire lifetime, although it is also given to us as an unmerited gift, a reflection of God’s infinite goodness.

THE JOY THAT COMES WITH HOLINESS

I think joy is more aptly associated with sanctity than happiness is, though both sentiments have a lot in common. Perhaps joy is more interior while happiness is often expressed outwardly. This may be true. However, I will be using both terms indiscriminately. Saint Paul surprises us by saying that joy is the second fruit of the Holy Spirit and he lists it after charity (cf. Gal 5, 22). Throughout Scripture we find that the sentiments most contrary to joy are sadness, lack of hope and lack of trust. St. Paul makes this recommendation to the Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” This is his final exhortation and joy is meant to be a sign of belonging to the Lord. So St. Paul ends by saying, “Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is near.” (Ph 4,5).

Why does sanctity give rise to happiness and joy? We must remember that both are free and generous gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ph 1, 25; Rm 14, 17; Ga 5, 22). When a person discovers God in their life and is serving Him through the small services they give, especially to poor people, and when they promote developmental projects that are pleasing to God because these are life-giving for people, every action becomes full of meaning. This meaningfulness is something that gladdens the heart much more than any help they can rely on when carrying out the work entrusted to them. How could a person fail to be happy when they know for certain that what they are doing is nothing less than God’s will? Of course, the one condition necessary for this is that the person recognises this truth. The Gospel tells us that when we discover a treasure we are immediately filled with joy (cf. Mt 13, 44; 13; 46). And if this treasure is the Lord, our joy and happiness cannot be measured, whether these emotions are reflected on the countenance or not. There is no need to ask why this should be, just as there is no reason to question why the ground is wet after a storm.

It is what we would call a natural outcome. What is necessary for all this is holiness of life expressed as living faith or a profound experience of God. Then this happiness which comes from a life centred on God, will be expressed as smiles, being pleasing to others, or good humour, depending on the person's character and upbringing as well as on circumstances. Indeed the joy felt by the saints was manifested in different ways: as a positive attitude to life, peace and serenity in the face of contradictions, the ability to communicate hope and enthusiasm to others and being able to live the present and the future without fear because the person trusts in God's Providence which has even the hairs of our head numbered and not one of these falls without God's consent (cf. Mt 6, 25-34; Lk 12, 22-32).

The photograph of Sister Lindalva attracts our attention because of her broad smile. This smile is gentle, natural and infectious. The photograph seems to reveal through Sister's expressive eyes, the source of her joy and the key to her happiness. She wrote, "I want to be brimming over with joy and tireless in doing good." These words show that she connects joy with service and enthusiasm with life, and she does this fully, generously and almost in an exaggerated way. This is shown by her use of the verbs "to brim over" and "to be tireless." When people allow themselves to be permeated by the God of life, they necessarily experience the joy of living, the happiness of serving and the meaningfulness of everything including the suffering they will inevitably have to bear. In short, joy is the reward of the saints here in this world. Everyone would agree, too, that joy and optimism are a great help in serving those who are poor. Like machines, people need to be lubricated in order to function well.

CONCLUSION

At this time of Assemblies, the Company is asking itself how the Sisters can be prophets of hope in our world where hope is in short supply. The things that are most loudly proclaimed and repeated on all sides in varying degrees include seeking after one's personal well being, the obsessive desire to own things and enjoy them in a selfish way and regardless of others, recourse to violence to make sure that personal interests prevail over everything else, competition and obsessive consumerism. What prophetic signs can challenge people today? We would have to say that the most challenging sign of all is the holiness of life at a personal and community level that the Daughters of Charity witness to by their simple life style which is both cordial and welcoming, and their strong commitment to the service of the poorest of the poor which reveals God's goodness. The Church today is asking us to give this witness even though many of our contemporaries lack the discernment and sensitivity needed to understand this sign. When in addition to this holiness of life, we add the joy of giving ourselves in service and our sisterly cordiality for one another, we are providing an unparalleled prophetic service. It is only with the joy that comes from the Lord that the Gospel can be understood and proclaimed as Good News.

Father Javier ALVAREZ.
Director General

FATHER J.ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Guidelines for the monthly day of prayer and reflection

“He is risen: he is not here” (Mk 16, 6)

Easter meditation on some scenes from the gospel

Without the resurrection of Christ everything is meaningless. With the resurrection everything has meaning: life, nature, the Church, love, our vocation, the community, the service of the poor, health, sickness, and even death. The Lord's resurrection is the basis of the Christian's whole outlook on life, the wisdom of the believer and the message of the evangeliser. The Church asks us to be witnesses to Christ's resurrection. However, we can only do this if we have first assimilated this good news. The Church had the happy inspiration of putting before us a journey of fifty days to discover its freshness so that we may be filled with the light and joy of those who believe in the living Christ. It is not enough to know about the resurrection: we have to make its message our own, personalise it and assimilate it so that it becomes part of our flesh and blood. Let us not forget that the distance from mind to heart is greater than it seems. So I invite you to stop and think about the five scenes from the gospel which I now put before you and which are like five echoes of Christ's resurrection as experienced by different people.

THE EMPTY TOMB

“Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb...’ Who will roll away for us the stone at the entrance of the tomb?’’ There is no need for alarm....He has risen...See, here is the place where they laid him.” (Mk 16, 2-6).

The sepulchre was wide open like some enormous mouth proclaiming that Jesus has conquered death. Up to the previous day, death had reigned supreme; today it has been indisputably dethroned. Light has pierced the darkness that held humanity in chains (cf 1 Cor 15, 35-49). The sepulchre is the sign and proof that nothing and nobody can keep life in bondage. This gospel account of the empty tomb strengthens our faith in the living Christ. Lord, I believe in You, you have made the light of the Resurrection the heart of everything. Thank you, Lord, because your Resurrection is our resurrection too.

THE MEMORIES OF MARY MAGDALEN

Mary Magdalen stayed outside the tomb, weeping....”Woman, why are you weeping?” “Master!”...”I have seen the Lord.” (Jn 20, 11-18)

Mary Magdalen was filled with grief at the death of the Lord. Her heart was filled with memories and nostalgia. She could only find comfort in tears, her inner refuge. The external world seemed to her too cruel; it had dared to put life to death. Mary Magdalen had lost hope. All that remained for her were beautiful memories and feelings that she would cherish for ever. The paradox is that it is precisely this fixation on her memories of the Lord which prevents her from recognising the Risen

Jesus. Nostalgia for a past that no longer exists and for a Living One who is thought to be dead, all this blinds her eyes so that she cannot see things as they really are. Mary Magdalen's situation could be repeated today in our own personal and community lives.

In fact many of the things that are happening today could make us think that "God is dead." In many social environments, for example, God is superfluous; unbelief and scepticism banish faith. New forms of violence appear in our world. In spite of advanced technology, poverty, hunger and social injustice are continually on the increase. The Church is losing its sacramental and prophetic meaning throughout the whole of the first world. The Company is seeing its members grow old and become fewer in number.....However, the message of the Risen Saviour is this: in every place He continues to be Lord and is still very much present. But we have to pray to the Lord that these negative situations we have just mentioned will not prevent us from discovering other signs of life that are also present in our world. The solidarity shown by many people and groups, the social movements for the defence of human values such as pacifism and ecology, concern for the third and for the fourth world (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n° 84), the courage of the Church and the witness given by so many Christians and groups committed to working for the third world; the Company's strong presence in 90 countries and in places of direst poverty, etc.

THE REACTION OF THE PILGRIMS ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS

On the third day after the death of Jesus, two of the disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus....."You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days".....He explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself....their eyes were opened and they recognised him (Lk 24, 13-25).

The two pilgrims, disheartened by the death of their Master, had decided to go back to their former way of life, to the work they were doing before they met Jesus. When the Master was alive it seemed right to stay with Him but after his death they realised there was no reason for remaining in the community because the unifying heart of it had disappeared. The death of Jesus meant the end and the dispersal of the community. It is important to note that the first effect that their encounter with the Risen Lord had on the disciples at Emmaus was for them to return to Jerusalem and the community. Their experience of the Risen Lord made them see that the community continued to be meaningful for them because He remained at the heart of it.

The first reaction of the pilgrims from Emmaus is replicated when people come to the conclusion that community is not what it was meant to be and so it would be better to look elsewhere for fulfilment in their personal and apostolic life. They remain in community but they no longer have any expectations for it. Hidden under this disillusionment is the following atheistic reasoning ; the Lord cannot reunite the community again to send it out into the world in a creative and prophetic way as in former times. To celebrate the Resurrection means to rise from this road of despair and encounter the Risen Lord who unifies the community round himself and sends it out for apostolic ministry.

Lord, give us the grace to believe that our community has possibilities because You, Lord, are there to encourage, sustain and love it. Today we ask you, Lord, to walk along our path and walk with us, too, as you did on that day with the two Emmaus pilgrims. Can you not unveil for us, too, the secrets of your Word and so make our hearts burn within us? Can you not stay with us so that we may discover your presence in the Bread, in our Sisters in community and in our brothers and sisters who are poor?

THE APOSTLES' ALARM

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were locked in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews....The disciples were filled with joy...."Receive the Holy Spirit." (Jn 20, 19-23).

The Lord's resurrection took place 2000 years ago and Christians are still full of fear, as were the disciples in the passage we have just quoted: they are afraid of the future, afraid of life, afraid of others, afraid of death... Very often people live with their eyes turned in all directions except heavenward. Fear is in inverse proportion to the gospel message and to faith; the more fearful you are, the less faith you have. As faith increases fears are dispelled, just as the morning dew vanishes as the sun's heat becomes more intense. Each year, at the Easter season, the Church proclaims again that the Word of God is stronger than evil and that Jesus has conquered death. When we live Easter interiorly and make it our own, it naturally leads us to peace and joy. These are the fruits we would expect of this holy season. However, tell us again that You have left enough peace for all of us. Put your hand on our shoulder and say to us, "Fear not, do not be afraid." Pass on to us your light and your serenity, give us the happiness of belonging to you, fill us with your joy. Lord, make us witnesses to your joy. May the world discover what it means to believe in You!

THE INCREDULITY OF THOMAS

One of the twelve, Thomas,was not with them... "Unless I see,....unless I put my finger....I refuse to believe." .."My Lord and my God!"(Jn 20, 24-29)

He heard the testimony of his community, "*We have seen the Lord!*" but that did not count for anything. He felt so secure in his crass realism. Thomas makes two mistakes. The first is to believe that the only reality that exists is the one that can be grasped by the senses. He is denying that when reality is touched by the Holy Spirit it is alive even though realities may seem to be, or are in fact, dead. This is what the resurrection of Jesus signifies. Thomas can be our mirror image and our accuser when, moved by our desire to be complete realists and nothing but realists, we do not think there can be new possibilities for the poor, for the world, for people, for the Church and for the community. We find it difficult to understand that when these realities open themselves to the influence of the Spirit, He can give new life to dry bones and raise them up again, as we are told by the prophet Ezechiel (cf. Ez 37).

Thomas's second mistake lies in not believing the testimony given by his community. "*We have seen the Lord.*" These words can have their counterpart in

community, as for example, *We have experienced the beauty and the dynamism of prayer in common*"; *"We have tried different ways of drawing up projects for those who are poor, and we are full of enthusiasm for the task."*..Having a closed mind and rejecting the "visions" of other people is to replicate an attitude and conduct which shows the underlying atheism of Thomas. Lord, help us to believe in the potential of people and of the community.

FOR PRAYER AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

Meditate on the five gospel passages corresponding to the five Scriptural incidents focused on the resurrection that are presented in this reflection.

With which character, attitude or situation can you most easily identify? In what way do you think of Christ's resurrection?

To live Easter means entering into the dynamic of the Resurrection. Which aspects of your life need to be resurrected this Easter? How can this be achieved?

Father Javier ALVAREZ, CM
Director General

SPECIAL" BEATIFICATION OF SISTER LINDALVA JUSTO DE OLIVIERA

Province of Recife

Homily for the celebration of the beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira

Salvador, 2nd December 2007

A new liturgical year begins today, reminding us to be vigilant and that we are called each day to help in building a new world. For Christians, December is the month of Advent: a time of waiting for the Saviour who comes to give meaning to our human existence, an event that brings joy to the hearts of Christians.

This new year opens under a sign of hope, for the Son of Man, Christ in his glory, will come again. Through Jesus, God knocks on the door of our heart. Let us welcome Him; He wants to come into our life. He has come, He is in the midst of us, and He will come again. We do not know the hour or the manner of his return, but we are certain of his promise: the coming of the Risen Saviour will bring the work of redemption to completion, bringing about the end of history. When Jesus was on earth, He asked us to prepare ourselves. Awareness and vigilance are two sides of the one attitude of trust and diligence.

This waiting is a precious time and not a meaningless interruption. For those who wait, Advent has a special significance. It means cultivating hope, giving meaning to time and to life. To wait means to be careful that distractions and concerns do not separate us from our goal of going to meet the Lord, as Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans (13:11-14).

This Sunday, the Archdiocese of Salvador is celebrating two very significant events:

- the manifestation to the world today of someone who witnessed to faith and love: the recognition of a martyr.
- the climax of the pastoral year and the beginning of a new stage in the diocesan missionary commitment.

God has granted that the diocese of Bahia include among its faithful a martyr who, by her life and her death, gave witness of her love for Jesus Christ.

PHOTO

Sister Lindalva wrote: *“Each day of our life should be a day of renewal and thanksgiving to God. I am happy to have been called by God. Those who follow Jesus Christ receive the strength they need to carry their cross. How good it is to love God and Mary his Mother. How I want to overflow with joy, help my neighbour and have boundless energy for doing good.”*

Sister Lindalva knew how to live out the coming of the Kingdom of God in her life. We, too, are called to be witnesses to the Kingdom of God. It is important to be aware of this and to pray for this grace, for it is difficult to proclaim the Kingdom in today’s world. This seems to be an outdated reality, one no longer in tune with contemporary thought. Many people no longer believe that God is present in the world; morals and ethics have become relative. However, as baptised persons, we place our hope in God and we will never be disappointed.

As the life of Sister Lindalva testifies, the Kingdom of God is not built by violence but rather by love and the freely given gift of self. On Good Friday, 9th April 1993, she joined with her community in making the Way of the Cross in Boa Viagem Church in order to *“honour the Holy Cross”* as Saint Louise wrote. Every disciple is called to identify with Christ’s sufferings for all people, to suffer for the Kingdom and to bear life’s difficulties with love. *“I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name,”* Jesus said to Paul (Acts 9:16).

After the Way of the Cross, Sister Lindalva returned to the Dom Pedro Residence to serve breakfast to the elderly persons there, as the love of Christ urged her to do. She had said: *“The service of elderly people brings me greater happiness each day...I would rather shed my blood than be separated from this service.”*

At the beginning of the decree on the martyrdom of Sister Lindalva, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, who is here today, recalled the words of Pope Benedict XVI to religious: *“To belong to the Lord means to be on fire with his love, to allow oneself to be transformed by his beauty, to offer him one’s littleness, that it might be united with his greatness, and*

witness to the greatness of his love. To belong to the Lord: this is the mission of the men and women who have chosen to follow the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, so that the world may believe and be saved.”

During this Eucharistic celebration, we will pray for the mission of the Church, the sign of Christ’s mission in the world. Then we will take our missionary commitment and confide it to the intercession of Blessed Lindalva and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

Cardinal Geraldo Majella AGNELLO
Archbishop of Salvador

SPECIAL “BEATIFICATION OF SISTER GIUSEPPINA NICOLI”

Beatification at Bahia, Salvador

**A powerful experience ...
a sacred time ... a sacred place...
*God was there!***

This sums up our reflections and impressions as we, the Sisters of the General Council, looked back to the beatification of Blessed Lindalva in Bahia, Salvador. It was a moment of grace when we experienced Christ’s presence in those who are poor, in the Company, and in the Church. It was a celebration of an ordinary life, of an ordinary Daughter of Charity from an ordinary, simple family raised to the altar to be venerated by the whole Church because of the extraordinary way she practised charity to the end... *a martyr of charity*. The beatification was not simply a celebration that we participated in but it was for us a call to holiness, a call to conversion so that Blessed Lindalva’s prophetic witness may continue to be a source of hope for others.

Impressions...

What impressed us all was the joy and the simplicity that pervaded everything about the event: the celebration, the atmosphere and those present- the people of Bahia, the Sisters and the invited guests. The warm and enthusiastic welcome accorded us everywhere was only surpassed by the tropical heat of the day before the beatification and the day following it. The vibrant faith of the people that we witnessed in all the celebrations we attended was popular religion at its best. A spirit of collaboration marked all the activities- collaboration among various groups, with the Church, the Community and public institutions. All these gave us a sense of being among a people, a Church and a Community that are faith-filled, joyful, simple, spontaneous, alive and dynamic.... who are understandably proud of having one from among them declared Blessed by the Church.

The ecclesial dimension of the celebration was another aspect that impressed many of us. The presence of thousands of lay people representing different parishes, hundreds of priests and bishops-religious and diocesan- the parish choirs, the participation of young people in the beatification ceremony at the stadium, enabled us to experience in a real, though perhaps limited way, the dynamism of the life of the local Church. From our attendance at several liturgical celebrations, it was clear that inculturation of the liturgy did not begin yesterday in the local Church of Salvador. The inculturated way of welcoming the Word of God was particularly striking.

The presence of Cardinal Jose Soraiva Martins, the Pope's representative, as well as of other clerics and Daughters of Charity from other parts of the world, was a visible manifestation of the universality of the Church. Blessed Lindalva, a humble Daughter of Charity, from now on belongs to the catalogue of saints proposed by the Church for veneration and imitation by the whole Church. In his homily Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnello, Archbishop of Salvador, put the beatification event in the context of the archdiocese's missionary commitment and its pastoral plan.

At the beatification of Blessed Lindalva we had a deep sense of being one family that goes beyond cultural and national differences, a family marked by the Vincentian spirit of simplicity, humility and charity. The availability of the Sisters from Brazil, particularly those from the Province of Recife and especially of the community at La Salette, was admirable. The presence of Sisters representing the Provinces of Latin America was symbolic of the internationality of the Company and of solidarity both in times of joy as well as in times of suffering and distress. The presence of two Superioresses General – Sr. Evelyne Franc and Sr. Juana Elizondo - witnessed to the bond that continues to link thousands of Daughters of Charity as one family through the years and in diverse places.

The thanksgiving Eucharistic celebration at the Cathedral that drew a smaller crowd than at the stadium was a joyful "family affair" during which Sr. Evelyne thanked all who had contributed to the memorable celebration.

Images...

Long after the last note of the hymns heard at the celebration have died in our ears, there will be images that will remain with us... like photos in a family album that we will turn to every now and then to relive the memories they preserve and to relive the meanings they have for us.

PHOTO

Images as powerful as they are diverse:

- the Bahian people with their exuberant joy in living, their simplicity and fraternity in the midst of diversity
- Sisters who were always welcoming, attentive, available, simple and joyful
- the stadium filled with thousands of people praying, singing, and clapping in an atmosphere that was at the same time joyful, prayerful, spontaneous and dynamic
- the huge banners representing different parishes coming into the stadium in procession with Nuestra Senora de Aparecida
- the young students gracefully dancing their Magnificat

PHOTO

- Blessed Lindalva's mother, accompanied by her son and carrying her daughter's relics radiated serenity, simplicity, quiet strength and total awareness of all that was happening, an eloquent witness to faith and generosity by sharing her daughter with the Lord and with poor persons
 - the huge seal of the Company creatively assembled at the stadium
 - Blessed Lindalva's statue being carried to the altar by her Sisters after the thanksgiving Eucharistic celebration at the Cathedral.
- These are images that we will not easily forget.

Indeed, the whole event was for us a powerful experience ... a sacred time... a sacred place.

*My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
because He has looked upon His humble servant...
The Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name...*

The Sisters of the General Council

SPECIAL BEATIFICATION OF SISTER LINDALVA

Province of Recife

**Homily for the celebration of the beatification
of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira**

Salvador, 2nd December 2007

A new liturgical year begins today, reminding us to be vigilant and that we are called each day to help in building a new world. For Christians, December is the month of Advent: waiting for the Saviour who comes to give meaning to our human existence, an event that brings joy to the hearts of Christians.

This new year opens under a sign of hope, for the Son of Man, Christ in his glory, will come again. Through Jesus, God knocks on the door of our heart. Let us welcome Him; He wants to come into our life. He has come, He is in the midst of us, and He will come again. We do not know the hour or the manner of his return, but we are certain of his promise: the coming of the Risen Saviour will bring the work of redemption to completion, bringing about the end of history. When Jesus was on earth, He asked us to prepare ourselves. Awareness and vigilance are two sides of the one attitude of trusting diligence.

This waiting is a precious time and not a meaningless interruption. For those who wait, Advent has a special significance. It signifies cultivating hope, giving

meaning to time and to life. To wait means to be careful that distractions and concerns do not separate us from our goal: going to meet the Lord, as Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans (13:11-14).

This Sunday, the Archdiocese of Salvador is celebrating two very significant events:

- the manifestation to the world today of someone who witnessed to faith and love: the recognition of martyrdom.
- the climax of the pastoral year and the beginning of a new stage in the diocesan missionary commitment.

God has granted that the diocese of Bahia include among its faithful a martyr who, by her life and her death, gave witness of her love for Jesus Christ.

PHOTO

Sister Lindalva wrote: *“Each day of our life should be a day of renewal and thanksgiving to God. I am happy to have been called by God. Those who follow Jesus Christ receive the strength they need to carry their cross. How good it is to love God and Mary his Mother. How I want to overflow with joy, help my neighbour and have boundless energy for doing good.”*

Sister Lindalva knew how to live the coming of the Reign of God in her life. We, too, are called to be witnesses to the Reign of God. It is important to be aware of this and to pray for this grace, for it is difficult to proclaim the Kingdom in today’s world. It seems to be a reality that is old-fashioned, that no longer in tune with contemporary thought. Many people no longer believe in the presence of God in the world; morals and ethics have become relative. However, as baptised persons, we place our hope in God and we will never be disappointed.

As the life of Sister Lindalva testifies, the Kingdom of God is not built by violence but rather by love and the freely given gift of self. On Good Friday, 9th April 1993, she joined with her community in making the Way of the Cross in Boa Viagem Church in order to *“honour the Holy Cross”* as Saint Louise wrote. Every disciple is called to identify with Christ’s sufferings for all people, to suffer for the Kingdom and to bear life’s difficulties with love. *“I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name,”* Jesus said to Paul (Acts 9:16).

After the Way of the Cross, Sister Lindalva returned to the Dom Pedro Residence to serve breakfast to the elderly persons there, as the love of Christ urged her to do. She had said: *“The service of elderly people brings me greater happiness each day...I would rather shed my blood rather than be separated from this service.”*

At the beginning of the decree on the martyrdom of Sister Lindalva, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, who is here today, recalled the words of Pope Benedict XVI to religious: *“To belong to the Lord means to be on fire with his love, to allow oneself to be transformed by his beauty, to offer him one’s littleness, that it might be united with his greatness, and witness to the wealth of his love. To belong to the Lord: this is the mission of the men*

and women who have chosen to follow the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, so that the world may believe and be saved.”

During this Eucharistic celebration, we will pray for the mission of the Church, the sign of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. Then we will take our missionary commitment and confide it to the intercession of Blessed Lindalva and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

Cardinal Geraldo Majella AGNELLO
Archbishop of Salvador

SPECIAL “BEATIFICATION OF SISTER GIUSEPPINA NICOLI”

Province of Sardinia

Beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli
3rd February 2008

Who is Sister Giuseppina Nicoli?

Sister Giuseppina Nicoli disembarked at Cagliari on January 1st, 1885 having just reached the age of 21. Several months earlier she had decided to leave her family and join the Daughters of Charity: Christ had irresistibly captured her heart..

She was born on November 18th, 1863 in the village of Casatisma in the region of Pavia. Her father was a judge and her mother was the daughter of a lawyer. The fifth of six children, Giuseppina was loved by everyone. Her gentleness was a natural gift. She gained a teaching certificate with the secret desire of dedicating herself to the education of poor children for whom she felt a natural attraction. Sister Nicoli started her new mission at Cagliari in Sardinia with great enthusiasm. She had been assigned to the “Providence Institute” to teach a class of young girls, but her activities were not confined to teaching. Although her health was not very robust she did not spare herself – at the age of 30 she contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, a disease which would slowly take its toll till the time of her death.

In 1899, she became Sister Servant of the Orphanage of Sassari. Here, she brought new life to the Association of the Children of Mary, gathered together the Ladies of Charity and guided them in the service of poor people. She encouraged the development of catechism classes that brought together large numbers of boys and girls each Sunday. Of special note was her involvement in refounding the “School of Religion” for young people in secondary schools and universities in order to prepare them to become qualified teachers imbued with faith.

In 1910, Sister Giuseppina, was named Provincial Treasurer and left Sassari for Turin. Eighteen months later, she became the Seminary Directress of the Daughters of Charity. On August 7th 1914 Divine Providence led her back to Sardinia to the “Marina Nursery School” in Cagliari. This district was the centre of a very large urban development plan, but also a place where many poor families lived. These families, who lived in squalor, lived by their wits and resorted to practices that were not always honest.

Since the children were poor, they were refused the right to education. This lack of schooling led them to engage in deviant behaviour. When the First World War was declared the situation became even more complicated.

In addition to this material poverty and destitution, Sister Giuseppina also discovered the even more hidden scourges of moral and spiritual poverty. She continued to promote the need for formation of young people through the School of Religion and in classes at the “Marina Institute” that enabled her to bring young people together. She also took care of the large number of youngsters in the city working in the tobacco factories and brought them together for spiritual retreats. She was also concerned about the young girls who had come into the city from the outlying areas to seek employment in the homes of wealthy families. As well as providing them with happy times of relaxation together, Sister Giuseppina taught them catechism and gave them the opportunity to learn to read and write.

More than anything else, however, Sister Nicoli’s fame is connected with the “basket boys” who were well known throughout the city because of the special tools of their trade: their baskets. These boys became her most constant concern. Hordes of these barefoot adolescents, poorly clothed and malnourished, would crowd around the market area in the city adjoining the Marina Nursery School. They earned a living by carrying luggage for people coming into the city via the station or the port, or by carrying in their baskets the goods that ladies bought at the market. The young boys would often knock on the school door to ask for something to ease their hunger. Accompanied by the Sisters in her community, Sister Nicoli approached these young people with the gentleness of a loving mother. She won them over, for she responded to a profound and inexpressible need they had for attention and affection. Through her trust and friendship, she guided them to find the Lord. She renamed them “Mary’s boys,” confiding them to Mary’s protection. She gave them lessons, prepared them to take up a profession, and talked to them about God, giving them a sense of their own dignity.

During the last year of her life, in 1924, she and her Sisters in the Marina were publicly maligned. Sister Giuseppina accepted this calumny in silence, until the President of the Administration admitted his error. On her deathbed, Sister Nicoli forgave him with a broad smile. She died on December 31st 1924.

Sister Giuseppina Nicoli will be beatified on February 3rd 2008 in Cagliari, the city where her charity spread far and wide. Numerous graces have been attributed to her intercession. The miracle that led to her beatification concerned a young military man in Milan who was suddenly cured of cancer of the vertebrae with lumbar swelling.

Charity was the rule of her whole life. In her journey of humility, she daily lived out the words of our Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul: *“You serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor; O my daughters, how true it is!”*

SPECIAL” BEATIFICATION OF SISTER GIUSEPPINA NICOLI”

Province of Sardinia

**Celebrations marking the beatification
of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli**

Cagliari, February 3rd 2008

“I want to belong completely to God”

**THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION IN THE SQUARE OF THE BASILICA
OF OUR LADY OF BONARIA IN CAGLIARI, SARDINIA**

We were gathered in Cagliari, a city in Sardinia, along the sea coast. On this rainy Sunday, February 3rd, 2008, the day of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli’s beatification, the sea, was stormy, that same sea that Sister Giuseppina so loved to contemplate as a sign of God’s infinite love..

“I want to belong completely to the Lord!” With these words of Sister Giuseppina, Father Guerra, the Postulator General, began to speak about the life of this new beata by mentioning the principal stages in her life. With the reading of the Papal Bull by Cardinal Saraiva Martins, the Pope’s representative and presider at the Eucharistic celebration, all the people gathered around the Basilica of Our Lady of Bonaria broke into prolonged applause, a very moving moment, as the beautiful picture of Sister Nicoli with her gentle smile was unveiled.

The Eucharistic celebration with about 15,000 people participating, took place in the square of the Basilica, whose long stairway gave the impression that we were in a real amphitheatre that focused all eyes towards the altar. From there, an endless procession of celebrants began to emerge, preceded by various Orders of Knights in their colourful costumes.

PHOTO

In addition to Cardinal Martins and Cardinal Franck Rode, CM, were 20 bishops, including two Vincentians, concelebrating with about 400 priests, including many Priests of the Mission, among them Father Gregory Gay, our Superior General. A large number of Daughters of Charity from all the Provinces in Europe: from Poland to Portugal, from Ireland to Albania, as well as many Italian Sisters, created a sea of blue in their seats near the altar, where Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress

General, and her Council were visible. Also present were many relatives of Sister Nicoli; about fifty great-nieces and great-nephews, and her only living niece who is nearly 100 years old. Many of her family members had come from Rome, grateful and deeply touched to be able to participate personally in an event that is quite unique for a family that is still a large and closely united one. Among the municipal officials present was the mayor of Casatisma, the birthplace of the new Blessed, in the Province of Pavia; he arrived by coach with other citizens of the town, led by their pastor, Don Sebastian.

After the Gospel of the Beatitudes was proclaimed, Cardinal Martins spoke in his homily about the extraordinary creativity of Sister Nicoli's charity. She touched everyone through her words and her actions:

“Giuseppina Nicoli shows us that to live for God and in God makes us truly free: this is a message that we need in our world of today that too often identifies freedom with individual success, thus closing people off from others and their needs.

What is most remarkable about Sister Nicoli is

- the promptness of the charity with which she accepted and responded to the new social challenges of her time

- her evangelical hope which never wavered in the face of any misunderstanding or difficulty

- the intensity of her union with the Eucharistic Christ who sustained her in every charitable act

- her concern for evangelisation

The key to her spiritual life and holiness lies in her desire to be completely for the Lord. She knew how to make space within herself for the Lord and to regard herself as an instrument of the Love of God. In this way, she practised the virtue of Christian humility which was not a denial of self, but on the contrary, the recognition of God working in her.”

PHOTO

At the offertory, there was a very moving presentation of various gifts: a long procession approached the altar, led by two Daughters of Charity and a Seminary Sister, dressed in the former habit that Sister Nicoli would have worn in her day.

Some children with their baskets and their “Mary's Boys” costume that was typical of Sister Giuseppina's time, brought great applause.

The gifts offered in the procession, in addition to bread and wine, were very symbolic:

- a real lamb,
- a basket of local sweets carried up by Luisa and Teresa, the youngest of Sister Nicoli's great-nieces,
- a plaque engraved for the baptistry in Casatisma where Sister Nicoli was baptised in 1863,
- flowers, fish, local products, including a cake weighing about 50 kilograms, carefully hand-crafted in “Byzantine” style and carried by young people wearing regional dress.

-

The moment that the young “Mary’s boys” climbed the altar steps amidst applause, the first ray of sunshine pierced the clouds and lit up the area that had been drenched by a heavy downpour. Despite the inconvenience it caused at the beginning of the celebration, the rain was welcomed as the first gift from Sister Nicoli to the city of Cagliari which is often in need of water.

PHOTO

The celebration was coming to an end when applause welcomed the unexpected picture on the large projection screens, of Benedict XVI reciting the Angelus with the pilgrims in Saint Peter’s Square. The voice and the fatherly face of the Pope filled the participants with emotion, as it seemed hard to distinguish the square at Bonaria from that of Bernini. It was as if Benedict XVI was already at Cagliari, where he is due to make a visit in September of this year.

In the afternoon, the celebration continued near the fair in Cagliari. Some folkloric groups in local dress embroidered with gold presented songs and dances.

PRAYER VIGIL IN PREPARATION FOR THE BEATIFICATION

The evening before the celebration of the beatification, a prayer vigil was held in the Marian sanctuary of Bonaria. Alternating with songs and texts, the message of Sister Nicoli was presented by her biographer, Father Antonello, the Visitor of Turin: “*Sister Giuseppina Nicoli,*” he said, “*showed great charity thanks to her complete adherence to the will of God in imitation of Christ the Servant.*” Through Vincentian litanies chanted by Father G. Burdese, the assembly invoked all the saints and blessed of the Vincentian family, asking them to assist us in our journey as we follow the example of Sister Nicoli. Sister Evelyne Franc and Sister Clementina Dessi, the Visitatrice of Sardinia, shared bread with the participants. This gesture symbolised the Daughters of Charity sharing life with the poor.

THE MASS OF THANKSGIVING

The day after the beatification, a Mass of thanksgiving was celebrated in the Marian Basilica of Bonaria. Some of Sister Nicoli’s relatives, members of the Vincentian family and numerous lay people took part. During his homily, Bishop Giuseppe Mani of Cagliari expressed his gratitude and his admiration, not only for Sister Nicoli but also for all the Daughters of Charity who, by their service of poor persons, give witness to the charity of Christ within the Church.

Afterwards, Sister Evelyne, in the name of the Company, thanked all those who had prepared the celebrations for the beatification and encouraged everyone to continue along the pathway of holiness in the love of God and the neighbour, following the example of Sister Nicoli.

The people who participated in these three days of celebration benefited from an exceptional experience of union and joy thanks to the hospitality and availability of the Sisters in Sardinia. The holiness of a life given official recognition during these days is a resounding call for us today.

Sister Maria Ida CISLAGHI
Daughter of Charity, Province of Turin

TESTIMONIES GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Province of Mozambique

**Interprovincial Gathering for the Provincial Councils
of the African Continent**
8th-16th September 2007

On September 8th, 2007, Father Javier Alvarez, Director General, Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor, and the Provincial Councillors from Central Africa, Congo, Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Madagascar and Mozambique met at the Provincial House in Maputo, Mozambique, for an Interprovincial Gathering for the continent of Africa.

After the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Father Alvarez, with the Provincial Directors and the Vice-Visitor for the Congregation of the Mission from Mozambique concelebrating, Sister Therezinha Madureira, Visitatrice of Mozambique, welcomed everyone and opened the meeting. This was followed by songs and dances from Mozambique presented by the Seminary Sisters and other Sisters. After this time of festivities, the Provincial Assistant presented an overview of the Province using PowerPoint before the work of the session began.

During the first two days of the gathering, Father Alvarez gave a presentation on *“Government according to the Constitutions”*. On the third day, a Sister from the Congregation of Nursing Franciscans developed the following theme: *“Consecrated Life in Africa, its Challenges and Perspectives”*. Next day, Sister Wivine offered some reflections on the theme of *“The Service of Animation in the Company”*.

On September 12th, the participants set out for Limpopo, 250 km away from Maputo, in order to find out about the work of the DREAM Project. The following day, they visited two health care facilities under the direction of the Daughters of Charity (an outpatient hospital and a healthcare centre in the town of Chalucane) and then returned to the Provincial House in Maputo.

PHOTO

The session continued on September 14th with a conference from Father Jesus, the Vice-Visitor for the Congregation of the Mission, on the topic *“The Spirituality of Service of Poor Persons”*. The following day, a Salesian priest gave a talk on *“Discernment in Initial Formation”*.

Finally, on September 16th, the closing Eucharistic liturgy was presided over by Archbishop Francisco Chimoio of Maputo. Together we gave thanks for all the wonders that the Lord had done for us during these ten days of work. Each day throughout our session, a different Province was responsible for animating the liturgy and for organising the times of relaxation and community recreation.

This interprovincial gathering gave us the opportunity to get to know one another better, to share our experiences and to address the challenges facing us on our continent of Africa.

Sister Elsa Fátima UASSIQUETE
Correspondent for the Echoes

TESTIMONIES GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Province of Peru

After the earthquake, love and hope spring up again

The year 2007 was a difficult one for the Province just as it was for other Provinces who had similar experiences. We seemed to be feeling God's silence in the midst of so much suffering. However, God was not long in giving Himself abundantly by touching the heart of all people who mobilised themselves to join us in confronting the terrible consequences of the earthquake. He turned his face toward suffering humanity through thousands of gestures of support and deep solidarity. We thank God because these tragic events have given rise to a greater sense of fraternity. The entire Company was mobilised and this enabled us to experience the wonderful internationality of the flame of charity. Among other sources of help we benefited from the immediate assistance of Sisters who were sent here on a temporary basis: 2 Sisters from Mexico, 1 Sister from Bogota and 2 Sisters from Cali. Together with four Peruvian Sisters they took charge of the education of more than 400 pupils from nursery to secondary school level, in prefabricated buildings. Housing construction projects are difficult to start up because there is a lack of appropriate documentation needed to comply with the formalities of the process. Visiting families in their homes helped us to discover urgent needs with regard to their physical, psychological and spiritual welfare and to find solutions. We also continue to give out food in 30 reception centres. The people of Pisco are simple folk with strong faith and they rely on divine Providence, drawing from it comfort, strength and hope. From the very beginning, a great number of benefactors gave money to help us. Several private institutions in our country also gave us their support and this allowed us to begin work on building a college. The Ladies of Charity in Peru took responsibility for building a primary school unit. All the colleges in the country showed solidarity with us and

were very generous. The Priests of the Mission and the Vincentian Family also gave us assistance.

During this year 2008 we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Province and we ask the Lord and the Blessed Virgin to help us to make prophecy and hope a reality for the poor and for the Sisters.

Sister Marina Isabel MELENDEZ
Visitatrice of Peru.

TESTIMONIES GIVEN BY THE SISTERS

Province of Switzerland-Turkey

Health for all, respect for all

In 2003, a friend of one of the Sisters in the Provincial House in Fribourg, Switzerland, called to ask for help in finding lodging for Susana, a 25 year old anthropologist who was working with the organisation “Medecins Sans Frontieres” in Geneva, Switzerland.

This young woman, born in Switzerland to a Portuguese father and Spanish mother, also spoke English and German, which enabled her to work effectively with a town’s population that was becoming more and more cosmopolitan. She had been sent by “Medecins Sans Frontieres” to take a census of the persons living in Fribourg who were not recognised legally and had no right to health care. We were able to guide her in her assignment, since we ourselves were involved on a volunteer basis with several lay associations that serve “undocumented persons”. Quite quickly, these connections helped her discover the social circumstances of these people and to develop a programme for them that was recognised by the Department of Health and Social Services.

To get this programme underway, meetings for the lay professional volunteers were organised in the Provincial House. This project involved setting up a permanent place in which to provide health care, listen to people’s needs and offer resources, to organise a network of general and specialist physicians, dentists and pharmacists, and start an information campaign. A three- room building was sought: one room for medical care, another for social services and a third for a waiting room and documentation area. The project quickly became a reality due to a great deal of solidarity and generosity. “Medecins Sans Frontieres” was able to be replaced by “*The Fri-Health Association*” that had state recognition.

Those responsible for the project found themselves facing the problem of prostitution that existed among people benefiting from this health care and guidance

service. They responded with a new initiative, called “*Grisélidis Réal*”¹, which began on March 8th, 2007, International Women’s Day. This set in motion a new network of solidarity with which we are also able to collaborate as intermediaries. The project involves a mobile vehicle that parks on a street in the “red-light district”. It offers a place of welcome, confidential discussion, advice, documentation and availability of contraception. The volunteers quickly realised that, among the thirty women served, hunger was one of their needs: their meagre income was used to assist their family in their country of origin or to pay their debts.

We, the Sisters, took the initiative to contact all the women’s and men’s religious communities in the city, apostolic as well as contemplative groups. The positive response was very encouraging! In this way, by means of a set schedule, each Community provides sandwiches, desserts, drinks, etc., as well as the possibility of enjoying a light meal on site.

This network of solidarity reveals the concern of religious communities (all of which are ageing) to remain attentive to the realities of life and be creative in responding to today’s needs as far as their limited resources permit. These communities continue to reveal the love of Christ for persons in difficult situations.

The people in charge of “*Grisélidis Réal*” have expressed their gratitude to the religious communities: *“Thanks to your contributions of food, you offer these persons some of the respect that is usually denied them as a result of their marginalisation – these people who suffer in harsh circumstances and the daily uncertainty of being in a situation they cannot escape from, still maintain their dignity and amazing resilience. We thank you for this small gesture of human kindness that helps to offset collective indifference!”*

Sisters of the Provincial House

¹ Cf. the novel *Le noir est une couleur* (*Black is a colour*) which tells of the life of Grisélidis Réal, a woman who became involved in prostitution in order to support her 2 children... “This existence would be nothing but misery and ordinariness, if it were not fantastically enlightened by extraordinary love!” - Balland

SPECIAL CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

1906 – 1968

Daughter of Charity – Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

VII – CONTINUATION OF THE POST-CONCILIAR PERIOD

A – FORMATION

*Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,
but only God who gives the growth. (1 Cor. 3:7)*

**SEMINARIUM FOR SEMINARY DIRECTRESSES; 20th APRIL – 3rd MAY
1967**

On February 15th 1967, Mother Guillemin wrote to all the Seminary Directresses to invite them to prepare and reflect on ideas for a programme that would be developed around two objectives: an in-depth study of the teaching concerning the formation of future Daughters of Charity and an examination of pedagogical and practical issues faced by the formation Directress every day.

In the same letter, Mother Guillemin specified the purpose of the gathering: it was to assist the Seminary Directresses in their delicate task of formation and to determine together the principal elements to be included in a **Revised Directory for Seminaries**, in accordance with Council directives. She also shared an overview of the process of the Seminarium: a conference given by an expert would guide the morning discussions. The afternoons would be dedicated to sharing and presentations on specific topics. Each evening the Director General would give a brief spiritual synthesis of the day's work.

The general theme, "Leading a baptised person to religious consecration" would be addressed in accordance with the various aspects of formation : formation in the life of faith, community life, sacramental life, consecrated life, life of prayer, apostolic life, formation in the spirit of Saint Vincent and, by way of conclusion, the major theme of : the Seminary Directress.

The conference speakers, who were specialists in their fields, presented their material brilliantly but in a simple way: Bishop Geraud, Bishop Brien, Father Ranquet, OP, Father Morin, CM and Father Lloret, CM. Father Jamet was the coordinator of all of it. The Seminarium was not simply a course that provided information. The speakers would be dealing with different aspects of formation, “but your role does not consist solely of listening and receiving from on high. It is a question of reflecting together and putting in common what you have heard, in order to assimilate it well.”

Father Jamet’s opening conference set the tone for the work to come: formation is the work of God and the work of the person concerned. Apostolic love and service to the Church springs from an attachment to God and the following of Christ. Formation would be integrated, the stages would not be separated from one another into first human, then Christian, then religious and apostolic formation. Father Jamet insisted: It is Daughters of Charity that you are forming. The specific apostolate and its objective shape our entire life style and spirituality: ***“to honour Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.”***

PHOTO

Mother Guillemin made an intervention towards the middle of the session with some reflections on one of the most important elements of religious life and our life as Daughters of Charity, namely, community living: “from the human team to the religious Community”. The hour long conference will not be reproduced here, but several key points are applicable to our life today.

“...These days we are witnessing two areas of heightened awareness: consciousness of the dignity of the human person, of the importance that should be given to each person with regard to his or her personal destiny, and also the role that the person has in the carrying out of God’s plan. There is an awareness, too, of community, of the indispensable necessity to come together in community in order to build the Kingdom of God and even simply at the level of the world, to build up human society...” And she added: *“It can be said that Conciliar thinking is thoroughly imbued with these two realities: the dignity of the human person and the communitarian aspect of the human vocation.”*

To illustrate this statement, Mother Guillemin recalled her memories of pilgrimages to Chartres with Father Ricardien. This example was given in the context of a reflection on community life.

*“One day, in front of the beautiful tapering spire of this architectural wonder of Chartres, the oldest cathedral, I said to him: ‘Don’t you agree that there must have been very famous architects, first class artists and gifted designers at the time this cathedral was built? Are their names not preserved? Do we know who was responsible for such a marvel?’ He said to me, ‘No, for you see, this is precisely what is so striking about the cathedral, it was the community that built it. **The community built this cathedral.** And in this community, there were people who were ordinary workers, some who were great artists or talented architects, and all of them blended together into one community...’”* And Mother Guillemin continued: *“You see, this is a perfect illustration of the connection between the individual and the community. If*

the community of the people of Chartres did not include certain outstanding personalities, they would not have been able to create the cathedral. If these gifted personalities in Chartres did not have with them all the people gathered into one community, praying and working together, the cathedral would never have become a reality.”

After analysing several specific aspects of community life, Mother Guillemin concluded: *“We need to be able to create an authentic teaching on community life and communicate this to others so that Sisters understand clearly **why we live in community.**”*

The important issue of community life had been complemented by prayer and union in the same spirit, nourished by Gospel-inspired doctrine, sacred liturgy and above all the Eucharist.

Another idea expressed was that the practice of reading in common was one means of creating a unified outlook. Other topics addressed included silence and sisterly friendship in community; “the fullness of the law is charity, which is the bond of perfection.”

Mother Guillemin concluded with some words of encouragement: *“Accept your community, then, as it is, and each day we will work to build it up through the efforts of support, mutual forgiveness, getting up again each time we stumble. Every day, we create our community, just as each day, we all hope that our poor and limited efforts help to build up the Kingdom of God.”*

SESSIONS AT BALLAINVILLIERS

January 1st 1967! In the letter enclosing the death notices of deceased Sisters we read several lines that renew our interest in what was being asked of the Company at this period so soon after the closing of the Council. Mother Guillemin invited us to continue these efforts with courage.

“The age in which we live is not a time of ease and rest, but a time of struggle and work; and if we wish to be faithful to the incessant call of God in this post-conciliar period, we have need of a special strength which can come to us only from Christ. We are now at the hour when all that lives in the Church must renew itself or die... The Church has no use for mediocre Daughters of Charity; the Church and the world have need of Saints. It is with this end in view that we must undertake the year’s work...”

THE SESSIONS AT BALLAINVILLIERS

A session for Sisters of 25 years vocation focused on reflections on the themes which the Vincentian Fathers described in broad outline: “Daughters of Charity at 25 years vocation, try to look on major external and internal events from the perspective of God, who serves as a guiding light for you. How can I give God glory?” The issues of freedom, obedience, living the gospel, community life, and leaving God for God were addressed in conferences, during personal reflection time and group sharing.

This session was linked to renewal **in and with the Church**; renewal that was also **in and with the Community**. Spiritual renovation is a condition for renewal, which demands that each one work at it with all her might. The conferences helped the Sisters to purify and deepen their faith, for faith must be present in the most humble of actions and attitudes dealing with human relationships. This prompted one participant to say: *“It means going into the future with a new outlook.”*

CATECHESIS IN A HOSPITAL SETTING

Once again at Ballainvilliers, from August 22nd to 28th, 1966, 65 Daughters of Charity worked together to revise their approach to their mission in hospitals. Fathers Diebold and Koch animated the session entitled “The meaning of life for Sisters serving in hospitals following Vatican II and in the light of Saint Vincent”. On the first evening, two questions were presented to the Sisters taking part in the session

- :
- 1) Is your life completely in keeping with Vatican II?
 - 2) Are all Saint Vincent’s ideals evident in the mission of the Daughters of Charity serving in hospitals?

The Sisters spoke of their difficulties and their unanimous concern about their lack of doctrinal knowledge at a deep level.

In spite of everything, the speaker said, the Sisters are in a privileged situation... this is true for several reasons.

-Technical formation and its application help us to discover what people are experiencing and to come closer to them

- This humane approach is made to sick people at a time when they are particularly vulnerable.

-The hospital setting is a place where people come together and it provides excellent opportunities for gathering and exchanges. However, catechesis encounters a number of difficulties in transmitting the faith. The following points were the focus for study and reflection: the understanding of doctrine, the subject and methodology used. “How can we speak about the gospel to people in today’s world? To sum up, in order to educate people in the faith, the Sister serving in the hospital must:

1. First of all have the humble conviction of the importance of a well-assimilated understanding of doctrine that is deepened by prayer. In this way, she will be able to introduce others to the Word of God.

2. Be able to transmit the message by adapting it to the person receiving it, based on that person’s real circumstances. This means she must acquire a basic knowledge of psychology and sociology and develop a certain understanding of human nature, remembering, among other things, that the social teaching of the Church follows the progress of society.

3. Continually work to develop within herself the theological virtues, to allow her to discover and recognise that everything that has, or is a human value, must enter into faith, must be recognised in faith and must constitute the first step of pre-catechesis.

Conclusion: the session was a “sign -event” in which God spoke personally to each one. The “session-event” brought about a change in outlook and for some, it served as a second vocational call for Daughters of Charity serving in hospitals.

SESSIONS AT THE MOTHERHOUSE FOR SISTERS OF 10 YEARS VOCATION

In 1966, the young Sisters of 10 years vocation spent a month at the Motherhouse, sharing in instructions on community life, doctrinal conferences on Sacred Scripture, theology and morality, along with group work. The topics addressed raised questions for the Sisters about prayer and meditation, spiritual life, community life, the vows, their office, and evangelical spirit. Sister Midon, the directress of the Seminary, gave an instruction that the Sisters would not easily forget. *“It seems to me that after these ten years of religious life lived under the gaze of Mary Immaculate, finding yourself again in her midst, as on the day of your habit-taking and your holy vows, Jesus is asking each of you personally: ‘who do you say that I am?’ Jesus invites you...to reflect seriously in order to better serve and love the Good Lord, the Church, poor persons, and the double family of Saint Vincent.”*

Mother Guillemin met the Sisters on August 16th: *“...I always ask myself this question: ‘why are there so many people who give themselves to God and why are there so few saints?’ It is because, on the whole, we miss this second option, we do not focus on it in a way that it continues to be an ongoing factor. We are not consistently faithful to God.”*

Here are the major points of this presentation to the Sisters of the session that are of interest to the whole Community.

*“This month of your tenth year of vocation is one of the most important ones for your spiritual life...an opportunity to make a decision that is as important as the decision you made when you entered the Company: the decision made between God and yourselves. It is important that you decide to **give yourself to God a second time** and to place your life on its real axis, God: **Christ**. We are Daughters of Charity in order to be **a manifestation of the love of God here on earth.**”*

A second element of our life of prayer and relationship with God is developed from the perspective of the prophet Daniel: *“I heard your prayers because of your **great desire.**”* The most important aspect of our life is to arrive at this striving for God, this desire to experience supernatural and spiritual realities. This is why Mother Guillemin announced the plan to have future sessions for Sisters of 5 years vocation, 10 years, 15 years, 25 years, etc. because it is always necessary to go back to the basics.

Another point, developed at some length, was the importance of justice and charity in order to make God present and recognised by humanity. We have to be able to contemplate this presence in our lives; *“The contemplation of the Daughters of Charity involves opening our eyes to all that represents the Lord in our midst and especially to what we can do to make the Lord present. Have this clear focus, be open to persons and things, but in your prayer, from time to time you need to know how to*

leave aside somewhat the human appearance of the Lord in order to find him in himself."

Mother Guillemin reminded the Sisters that the Lord knows us as we are; that is why *"when you look back on your life, in spite of your failings, in spite of the times you fall...tell yourself that your life is not a series of successes, but a successful life with a series of failings that have been overcome, sins that have been forgiven."*

FORMATION SESSIONS IN THE PROVINCE

Session for Sisters between 15 and 30 years vocation in the Province of Rennes

Some of the Sisters had not seen each other for 15, 20 or 25 years. What a joy it was to be together again, everyone prepared to grow young again in the renewal of the Council, and the renewal of the Community, everyone prepared to listen attentively in order to grasp the immense riches of the Bible, and most especially, the Psalms.

For three days, they prayed, worked and reflected together. Three sessions stimulated their reflection: Biblical studies, professional life, apostolic life and community life. A great deal of time was dedicated to the topic of obedience. After times of sharing, the groups came together to affirm that **obedience is a factor in security, order, happiness and maturity**. How is that? In union with our Lord, as we repeat each day: "Jesus Christ became obedient for us unto death, even to the death of the Cross, therefore God has exalted Him." Thanks be to God.

Province of Marseilles

75 Sisters between 12 and 25 years vocation gathered in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Prime-Combe for the following programme: Light and shadow in our religious life: obedience and dialogue. Father Glenadel, Director of the Province and Father Causse provided the conferences which were followed by discussions after sharing.

Province of Paris

The Diocesan Assembly of Paris took place at Versailles: 1300 religious women from all parts of the diocese. Mother Guillemin was asked to share her impressions of being Auditrice at the Council. The press made mention of this beautiful testimony, interspersed with interesting details and especially practical lessons, so that everyone could get down to an attentive and in-depth reading of the decrees concerning religious life.

AGGIORNAMENTO IN ACTION IN THE PROVINCES OF THE COMPANY

The 1967 circular letter of Mother Guillemin contained, among other recommendations, the following exhortations: *"...We must, my very dear Sisters, work ardently and with perseverance at our spiritual renewal. What is this 'renewal' which is required of us? It is, first of all, the recovery of that enthusiastic impetus which is the grace of beginnings; that freshness of emotions, that keen attraction for spiritual things, that ceaseless energy in seeking God which is the characteristic of*

spiritual youth...” and further on, *“To renew ourselves is also to examine our heart and our conduct to find out if we still believe in our calling”*

This rediscovery of the grace of beginnings was something Mother Guillemin practised personally when visiting the Provinces in other regions. The Sisters of the General Council also visited the Provinces confided to their care in order to have meetings with the Sister Servants and their companions.

Mother Guillemin set out for Brazil with Sister Rocha; on the way, they stopped in Portugal. Three days were set aside for the Visitatrices of Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Central America, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. The Sisters from Mexico and Cuba were not able to obtain a visa to travel.

Sister Mary Basil met 200 Sister Servants in the United States: “Daughters of Charity, Daughters of the Church today”. She also brought much joy to India, Australia, the Philippines and Japan with her visits there.

The Echoes of the Motherhouse gave accounts of sessions in the Middle East, Madagascar, Naples, Rome and Sienna.

Successive professional sessions took place in Ballainvilliers: courses on teaching, specialised catechesis, education in children’s homes. Sessions for the health professions: hospitals, home care, social services, etc. which sought not only professional improvements but an integration of Vincentian guidelines into their activities in order to evangelise. Retreats at the Motherhouse were also good occasions for promoting the task of sensitising the Sisters to what was required of them. To this effect, Mother Guillemin spoke of the need to bring the decisions of Vatican Council into our life: *“The Holy Spirit has planted the seeds in the Church; it is up to us to make them bear fruit.”*

Mother Guillemin recommended that the conciliar texts be carefully read in common. It was not sufficient to just read the decree concerning religious life, for it was only part of the whole. Rather, it was important to read the texts one after the other, in order to see where each fitted into the whole.

In order to be open to the world around us, we must first to ask ourselves if our interior dispositions are in line with the Gospel.

The Superiors General of France gathered together for study days and the Visitatrices also participated. Mother Guillemin was asked to give a conference on the guidelines issued by the Council.

To conclude these pages dealing with some aspects of aggiornamento in the Company, a few words from Pope Paul VI, at the general audience of August 17th, 1966, can help us to commit ourselves resolutely to our work of personal renewal: “The Council has left the Church not only a rich treasure of doctrine and an urgent drive towards action, but also a heritage of duties, precepts and missions, to which the good will of the Church must correspond in order that the Council may be truly efficacious, and may accomplish the objectives it set itself .”

B PREPARATION FOR THE “EXTRAORDINARY” GENERAL ASSEMBLY 1967

Introduction

August 6th, 1966: **publication of the motu proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae*** which included an explanation of how the Conciliar decrees were to be implemented. *“The governing of holy Church requires the framing of new norms and the setting up of new organisms that will meet the needs created by the Council and which will be better adapted to the new apostolic aims and the new fields of apostolate in the modern world disclosed by the work of the Council. This world is greatly changed and it needs enlightenment and the warmth of supernatural charity...”*

The decree *Perfectae Caritatis* applied to us also. *“If the fruits of the Council are to come to maturity, religious institutes must, first of all, promote a renewal of spirit. Then they should endeavour to effect the renewal and adaptation in their way of life and of their discipline, acting prudently but at the same time with energy. To this end they should study carefully the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (chapters 5 and 6) and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* – these especially – and they should endeavour to put the Council’s teaching and directives into effect. (*Ecclesiae Sanctae*, n° 48)*

Article 4 of *Perfectae Caritas* indicates the line of action to be followed with regard to the renewal and adaptation of religious life.

In preparation for this General Assembly the General Council makes suitable provision for full and free consultation by its members. The results of this consultation must be made available in good time so as to guide and assist the work of the Assembly. This may be done by setting up commissions, sending out questionnaires, etc.

Art. 4. *“In these criteria for renewal, it is specified that the Institutes must seek after a genuine understanding of their original spirit, so that they will faithfully preserve it when deciding on adaptations....”*

Several specific points were highlighted: it was recommended that everyone should take part in the divine office, either in its entirety or in parts of it.

More importance should be given to mental prayer rather than to a multiplicity of vocal prayers, while at the same time preserving the common exercises of piety in use in the Church. It is also important to ensure that the members of the Institute be carefully formed with regard to their spiritual life.

In the Institutes committed to the apostolate, there should always be established within the common life, in addition to times consecrated to spiritual activities, periods of time for religious to set aside for their own use, including an appropriate time for relaxation...

In formation, the special characteristics of the Institute should be taken into account.

After this rather long but necessary preamble, we find Mother Guillemin at work. “The little Company, following in the footsteps of the Church, and as part of the Church, also seeks renewal”. Even in 1966, she had this to say to the Sisters: *“What does it mean when we speak about spiritual renewal? Our renewal must be solidly based on the past, on the healthy and strong traditions of the Community...First of all this God of charity, the presence of Christ, Christ who is discovered, contemplated and served in those who are poor; Christ present in us and through us, made present in the world of poor persons...Another characteristic of it is for us to be available to the calls of the Church in its ministry today.”*

The projects for renewal were taking shape in her mind and heart. Cardinal Antoniutti, with whom she discussed these renewal projects, encouraged her: *“...your situation in the church, which is neither that of a religious congregation nor a secular institute, is something very special, it is, in a word, a privileged situation. It’s a feature of the genius of Saint Vincent and a profoundly religious genius.”* He added: *“your canonical status is something that should not be altered. It is an absolutely unusual factor and is even the basis of the Company’s vitality in the Church, and I would gladly say about you what I would say about the Jesuits: that they should be what they are or they should not be at all.”*

This extract shows the rich spiritual resources available to the Sisters.

CONSULTATION

“God is revealed in the Community through its members.”

On February 17th, 1967, Father Slattery, the Superior General, wrote to the Visitatrices and the Daughters of Charity all over the world announcing to them the Sovereign Pontiff’s decision for a special General Assembly to be held for the revision of the Constitutions, in view of their “aggiornamento”.

On March 15th of that year, Mother Guillemin announced in her circular letter the schedule for the work process and what was expected of the Sisters: *“an effective renewal and a suitable adaptation can only come about with the participation of all the members of the Institute.”* Her explanation was blunt: *“...no one then can think that this work of renewal does not concern her or that she is incapable of giving valuable opinions...What is being asked of you is to contribute your thoughts very simply, in all humility, but also with a great sense of responsibility...This is not an opinion poll, it requires a personal and deliberate commitment, to the work of conversion that the Company must undertake for itself, in order to more closely resemble Christ, its Divine Model, and to make him more visibly present among poor persons, according to our vocation. It means listening to the voice of God speaking in the heart of each one of you and being aware of the invitations that the Holy Spirit may be addressing to the Company.”*

Some practical advice was included in the letter: *“each Sister must complete her questionnaire herself, without the assistance of anyone else; without communicating*

her responses to anyone else; each Sister will put her answers directly into the prepared envelope.

The purpose of this consultation was clearly defined:

- To allow each Sister, even the most timid, to express her thoughts and to offer her contribution to the renewal of the Company. In this way, the broad trends currently present in the Community would be seen and the opinions of Sisters in general brought to light,

- To help the Sisters deepen and clarify their convictions and opinions on the issues that presented themselves to the Company.

- To make remote preparations for the work of the Domestic Assemblies which, in each local community, would provide an opportunity for the members to formulate their wishes which would be presented to the Provincial Assembly.

And afterwards? A General Commission would be set up to function for a year or longer as deemed necessary. It would be composed of Sisters from different language groups, and together with the Sisters of the General Secretariat, would have the task of going through the questionnaires, and later, the postulates of the Provincial Assemblies. The members of the Commission would be bound to observe the utmost secrecy. The various works of synthesis would be carried out under the direction of the General Councillors, either by the members of the General Commission or by specialised Commissions which would be established later.

CARRYING OUT THE CONSULTATION

Instructions and directives would be given via abundant correspondence to Visitatrices and Daughters of Charity throughout the entire world. Preparation was carried out in two time frames: the first presented the individual questions to which each Sister was invited to respond personally, the second, directly linked to the General Assembly, would be held with the Domestic Assemblies in each house where the aim was to elect delegates and to develop material the Sisters wished to be presented at the Provincial Assembly. The purpose of the Provincial Assembly was to elect the delegates and present postulates from the Province for the General Assembly.

Recommendations for the use of the questionnaire with some general directives were sent to the Sisters. The content was extensive and was written on different coloured worksheets:

- Vocation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity: 8 questions
- Spiritual Life: two worksheets with yes/no responses and 5 questions
- The Vows: 11 worksheets with yes/no responses to questions for each vow.
- Apostolic Activities: questions
- Community Life: questions with yes/no responses
- The Missions: 4 worksheets with questions and yes/no responses
- Vocations
- Government

Each Province was invited to set up special commissions to study the main topics that would be presented at the Provincial Assembly. Mother Guillemin specified: *“The Sisters who are members of the commissions must be specialists in the subjects to be studied: specialists either by their theoretical knowledge or by the experience they have acquired through practice.”* The titles of the specialised commissions had been decided with her Council: Vocation of the Company, Spiritual Life, Consecrated Life, Community Life, Apostolic Life, Formation, Vocations, Missions, Government.

These nine Commissions of the Provinces of the Company would have over 45,000 questions to sort through before arriving at an accurate synthesis.

After this enormous task, on July 19th, 1967, the Superior General sent the letter convoking the General Assembly to the Visitatrices, setting the date, the location and the procedures to be followed: Pentecost Monday, June 3rd, 1968 at the Motherhouse in Paris. The retreat would begin at the Motherhouse on the evening of the feast of the Ascension. Father specified that he *“would certainly like to come with the delegates, in order to give spiritual assistance to the members of the Assembly in the important task that awaited them.”*

It was in Rome, on June 5th, 1967, in Casa Maria Immacolata, that the work of the Assembly would continue. The Superior General concluded his letter with these words: *“to call down divine blessings on this work of adaptation and renewal, I ask that you recite each day in every house in the Province, the Veni Creator at the time of the 2 o’clock reading, from the time that you receive this letter until the end of the Assembly.”*

After the official convocation of the General Assembly by the Superior General, Mother Guillemin continued to reflect on how the process would be carried out and she completed the last three study themes for all the Sisters: government, formation, special activities, and to crown all these, the Blessed Virgin and the Company

Her circular letters clarified certain matters necessary for understanding the texts. The General Synthesis Commission was convoked for the month of February. Forty Sisters reviewed, sorted, compared and collated the responses according to language.

Mother Guillemin had announced that simultaneous translation would be provided. The Sisters from the language groups involved were brought together in Rome for a formation session lasting three weeks. The professor was an Austrian woman named Elisabeth Burjan who spoke five languages fluently. The beatification of her mother was announced in *l’Osservatore Romano* at the same time as that of Sister Lindalva. Ms. Burjan would say jokingly, *“My mother is a saint, not I...”*

On March 15th, 1968, the last circular letter of Mother Guillemin dealt with modifications to the material to be studied. From the experience of the preparatory commissions, it seemed necessary to rethink the classification of the material; some questions overlapped and were better studied together. The results are as follows: Nine Commissions:

- Vocation of the Company

- Spiritual and Community Life
- Consecrated Life: chastity, poverty, obedience
- Apostolic Life and Service of Poor Persons
- Mission
- Formation and Vocations
- Government
- Administration and Finances
- The Blessed Virgin
-

Experts would be invited to provide clarification with regard to matters for discussion. It was important to make sure that each Commission represented a variety of Provinces and countries in order to assure the indispensable international perspective. For the last time, she signed her letter, *“Your very humble and affectionate Sister Suzanne Guillemin, U.d.o.c.s.o.t.s.p.”*

In this mammoth work of consultation within the Company, it was essential to bring out *“the broad outlines of unity with regard to the spirit and actions handed down from our holy Founders, which must remain the binding force of the Community in ensuring the fulfilment of its vocation.”*

The Conciliar decree concerning us demands that, from now on, the Gospel be used to establish the norms that will regulate the life of all communities, regardless of their mode of governance. Mother Guillemin was firmly convinced of this; however, she did not use the word “gospel” very often, but rather *“to do what the Son of God did when he was on earth”, or again, “the presence of Christ...Christ discovered, contemplated, served in poor persons, Christ present in us and through us, made present in those who are poor...to commit yourself personally and deliberately to the work of conversion...”* These are expressions inspired by Saint Vincent’s maxim *“Christ is the rule of the Daughter of Charity.”*

The decree emphasises a constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of each Institute, while at the same time adapting each of these elements to the new conditions of present times. For Mother Guillemin, this was nothing strange or new. Since her days at the Centrale des Oeuvres, she was continually preoccupied with the question of the usefulness and the need for renewal. For her, consecrated life needed to be founded solidly on a sound doctrinal base, in order to give the Sisters joy and security in their vocation. Only with the support of the teaching of Vatican II and fidelity to the spirit of the Founders would the Community be able to find the way to renew itself successfully. To sum it up, emphasis should be placed on a return to the origins, with complete adherence to the spirit of the Founders and their original ideas.

A third remark on the topic of aggiornamento concerns Mother Guillemin and the Church. *“Our renewal is not an isolated act in the Church; we do not have to renew ourselves just as members of the Company, but as part of the Church. It is an act of renewal of the entire Church...The Church in Council wanted to be a servant, to be poor and fraternal; and we have to enter into this mentality of service, of poverty, of fraternity. Of course we have always served in the Church of God, but I would make bold to say that we have served from a situation of superiority. It is time for us now to serve from a situation of fraternity. That is where conversion of spirit is*

called into play... ” .. “You will not be ready until the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, has taken first place in your life.”

Whether in matters concerning the universal Church in Council, or religious life, Mother Guillemin was fully committed to matters regarding the universal Church in Council and to religious life, bringing to both of them her supernatural understanding and her deep reflection.

(to be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Services

Back Cover

You will not be ready
until the Holy Spirit,
the Spirit of Love,
has taken first place
in your life.

Mother Guillemin