

*E*choes of the Company



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Holy Year of Mercy

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INTRODUCTION

A Holy Year of Mercy

Through the Year of Mercy proclaimed for the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis intends to extend the spirit of the Council. He invites us to contemplate mercy as a source of faith, serenity and peace in order to continue to make the Council a reality in the current situations in our world that so often obscure the merciful face of the Father. A world deprived of compassion and divine mercy is a cold world. The Church is thus called to show the merciful face of the Father more intensely to the world today.

While Jesus promised us, “*Blessed are the merciful*”, He also invites us to take up the challenge, “*Be merciful as my heavenly Father is merciful*”. Saint Paul did not hesitate to remind the Colossians of this: “*Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do*” (Col 3:12-13).

Divine mercy is the underlying concept of the Gospel; it is the key to the Christian life. The Virgin Mary is its purest and most radiant reflection among us. A reflection of the endless tenderness of God, she was given to us as our Mother in order to remind us that God never gives up hope on us. His love is stronger than our sin; His love seeks us and waits for us. Let us allow ourselves to be conquered by God’s mercy, which Mary echoes perfectly. During this year, the Lord comes to do something new in us. Saint Louise and Saint Vincent showed us how



Holy Year

A Holy Year of Mercy

necessary mercy is for the life of the Company and that it is a very demanding commandment.

The Holy Father invites us to experience a Year of Mercy in order to “*change our lives*”. He also calls us to “*become compassionate towards others*”. Let us actively commit ourselves to this path of personal and communal conversion. Let us open the doors of our hearts to the Lord so that He can unleash waves of mercy in them in order to make our local communities ever more truly the privileged place where mercy is practiced; in that way, they can bear witness to this truth to those wounded by life. The very credibility of the Company is at stake. “*This Extraordinary Year is itself a gift of grace. To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them.*”

Let us make the prayer of Saint Faustina our own; with her, let us ask God for the grace that 2016 will really be a happy and holy Year of Mercy.

LORD, HELP ME TO BE MERCIFUL

O Lord, I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to **be Your living reflection**. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, **that my eyes may be merciful**, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors’ souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, **that my ears may be merciful**, so that I may give heed to my neighbors’ needs and not be indifferent to their pain and moaning.

Help me, O Lord, **that my tongue may be merciful**, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, **that my hands may be merciful** and filled with

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good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, O Lord, **that my feet may be merciful**, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness. My true rest is in the service of my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, **that my heart may be merciful**, so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

I will refuse my heart to no one.

I will be sincere even with those who, I know, will abuse my kindness. And I will lock myself up in the most merciful Heart of Jesus.

I will bear my own suffering in silence.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me. O my Jesus, transform me into Yourself, for You can do all things.

Jesus, my God hidden in this great and Divine Sacrament, be with me at every moment, and my heart will be at rest. Amen.

Letter of November 27, 2015

Dear Sisters,

... **God in ALL things ... ALL things in God ...**
ALL things for God ...¹

It is with joy that I wish you a very *HAPPY FEAST* for our triduum of celebrations which commence today with the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. May this holy day, so treasured in the Little Company, as well as tomorrow's feast of St. Catherine Labouré, and Sunday's feast of the Anniversary of the Foundation of the Company, be a source of many special graces for each of you. I began this letter with a simple yet profound insight which the author René Laurentin has used to describe St. Catherine's awareness of God's presence in all aspects of her life. The concept provides me with a framework within which I will share various experiences that reflect this same confidence in God's presence among us. I am hopeful that as you read further, you too will discover God in all things.

I am happy to share with you, first of all, information about two very joyful events in the Company. After much study, prayer, and discernment, on November 7, 2015, the Provinces of Belgium, France-North, France-South and Switzerland-Turkey joined as one, thus becoming the new Province of Belgium-France-Switzerland. More than 300 Sisters came together and celebrated their unity through Eucharist, creative presentations of their local

1. R. Laurentin, *The Life of Catherine Labouré* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 299.

communities, and sharing food. The experience was indeed delightful. This Sunday, November 29th, again following much study, prayer, and discernment, the Provinces of North Africa and España-Sur will unite, thus forming the one Province of España-Sur. Having seen the plans in place for this celebration, I am confident that our spirit of communion will be equally present and genuinely appreciated as we gather in Seville, Spain. Please join me in offering prayers of gratitude for all that has been as well as for that which is yet to come for these two Provinces. Truly, *God is present in all things*, and wonderful things are happening in the Family of St. Vincent and St. Louise! Imagine the happiness that these significant events bring to our Holy Founders. That which they discretely began 382 years ago continues to spark new life and responses from the heart to the needs of those who are poor!

At the same time, but with very different emotions, I am confident that you join me in prayer for those who are suffering as a result of the human tragedies and natural disasters that are occurring in our world at the present time. Truly, the Charity of Christ impels us and raises our empathy. In particular, the anguish of victims of terrorists' attacks, religious persecution, and racial unrest experienced on each of our continents sears our hearts. We wish to reach out to comfort the victims themselves, as well as those family members and friends who have lost loved ones through these horrific ordeals. The earnest appeals for assistance, which we hear from those caught in the unprecedented crisis of migration, compel us to search for the best ways that Provinces and the Company as a whole can respond to the needs of those who have lost their livelihood, their homes, their families, their homeland ... I am deeply grateful for your ongoing response to these painful situations, and, in a very particular way, I thank you for your recent outpouring of prayers for and solidarity with all of the people of France suffering because of terrorism. I encourage the Visitatrixes with their Provincial Councils to continue exploring with the Sisters of their Provinces concrete means of addressing these situations of suffering. We remain ready at the General Level to assist you in any way that might be possible. ...*All things in God ... All things for God ...*

Letter of November 27, 2015

These reflections resonate with the radical challenges that come from the 2015 General Assembly. By now, I believe that many of you may have received the Inter-Assemblies Document 2015-2021: *The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*. It is my prayer that you will use it as a tool guiding you as you dare to renew your hearts and develop creative and audacious responses to the cries of those who are most poor. We as a General Council look forward to receiving your Provincial Plans, which will reflect how you anticipate translating this document into concrete actions! ... *God in all things*.

Finally, in union with the Church, we will open the *Jubilee Year of Mercy* on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Pope Francis has told us that this “Holy Year must keep alive the desire to know how to welcome the numerous signs of the tenderness which God offers to the whole world.”² Our Holy Father continued that he intends this to be a time “to be touched by the Lord Jesus and to be transformed by His mercy, so that we may become witnesses to mercy ... this is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.”³ Each of us has the possibility to benefit greatly from the graces of this Jubilee Year as we walk through the Door of Mercy and become more fully aware that God’s love and forgiveness know no boundaries – no limits. Let us open ourselves to the reality of His mercy. Let us strive as well to serve as instruments of this mercy – this “beating heart of the Gospel”⁴ – in our daily encounters, particularly with those who are most poor, most isolated, most vulnerable ...

... *God in ALL things, ALL things in God, ALL things for God ...* May St. Catherine’s simple yet profound spirituality influence each of us as we discern how Christ is inviting us to center ourselves on Him. May Mary Immaculate, who always leads us to her Son, guide our steps. May our Holy Founders inspire us to give ourselves completely to God, holding nothing back. *May each of us resolve to bring ourselves and the cries of the world continually to the foot of the altar!*

Affectionately and with my prayers,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

2. Pope Francis, *Homily for First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday*, April 11, 2015

3. Ibid.

4. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 12

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A path that will make us effective mediators of God's promises

My Dear Brothers and Sisters, Members of the Vincentian Family,

GOD'S PROMISES

I will be your God and you will be my people! (Leviticus 26:12)

My love shall never leave you! (Isaiah 54:10)

I rescued the poor who cried out for help, the orphans, and the unassisted! (Job 29:12)

Behold, I am doing something new ... do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)

Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die! (John 11:26)

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me and I in them! (John 6:56)

I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you (John 14:18).

Behold, I am with you always until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

Those biblical texts embody and express the covenant relationship that God established with humankind. All the promises that I have referenced above require a form of presence in order for those words to be fulfilled. Let me place before you some examples to explain what I mean.

When the people cried out against their oppressors who had enslaved them in Egypt [God was present, listening to their cries], God called Moses: *Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people out of Egypt* (Exodus 3:10) [God was present, initiating a solution to the situation]. After a bitter struggle Pharaoh relented and the people crossed the Red Sea to begin their journey through the wasteland [God was present, saving the

people]. When the people were hungry, God provided them with manna; when they were thirsty, water flowed from the rocks [God was present accompanying the people in their time of need]. Indeed, God became present in the midst of the people's struggles through Moses's leadership. Centuries later, when people gathered in another deserted place to listen to the teachings of the Master, they witnessed the multiplication of the loaves and the fish and their hunger was satisfied [God was present, this time physically in the person of Jesus, as teacher and healer and comforter]. The Master, however, desired to satisfy not only their physical hunger, but also their spiritual hunger: *I am the bread of life; those who come to me will never hunger and those who believe in me will never thirst* (John 6:35). The following words from the letter to the Hebrews sum up what I am attempting to say: *In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days he spoke to us through a son* (Hebrews 1:1-2).

What has any of this to do with the liturgical season of Advent? We, as Vincentians, are called to continue the mission of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Good News to those people who are marginalized and living on the peripheries of society: *Yes, Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that's what He did, and what He wants to continue to do through us.*¹ As we engage in this process of evangelization, we are preparing the way for the Lord and, at the same time, we become mediators who bring to fulfillment God's promises. Through our various ministries/services, we unite ourselves with John the Baptist's desire: *he must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30).

A MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

Let me use one of my missionary experiences to illustrate this point. During my visit to the Province of Madagascar in 2011, at the time of its centennial celebration, our confrere, Father Anton Kerin, shared with me some of his experiences as he engaged in ministry in a very remote part of that country. He spoke about the joy that he experienced as he

1. Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC, and Marie Poole, DC, et al.; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XII, p. 71; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XII:71.

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saw the ways in which the Good News of Jesus was becoming rooted in the people. Father also spoke about the difficulties that he encountered as he attempted to give witness to people who had never before heard the name of Jesus. I desired to see this mission for myself and so I promised Father Anton that I would visit him on a subsequent trip. It was not until April 2015 that I was able to fulfill that promise. In order to do so, I had to travel for two days over some of the worst roads I have seen during my eleven years as Superior General. Obviously, I was unable to travel this distance by myself since I had no familiarity with the roads. This meant, then, that others had to accompany me. In this specific instance, the Visitor, a layman, and Father Anton (who drove the last nine hours, the most difficult part of the trip) became my companions on the journey. When we finally arrived at our destination, Father Anton led us to the chapel where we were welcomed by local government and church officials. The next day I had the privilege to celebrate the Eucharist with the people of that community. It was Vocation Sunday, and I preached my homily in English, which was then translated into Malagasy. I was also able to visit and celebrate the Eucharist at one of the newer missions, established some four years ago and now flourishing. Yes, I fulfilled my promise to Father Anton, and, at the same time, I discovered that Father Anton and those who ministered with him were mediators in bringing to fulfillment the promises that God and our Founders had made to the people of Madagascar.

During this season of Advent, we recall the fact that God has been faithful to the promises that were made to our ancestors and that have been extended to us as the people of God living in the midst of the world during this year of 2015. As we reflect on those promises, we also realize that our cooperation is necessary for these promises to become reality. Therefore, I would like to reflect with you on my missionary experience in Madagascar and, hopefully, outline a path that will make us effective mediators of God's promises.

COLLABORATION

First, I, all alone and by myself, was unable to do what I had said I would do. In order to fulfill my promise I needed the help and the collaboration of many other people, namely, guides and drivers, who were familiar with the roads and who knew where we were going.

Our Founders made a promise to *our lords and masters* that we would proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. No one of us, alone, can fulfill that promise. From the beginning, Vincent realized that he had to involve others in his ministry in order to be effective. Therefore, *after having seen proof of the virtue and ability of François de Coudray, Antoine Portail, and Jean de la Salle*, Vincent invited those individuals to join him in preaching popular missions (cf., CCD:XIIIa:222). Within a short period of time the Missionaries realized that they, too, needed collaborators since it became clear that *the poor suffer more from a lack of organization than from a lack of generosity* (cf., CCD:XIIIb:8) and so the Confraternities of Charity came into existence. Later, during the 19th century, when Frédéric Ozanam founded the Vincent de Paul Society, he called upon one of the Daughters of Charity to advise and accompany the members of this newly formed group of university students: *Sister Rosalie [Rendu] ... gave them invaluable advice, drew up for them a list of poor families to visit, furnished them with bread and meat tickets until such time as the Conference would be able to issue its own.*² During that same period of time, Catherine Labouré called upon Father Jean-Marie Aladel to collaborate in the establishment of a group of young men and women that today is known as the Vincentian Marian Youth Association.

Collaboration is fundamental to our being as Vincentians. No one alone can proclaim the Good News in an effective manner; no one alone can put in place the structures that will unite the world in a network of charity; no one alone and no one branch of the Vincentian Family possess the only path, or the privileged path, that enables its members to follow Jesus Christ, the evangelizer and the servant of the poor. When, however, we share our gifts and talents, when we join together in a common project, when “we” and “our” become more important than “me” and “mine,” then we, together in Christ and as Vincentians, can and do make a difference; then we, together in Christ and as Vincentians, make it possible for the promises of yesterday to be fulfilled today.

BEING UNCOMFORTABLE AND TAKING RISKS

2. Baunard, *Ozanam in his Correspondence*, Translated by a member of the Council of Ireland of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, Dublin, 1925, p. 72.

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Second, in order to fulfill my promise to Father Anton Kerin, I had to travel along some difficult roads, which involved taking risks and allowing myself to feel uncomfortable. The same can be said about us as a Vincentian Family if we are to remain faithful to our promise to be the servants of those who are forgotten and abandoned and cast aside, the servants of our brothers and sisters who live in the midst of poverty and misery. If we are honest, I believe the majority of us would have to admit that we are not very comfortable with the reality of collaboration. A collaborative approach to ministry/service is more demanding than a lone-ranger approach. Because it is more demanding, we will naturally feel uncomfortable and might even attempt to avoid engaging in such an approach.

Let us take a minute to look at some of those demands that we might find threatening: collaborative ministry/service implies a willingness to surrender control and power, a willingness to join with others as equal partners in the decision-making process, a willingness to invite the poor to sit with us around the table where those decisions are made (decisions that affect them and their families). That style of ministry/service demands open and honest dialogue, as well as a willingness to compromise – a word that, in recent years, has taken on negative meanings, such as weakness, a betrayal of ideals, and a surrender of moral principles. All of that may make us uncomfortable because there is an implied risk, namely, at the very heart of the matter is the true and certain reality that today, you and I are being invited to change (and we will always feel uncomfortable and insecure when confronted with the need to change). You and I are being invited to change the ways in which we interact with one another, to change the ways in which we minister/serve, to change the ways in which we express our solidarity with the less fortunate members of society. The degree to which we are willing to engage in this process of conversion will determine the manner in which we, together in Christ and as Vincentians, make a difference today and tomorrow. It will determine the manner in which the promises of yesterday become a reality today.

ELEMENTS THAT WILL ENHANCE OUR COLLABORATION

Certain elements should characterize all of our joint efforts to make a difference in the world today and to bring to fulfillment the promises

of yesterday. I know that if we were to make a list of those necessary elements, we would include prayer (in all its different forms), the practice of virtue, reading and reflection on the scriptures, attentive listening, etc. You know the list of elements. Here, however, I would like to refer to some other elements that do not always find a place on our lists, but elements that I believe are necessary if we are to be effective and influential mediators of God's promises. My list, in addition to the elements mentioned above, would also include:

Curiosity

As we engage in joint ministry/service with the other branches and members of the Vincentian Family, we necessarily become involved in a constant search for order in the midst of chaos and for meaning in the midst of turmoil and suffering. That search leads us to ask the question, "why?" and as we continue our search, we discover another question, another "why?", and then another question and another "why?" This curiosity, however, should give us the courage to walk along new roads even if that means becoming bruised, hurting, and dirty because we have opted to journey along roads that are still under construction (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 49).

Critical analysis

Curiosity and critical analysis go hand in hand. Curiosity asks, "is this true?", while critical analysis enables us to look behind such statements as, "this is the way we have always done things! This is the way we have always acted!" This element of critical analysis is especially noteworthy since we are called to participate in the process of the New Evangelization, a process that is new in its ardor, new in its methods, and new in its expression.

Creative imaging

Love is inventive to infinity (CCD:XI:131). *Your community* [your group or your branch of the Vincentian Family] *was not yesterday what it is now and there is reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it as he wants* (cf., CCD:IX:194). Curiosity leads to creative forms of imagination, which in turn sustain us in our efforts to proclaim the Good News as a present reality that is both "good" and "news" for those who are poor.

Earthen vessels

An awareness of which enables us to maintain our perspective and see ourselves for what we are: *remember, you are dust, and unto dust you shall return* (Liturgy for Ash Wednesday); *I praise you because you made me in such a wonderful way. I know how amazing that was!* (Psalm 139:14). Listen to some of the words that Vincent used when speaking about himself: *I am a farmer's son who tended swine and cows, and ... that is nothing compared to my ignorance and malice* (CCD:IV:219); *wretched man that I am, I preach to others but I'm so full of cursed thoughts* (CCD:X:10); *O Savior, forgive this wretched sinner, who spoils all Your plans* (CCD:XI:247); *I intend to be steadfast in the good I have begun, because that will be pleasing to God* (cf., CCD:X:159). Each of us has gifts and talents and strengths; each of us has limitations and blind spots and weaknesses. We are both great and small!

An ability to dream of a better world

As members of a large extended Family we have dreams and visions of a new day: *we dream of a new heaven and a new earth in which every tear will be wiped from the eyes of all our brothers and sisters ... we dream of a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more death or mourning wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away* (cf. Revelation 21:1, 4); *we dream of justice rolling down the mountain side like surging waters and we dream of righteousness as an ever-flowing stream* (cf., Amos 5:24). Nevertheless, we minister in one small area of the world and we can be tempted to think that our ministry/service is inconsequential in the overall scheme of reality. But that is not true. We should imagine that we are all part of a large jigsaw puzzle, a puzzle that is composed of hundreds of pieces. While we are just one piece, that piece is, nevertheless, essential and has great value; that piece, our piece of the puzzle, along with all the other pieces, does in fact contribute to changing the world. Together we make a difference.³

CONCLUSION

We live in a world where people make promises of one kind or another every day and then forget that such promises were ever made. People,

3. For further discussion of these elements from the perspective of systemic change see, Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, Vintage Books, a division of Random House, New York, 1971, p. 72-76.

however, expect us to act differently; they expect us to be courageous and to keep our promises, to keep God's promises and the promises of our Founders. In 19th-century France, people were discouraged and disheartened. Promises had been made to them and yet the majority of people continued to live in poverty. Frédéric Ozanam understood that situation and challenged the members of the Vincent de Paul Society with words that continue to challenge us in the 21st century. I would like to conclude this reflection with Frédéric's words: *The earth has become a chilly place. It is up to us Catholics [as Vincentians] to rekindle the flame of human warmth which is going out. It is up to us to recommence the great work of regeneration even if it means another era of martyrs. Can we remain passive in the midst of a world which is suffering and groaning? And as for us ... are we going to make no attempt to be like those saints whom we love? If we do not know how to love God, for it seems that we need to see in order to love and we can only see God with the eyes of faith, and our faith is so weak! But ... we do see them [the poor] with our eyes of flesh! They are there before us and we can place our finger and hand in their wounds and the marks of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads. Thus there is no possible room for unbelief and we should fall at their feet and say to them with the Apostle: "My Lord and my God! You are our master and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred image of the God we cannot see. Since we know not how to love him otherwise, we will love him in your persons."*⁴

May God bless us all as we celebrate this season of Advent, a time in which God fulfills the promises that were made to our ancestors and that are renewed in this present era; a time in which God fulfills those promises by using us as humble instruments and zealous ministers.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

4. *Ozanam*, editors: Amin A. de Tarrazi and Fr. Ronald Ramson, CM; text: Pierre Pierrard, Amin A. Tarrazi, Caroline Morson, and Fr. Ronald Ramson, CM, Editions de Signe and printed in Italy by Albagraf, Pomezia, 1997, p. 22.

The Vows of the Daughters of Charity

My dear Sisters,

I wish to express my gratitude for the enduring witness of the Daughters of Charity in your service of Christ in the person of the poor; you “*wake up the world*” to the needs of all those in need. You offer this four century-long legacy of charity through humble, simple service. This year’s General Assembly is also a graced time that commits you to truly embrace the “*Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*”.

My reflection weaves together two different but connected themes. This Year of Consecrated Life declared by Pope Francis offers us the challenge to “*wake up the world*”. The theme of your General Assembly calls us to embrace the “heritage of hope”, that is, our Vincentian charism, and to do so with *boldness* and *charity* and *as missionaries*.

I believe that what unites these themes and challenges are your vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service to the poor, four vows to live each day. They frame your life and ministry and enable you to remain awake to the world with boldness, charity, and a missionary spirit. I will reflect on these vows as I have seen them lived in a recent visit I made to the Daughters of Charity of the Province of North Africa.

THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

Let us begin with the vow of obedience. The Daughters of Charity who serve in the Province of North Africa are part of a minority in countries such as Mauritania and Tunisia, where the majority of people are Muslims. They are not permitted to establish works in the name of the Daughters of Charity nor of the Church. To serve the poor, they must work with various lay associations. As volunteers, they forego any role in the direction of the work. To serve the poor, they must willingly

put themselves under others who are in charge.

How does this relate to the vow of obedience? We know Jesus humbled Himself by becoming human and was obedient even unto death (cf. Phil 2:8). These Daughters of Charity follow His example: they practice a form of obedience by humbly accepting that others dictate how, when, and where they can serve to poor.

Prayer, reflection, and an internal awareness of the vow of obedience are required to do this well. This is not accomplished by a mere passive assent to authority but requires handing oneself over to a deeper dimension, namely, obedience to Jesus Christ, whose life and ministry were a model of humility and submission to the will of the Father.

THE VOW OF POVERTY

With regard to the vow of poverty, I was very impressed with the simple lifestyle of these Sisters. I saw with what great ease the Sisters were able to relate with those in humble living conditions. In my opinion, that is only possible if they themselves live simply.

This is true of Daughters of Charity throughout the world. A simple lifestyle helps you to identify more easily with those whom you are called to serve.

The poor are among us, often disadvantaged, due to lack of skills or outward abilities. Sisters who live and serve among them can readily identify with the poor, not only because of their vow of poverty, but also by living the virtues of simplicity and humility, essential for true Daughters of Charity.

It is the gift of the poor to us. The vow of poverty helps us to identify more readily with those who live in poverty.

THE VOW OF CHASTITY

My reflection on the vow of chastity also comes from a profound experience I had in Mauritania. I met a number of people whom the Daughters serve in charitable associations. I visited a program in which

The Vows of the Daughters of Charity

the Daughters of Charity assist women who have been divorced or abandoned by their husbands and who end up homeless and living on the streets with their children. This organization offers opportunities for these women to gain skills and appreciate their own human dignity so they can move forward and care for their children without being dependent on others.

Through an interpreter, I spoke with a number of the women, who told me that they have learned something from these Christian women, the Daughters of Charity, that they had not learned from those in their own religion. Curious, I asked, “What found you found in these Christian women?” Their response was startling and simple: “They have taught us what it means to love, and how to be love!”

That is the basis of our Christian faith. When a Daughter of Charity lives her vow of chastity, she can love others deeply and fully. The vow of chastity is what helps us to live freely the love God has for each of us and to give that love away freely.

THE VOW OF SERVICE OF THE POOR

Perhaps some might ask the question, why are Daughters of Charity present in these countries of Province of North Africa where Christian communities are forbidden to flourish? I posed this question to these Daughters of Charity, and their answer was strikingly simple: “We are Daughters of Charity who serve the poor, and there are many, many poor here.” To me, that response is a concrete example of your *firm commitment in living the vow to serve the poor*. To help keep this commitment alive and well, you renew it each year on the feast of the Annunciation.

Like the Fiat of Mary, “Only Mother of the Company”, your yes to God enables you as well to be a “handmaid of the Lord” in order to do His will (Lk 1:38). In so doing, you imitate our Blessed Mother as a trusting servant of the Lord, one who sought the loving and providential will of the Father even when she could not comprehend its meaning.

The story of Mary’s Annunciation is also yours since you tell the world, the Church and the poor of God’s love. Allow our Blessed Mother and her “Fiat” to be your inspiration and guide.

In closing, I want to say that “*waking up the world*” is best accomplished in a fresh start each day, attentive to the active presence of God in your life, allowing God’s Spirit to animate your mind and heart to help you discern “a sense of the true and a taste for the good”. You will find yourself renewed as a disciple of Jesus, and your love for our Vincentian charism will deepen and fire your heart, mind, and will.

Father Gregory GAY, CM
Superior General

My God, You are great!

*My God, You are great, You are beautiful!
Living God, most high God, You are the God of Love.
My God, You are great, You are beautiful!
Living God, most high God, God present in all creation.¹*

On May 24, 2015, the feast of Pentecost, the Catholic Church received Pope Francis' encyclical on human ecology. Today, I am offering you a meditation on a few passages from this powerful, demanding and courageous document. Together with the Church, we wish to commit to reflection on climate issues.

In line with COP21, the Climate Conference held in Paris in late 2015, the Church challenges Christians on care of creation. ***The Church invites us to a path of conversion toward a joyful sobriety that adopts ways of living which show greater respect for the environment.***

Along this new path, the Church assures us of its hope for the future. The Conference in Paris was not an end point, but rather a favorable time to imagine the ***“good life”*** and to revise thinking about the process of growth and development.

At the beginning of his Encyclical on care for our common home, Pope Francis is filled with wonder, saying: ***“‘Laudato Si’, mi ‘Signore’ – ‘Praise be to you, my Lord’.*** *In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that **our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. ‘Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs’.***”²

1. Words and music by Patrick Richard
2. *Laudato Si’*, 1

I. THE GAZE OF JESUS

With Jesus, let us enter into this sense of wonder as well. May His gaze enlighten us so that we may better welcome the gift of creation. In the first part of our meditation, I share these passages with you from the document on ecology that speak to us of Jesus' gaze.

1. JESUS TOOK UP THE BIBLICAL FAITH IN GOD THE CREATOR.

“Jesus took up the biblical faith in God the Creator, emphasizing a fundamental truth: God is Father (cf. Mt 11:25). In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God's eyes: ‘Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God’ (Lk 12:6). ‘Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them’ (Mt 6:26).”³

2. JESUS INVITES US TO BE ATTENTIVE TO THE BEAUTY OF CREATION.

“The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things:

‘Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest’ (Jn 4:35). ‘The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants’ (Mt 13:31-32).”⁴

3. JESUS LIVED IN FULL HARMONY WITH CREATION.

3. *Laudato Si’*, 96
4. *Laudato Si’*, 97

My God, You are great!

“Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: ‘What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’ (Mt 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life. Of himself he said: ‘The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard!’” (Mt 11:19). He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world.

Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel. Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship.

It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?’ (Mk 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labor and endowed it with a special significance for our development. As Saint John Paul II taught, ‘by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity’.”⁵

4. THE DESTINY OF ALL CREATION IS BOUND UP WITH THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.

“In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: ‘All things have been created through him and for him’ (Col 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (Logos).

But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word ‘became flesh’ (Jn 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.”⁶

5. *Laudato Si’*, 98

6. *Laudato Si’*, 99

5. JESUS, RISEN AND GLORIOUS, IS PRESENT THROUGHOUT CREATION.

“The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: ‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross’ (Col 1:19-20).

This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that ‘God may be everything to every one’ (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.”⁷

Let us contemplate creation as Jesus did. With the psalmist, taken with God’s unconditional generous gift, let us praise the Lord: **“O Lord, our God, how awesome is your name through all the earth!”** (Ps 8:2) *“What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, put all things at his feet: all sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever swims the paths of the seas”* (Ps 8:5-9).

II. TOWARDS A NEW LIFE STYLE

However, an awareness of the gravity of the cultural and ecological crisis should translate into new habits, a different life style. Modern progress, no more than the mere accumulation of objects or pleasure, is not sufficient for giving meaning or joy to the human heart. I return to Pope Francis’ encyclical; we will continue our meditation with him.

1. AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE.

My God, You are great!

“Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that ‘less is more’. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment.

Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.”⁸

2. SOBRIETY IS LIBERATING.

“Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.”⁹

3. SOBRIETY AND HUMILITY ARE TWO NECESSARY VIRTUES.

8. *Laudato Si'*, 222

9. *Laudato Si'*, 223

“Sobriety and humility were not favorably regarded in the last century. And yet, when there is a general breakdown in the exercise of a certain virtue in personal and social life, it ends up causing a number of imbalances, including environmental ones. That is why it is no longer enough to speak only of the integrity of ecosystems. We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values.

Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong.”¹⁰

4. BE AT PEACE WITH ONESELF.

“On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself. An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace, which is much more than the absence of war. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances? Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment. An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence ‘must not be contrived but found, uncovered’.”¹¹

10. *Laudato Si'*, 224

11. *Laudato Si'*, 225

5. APPROACH LIFE WITH SERENE ATTENTIVENESS.

“We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full. Jesus taught us this attitude when he invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, or when seeing the rich young man and knowing his restlessness, ‘he looked at him with love’ (Mk 10:21). He was completely present to everyone and to everything, and in this way he showed us the way to overcome that unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive and compulsive consumers.”¹²

6. STOP AND GIVE THANKS TO GOD.

“One expression of this attitude is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals. I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labors provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need.”¹³ Giving thanks, blessing, being grateful for the gifts of creation... With the poet, let us sing this refrain: “Bless the Lord, o my soul, and do not forget any of His gifts. Bless the Lord, o my soul, bless the Lord forever.”

Benedictions are words by which we acknowledge that God - He, the Holy One, the Blessed - is the source of all good. God, for His part, blesses us and gives us life through the sacraments. In the final part of our meditation, we are invited to use our ability to contemplate and celebrate the mystery of creation. I have chosen these articles from the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

12. *Laudato Si’*, 226

13. *Laudato Si’*, 227

III. SACRAMENTAL SIGNS AND REST IN ORDER TO CELEBRATE

1. THE UNIVERSE UNFOLDS IN GOD.

“The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that ‘contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves’.”¹⁴

2. THE SACRAMENTS GIVE US GOD’S LIFE.

“The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colors are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. The hand that blesses is an instrument of God’s love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ, who came to accompany us on the journey of life. Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life. Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature.

This is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East. ‘Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colors, in the lights, in the scents.’

For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive

14. *Laudato Si’*, 233

My God, You are great!

transformation. 'Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world's salvation'.¹⁵

3. THE EUCHARIST IS AN ACT OF COSMIC LOVE.

"It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God.

Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: 'Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.' The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation.

The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself'. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.'¹⁶

4. SUNDAY IS THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION, OF THE NEW CREATION.

15. *Laudato Si'*, 235

16. *Laudato Si'*, 236

"On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world.

Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the 'first day' of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord's risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims 'man's eternal rest in God'.

In this way, Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity. Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence.

It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, 'so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed' (Ex 23:12).

Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.'¹⁷

Through our prayer, reflection and adoration all throughout this day, let us listen to God who tells us, **"I am your Creator and Savior!"** I invite you to use one of the prayers quoted at the end of the encyclical on care for our common home.

Let us pray:

Father, we praise you with all your creatures. They came forth from your all-powerful hand; they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. **Praise be to you!**

My God, You are great!

Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made. You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth, and you gazed upon this world with human eyes. Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory. **Praise be to you!**

Holy Spirit, by your light you guide this world towards the Father's love and accompany creation as it groans in travail. You also dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good. **Praise be to you!**

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.

Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.

O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. **Praise be to you!** Amen.

(A Christian prayer in union with creation)

Father Bernard SCHOEPFER, CM
Director General

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments

DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

PROVINCE OF GREAT BRITAIN: Sister Ellen FLYNN was designated Visitatrix on July 22, 2015.

PROVINCE OF BELGIUM-FRANCE-SWITZERLAND: Sister Elise BORTHEIRIE was designated Visitatrix on September 2, 2015.

APPOINTMENT OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS

PROVINCE OF MADAGASCAR: Father Noël RAMANANDRAIBE was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on March 24, 2015.

CHINESE PROVINCE: Father Jan Van AERT was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity on March 24, 2015, until the unification of the three Provinces.

PROVINCE OF GIJON: Father Juan Velasco ROBLA was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity on March 24, 2015, until the Province's unification with the Province of San Sebastian.

PROVINCE OF COLOGNE-NETHERLANDS: Father Mathieu VAN KNIPPENBERG was appointed Sub-Director of the Dutch-speaking Daughters of Charity for a three-year term on April 21, 2015.



*News from
the Provinces*

Appointments

PROVINCE OF LOS ALTOS HILLS: Father Bernard QUINN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on April 21, 2015.

PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA: Father Jose MANJALY was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on April 21, 2015.

PROVINCE OF ERITREA: Father Oqbamicael TECLU was appointed part-time Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on May 18, 2015.

PROVINCE OF SLOVENIA: Father Pavle NOVAK was appointed part-time Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on May 18, 2015.

PROVINCE OF SLOVAKIA: Father Jozef GARAJ was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term on July 15, 2015.

PROVINCE OF BELGIUM-FRANCE-SWITZERLAND: Father Yves BOUCHET was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a six-year term on October 14, 2015.

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Father Emmanuel TYPAMM was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term on December 7, 2015.

SISTER E. BORTHEIRIE, DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

INTERACTION OF GENERATIONS IN COMMUNITY LIFE

I - Generations and Interaction of Generations: A Constitutive Human Reality

A few years ago, a Dominican Sister was a patient at the hospital where I serve as chaplain. She was 97 years old and needed to have a leg amputated. This Sister had taught the Bible and introduced several generations to knowledge of God and of the human person; for many years, she had served in numerous leadership positions in her congregation, where she was greatly appreciated by her Sisters. She knew community life deeply through experience. She knew its source, its human reality, its mystery. At the hospital, when the time came to receive communion, which I brought to her in her room, she relentlessly asked this question before the Eucharist: “Who, then, is God? What is man? Who are we to enjoy such love?”

Today, speaking to you, I think of this Sister, of the mystery of the Eucharist that establishes us in real solidarity, that establishes us in communion... and I ask myself the same questions: “Who, then, is God? What is our human race? How can we speak of love, of fraternity, in community life?”

From these questions, you can understand that this topic of “fraternal relationships in community” is beyond me and that I would benefit from listening to you in order to take in and learn from your experience. However, I have

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been asked to speak about it. I am quite aware that I am only able to offer you a very limited aspect of this vast subject and will teach you nothing new. I will base my presentation essentially on my experience of community life, which is ever evolving as I age, and on my way of responding more deeply to our shared vocation.

In the first section, we will define the concept “generation” in the horizontal and vertical directions, as a constitutive human reality.

In the second section, we will speak more directly about community life.

I -GENERATIONS AND INTERACTION OF GENERATIONS: A CONSTITUTIVE HUMAN REALITY

The concept “generation” has several meanings. I would like to suggest that we focus on a sociological approach, which you could supplement with other approaches if you find this necessary.

GENERATION IN THE HORIZONTAL DIRECTION

According to a sociological approach, generation can be defined in a horizontal direction, as a group of people of about the same age or having lived in the same historical period. Living through the same historical events creates a sort of common vision of the world. These people who have the same age at the same time share a number of practices and perspectives.

Specialists in sociology have studied the phenomenon of generations; thanks to them, we can pick out some general characteristics that are typical of members of specific generations. However, we can never define a human being because his complexity and mysterious aspect are totally beyond us. Neither can we lock people into “boxes” nor say which values and behaviors belong exclusively to one generation or another.

1 - Social and cultural evolutions over generations

Each generation is a sort of reflection of the era during which it grew up. Inventions, new technologies and major political and economic

crises are some of the factors that shape the characteristics, dreams and values of a generation. They will be different depending on the times.

Generation gaps often lead to conflicts based on different ways of looking at the world and living in it, as well as conflicts based on a hierarchy of values that varies depending on the course of time and historical evolution.

Some specific characteristics of generations since 1925 have been observed; they can help us better understand and love our Sisters who belong to these groups. These observations specifically concern Europe, my own context; I count on your indulgence to accept this limitation, which may not correspond to the reality of the other continents where you live. Perhaps you will still be able to make some connections.

The generation born in 1925 – 1942

These are people who lived through war and in an era when work well done was considered an art. Loyalty and a sense of duty are their dominant values. They are submissive to authority and have a deep sense of duty. They have a strong work ethic and are hard-working. Their rather limited life choices and material resources lead them to demonstrate thrift and prudence in their use of material goods and in their perception of the future.

The generation born in 1943 - 1959

Here at the end of the Second World War, most European countries noted a significant demographic and economic decline. We call this generation the Baby Boom generation. Success at work is one of its dominant values. This generation has many choices in life with exceptional opportunities for employment. Many people from this period have a life centered on work and base their social value on their career. They respect authority and the hierarchical structure and remain stable in one job until the end of their life, with a sense of belonging to the business. Despite many divorces, concern for family values remains strong. Alongside aspirations that are mostly materialistic, we owe the establishment of social reforms and the formation of labor unions to them and can observe their deep longing for freedom and their desire

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to change the world. People from this generation are also characterized by their wish to remain young at any price.

The generation born in 1959 – 1977

This generation is part of a social transition; it witnesses the decline of colonial imperialism and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the end of the Cold War. This generation experienced professional decline with difficulty finding stable well-paying jobs. We call them Generation X. The pursuit of challenges and a desire to learn are dominant values.

Generation X is confronted with a scarcity of work. Salary will not be the main driving force for choosing a job. The choice will be driven more by looking for a job that provides a degree of fulfillment, is motivating and offers opportunities for learning, challenging experiences and self-development. This generation is skeptical about institutions and other generations. It questions authority and wants to develop in a collegial and friendly atmosphere where all participate in decision making and goal-setting.

For people of this generation, who are more focused on their own needs and who live in the present and for the present, life is more than work. They seek a certain amount of balance between work and family life through more flexible work hours, the possibility for extended leave, etc. We also observe a greater social openness, a greater openness to the world, in which multiculturalism, gender equality and ecology develop.

The generation born in 1978 – 1994

People from this generation did not suffer from the threat of the Cold War; they have never known a world without AIDS; they consider the moral changes of the 1960s old-fashioned. At a young age, they learned to live with media: television, telephone and the internet. We call them Generation Y, which comes (among other reasons) from the Y that their headset or earbud cord traces on their chest. Coaching and feedback are its dominant values. This generation is also called the e.generation, in reference to the internet. We could say that it “was born with technology in its hands” and that it has a precocious openness to the world. Within this group, we note strong individualism

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and values focused on material objects, with behaviors demonstrating hyper-consumerism and hyper-sexualization. Their notion of good and evil is fluid, and models with whom they seek to identify are rare. We see that they are rebellious toward authority and do not understand the need for punctuality, traditional expressions of courtesy, wearing a suit, etc... They are also people who generate ideas, are resourceful and think critically.

Generation Y workers show independence toward their employer: the company should have something to offer them and not the other way around. They have difficulty carrying out a task or an order if they do not understand its usefulness or the reason for it. They seek pleasure in their work, a fast pace, quick results and a stimulating job - no routine. They want to develop within a “collegial” environment and value team work. They also have an ongoing need for feedback and a desire to climb the ladder at a fast pace. Their need for coaching (looking for a mentor and not a superior) points to their intention to move forward alone and to have someone to turn to if it does not work. This generation is also called Generation M: the only thing that counts is me!

1995 - ... ?

This generation experienced the attack on the World Trade Center, September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism. It is also the generation of the MP3 player. We call them Generation Z. These people are familiar with new information and communication technologies. Their expectations are similar to those of the preceding generation. With their openness toward developing countries, it seems that they will not experience difficulty finding work.

The major difference between Generation Z and Generation Y is that these children are born, live and will live with Internet. Therefore, they often are perfectly proficient with information technology, be it computers, GPS or cell phones. They use these devices on a daily basis and cannot imagine living without them.

All of these descriptions sketch out the traits that we could say are shared by a large number of individuals, and each one of us can identify with one group or another to a greater or lesser extent; nonetheless, a

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generation is not homogeneous. The religious, cultural, political and ideological realities in our world represent other reference points around which other categories could be identified.

2 - Evolution in the Church

The Church is part of the world, and it evolves within it according to the rhythm of human, social and spiritual changes in different periods. As far as what concerns the Church, in most recent history, we can define Vatican II as a major event that marked a generational transition. We distinguish the generation formed before Vatican II, with its reference points and values, from the post-Vatican II generation, with other reference points and values. Consecrated life as a whole was significantly influenced by the dramatic changes in these reference points at the time of the Council. This aspect could deserve in-depth study in order to better understand our elders in our local communities. I will simply briefly mention Mother Guillemin, who actively contributed to the Company's entrance into the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. In 1964, referring to the traditional positions that we held, she proposed a change of position, the fruit of a common spiritual conversion. I quote her: "*...If a Daughter of Charity today wants to be faithful to the world, to Christ and to the Church and consequently to her Founders, she is invited to go*

- *from a position of possession to a position of insertion;*
- *from a position of authority to a position of collaboration;*
- *from a complex of religious superiority to a sense of fraternity;*
- *from a complex of human inferiority to a genuine participation in life;*
- *from a preoccupation with moral conversion to a concern for the mission.*"¹

We can hardly imagine how the call to live out these transitions was received, not only by the Daughters of Charity, but also by a great number of religious congregations of the time. This represented a real mental, spiritual and social revolution. Despite resistance connected to how people were raised according to the meaning and values of their time, changes took place little by little on a personal and community level. After Vatican II, for example, congregations that had been more focused on uniformity and observation of rules emphasized the

1. Sister Suzanne Guillemin

importance of the individual, respect for her skills, spiritual progress and personal responsibility. In the directives that came out of Vatican II, in effect, there is more stress on complementarity of persons and roles and on charism than on uniformity. The concept of community life appeared with a spirituality of communion where each individual is invited to build more authentic and more fraternal relationships. New ways of praying and sharing in community came to be; thus, the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, the Eucharist, spiritual exercises such as sharing on the Gospel, faith sharing and apostolic reflection developed. They produced a spiritual renewal in communities and promoted building fraternal life in community. However, some individuals and some religious congregations were not able to enter into this process of renewal. There is still a noticeable difference in mentality for those who remain attached to the pre-Vatican II spirit. Still today, in communities of consecrated life and in the Church, this gap in mentality can be a source of relational difficulties and even sometimes of conflicts.

GENERATION IN A VERTICAL DIRECTION or INTERACTION OF GENERATIONS

The sense of belonging to a generation is not just developed horizontally, that is, in relation to a given historical period, but also vertically, in relation to filial relationships. Generations establish each other over time through what remains constant and what changes in society as well as through relationships within the family. Thus, in our homes and in our culture from the time of our birth, we experienced exchanges among different generations: among people in the same family, with the same roots, the same neighborhood or the same ethnic group...

We learned a way of living together there and integrated it into our personal history: for example, the way of treating elders or elderly persons, listening to them, appreciating their wisdom and experience; the way of passing on certain values to other generations: the sense of family, solidarity, sharing, expressing faith; the way of living certain life events: welcoming a new member into the family through marriage and births, illnesses, difficulties, mourning...

In this setting into which we were born, we have had the experience that exchanges between generations are not always simple nor easy to

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manage. There can be misunderstandings, resistance to accepting what is new and foreign to one's culture or traditions, and relationships may be broken off in order to remain faithful to values considered essential.

As a very concrete example, I think of a grandmother who spoke with me a few days ago about her 20-year-old granddaughter, Nathalie. After several years of silence toward her grandmother following troubled relationships with her parents, one day Nathalie called her on the phone: "Grandmother, I am very happy to tell you that I would like to come visit you. I will come see you with the man I love, and I would like to introduce him to you. Could we come spend the weekend at your house?" This nearly 90 year-old grandmother was shaken by this phone call. She was very happy that her granddaughter was reaching out to her after years of silence and wanted to come see her; at the same time, she could not accept hosting her in her home with the man she loved and with whom she lived while not married to him. It was against her values. After reflecting a moment and at the risk of losing all contact with her granddaughter, she told her, "My dear, I am happy that you are in love with a young man, and I will joyfully welcome you. You can spend the whole day with me, from morning to evening, but you will not stay the night. It goes against my principles, which you know." Nathalie stopped communication with her grandmother for several months. During this time, the grandmother, deeply saddened but understanding, bought herself a cell phone and learned how to use text messages to reach out to her granddaughter and try to communicate with her through this means. This approach made it possible for Nathalie to respond, and their relationship was reestablished little by little; loving words were even exchanged. Each of them gave a little to reach the other, respecting each other.

Thus, even within our families, in our natural environment, we experience the complexity of relationships between generations; we have experienced relational difficulties connected to differences in values even within our families. When differences are encountered, we may witness estrangement, attempts at openness, new possibilities, construction of new connections or obstacles.

DIFFERENCES BEYOND GENERATIONAL ISSUES

The phenomena of globalization and wide-spread social communication can make us think that as human beings, we all have points in common and, as a result, that we can easily communicate and relate with everyone on a human level.

An international session such as yours, for example, is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the reality of differences and the limits of communication, even within the same generation and a shared vocation. If this is true and obvious for an international gathering where we come from different countries and cultures, it is also true within a single local community made up of Sisters from the same generation or Sisters from different generations.

In fact, as soon as two individuals meet, it is two universes, personal universes, different cultural universes that meet. Not only is each individual unique in all the world, but even the seemingly most universal characteristics are shared differently depending on the individual and culture.

Just think about our physical characteristics. We suppose that because we have ears, we hear. If we listen together to a piece of music that I choose because I think it is wonderful, I could think that all of you would hear the same thing as I did and that you would appreciate it in the same way. The same goes for songs that I might suggest for the chapel, for example. I could say to myself, "Everyone will surely appreciate this wonderful praise of God." Well, no! We do not hear the same thing... so we taste what we hear in a different way. It is not surprising that, without bad faith or ill will, the Sister beside me does not appreciate in the same way what she hears.

The same goes for eyes: we have eyes and we think we see. Not only do we not see the same things; we do not see them in the same way. This is true for the other senses as well.

All these physical characteristics make us perceive different worlds from the same place. Now, we think based on the world that we perceive. We create a world for ourselves based on what we see, hear and touch. We do not have direct access to reality: it is always mediated by our senses. Our senses, in turn, make us perceive different worlds, or cause us to

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perceive the same world differently. It is very important to be aware of this because if we have different opinions when we speak about the same things in community, it is not ill will or bad faith; it is probably because we have different characteristics; perhaps we are also from different cultures and have different experiences.

When people are so different that they little resemble us, we are tempted to reject them simply because we are uncomfortable with that difference. It is important to be able to conceive that others, even in the same place, could be different and to accept that such is the case.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, A HUMAN COMMUNITY WITH ITS LIMITATIONS

In no way does the community of the Daughters of Charity escape what is part of the human condition. From the beginning, the Company has been made up of people who are different; the writings of the Founders describe their diverse backgrounds for us: city girls and village girls; young Sisters and elder Sisters; their varied personalities; relational difficulties within some local communities as well as with those outside the Company... We are well aware that in the Company, in our local communities, each individual is unique and cannot be reduced to the others.

Each individual is marked by her family, social, professional, cultural and religious history, with her age and health, with her psychological and emotional make-up, her desires and expectations, with her human and spiritual gifts and limitations.

We are different because of our age, formation, culture, type of ministry, health, etc. In fact, the community brings together people who are not necessarily made to live together. We cannot avoid either the daily banality of being together or the reality of another Sister's difference. For example: "I am slow, she goes fast; I am meticulous, she is unpredictable; she likes music and I prefer silence, etc." We cannot escape this; nor can we avoid the gradual construction of dialogue and relationships affected by human reactions of trust and fear, naturally liking each other to a greater or lesser degree, rivalry and submission, responsibility and desire for autonomy, influence and domination, etc.

A reality that must be accepted

In our local community, Sisters can live together who, according to their age, could be great-grandmother, grandmother, daughter and granddaughter to each other. In this reality of different generations, what can make relationships in community life possible? Obviously, living together does not automatically create fraternal relationships. What can make differences in fraternal living together possible? For community life could try to reduce, even eliminate differences.

More or less consciously, all of us are looking for ideal relationships, for the ideal local community: a unanimous community, in agreement on the same things, a community without clashes, where we feel good, comfortable. But when we look at the reality of our local community, this ideal is accompanied by disappointment. It leads us to a task, a struggle: to learn to accept reality and to build sisterly relationships with this reality.

During our first years in community, we can strongly aspire to this ideal community and at the same time be greatly disappointed. Whereas I initially might find the Sisters "good" and "holy", I discover after some time that they have some ugly points, some limitations. So then I say to myself: "This isn't what I thought it was; I never would have thought that Sisters could be like this... How can it be that...", and so on. What happens? We do not just have the disappointment that comes from the reality about others and about community life, but also from the difficulty of achieving a unity of life for ourselves. During our initial years, we experience many tensions within ourselves related to the Sisters with whom we live, related to the new schedule and life style and related to being torn between mission and community life.

We wonder how to manage the demands of the spiritual life, community life and apostolic life. How can we find a balance and accept what we might experience as frustrations? When we are young Sisters, we can pass through a period when we are not sure where we fit in or who we are; we no longer know what unifies our lives or how to achieve this unity. In the local community that receives you, Sisters who are older in vocation, especially in countries where there are few vocations today, may have high expectations of you who are young. They may have

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an idealized image of you as a young Sister; they also might express concerns about your generation, about what you express; they might fear their lives will be disrupted by the novelty that you represent as well as by the fact that one generation, without realizing it, sends earlier generations toward death. Given their ages, they may consider you as their daughter or granddaughter and treat you like children.

For your part, you who are younger might have relationships with older Sisters like those you have with your mother or grandmother, reacting with rivalry or independence or, on the other hand, seeking emotional protection, etc.

Concretely, in a local community, expectations of each other, disappointments and fears are part of everyone's behavior and the dialogue and responses of everyday life. Disappointment and the work required in order to accept reality is a tough challenge for each individual. For those who are more fragile, the difficulty can even lead them to question their vocation.

A reality that must be discerned

In the context where we live out our life, age can be experienced as a form of power. For each individual, personal experience, in other words, my lived experience, can become the norm and the reference point that I may try to impose on others. An older Sister, based on what she has lived in community, may, for example, want to impose a way of doing things on others and exercise a certain power over the behavior of those who are younger.

A younger Sister who has more knowledge in some areas or simply because she is part of the "youth" may want to be the norm and reference point for the other Sisters in her local community. For example, "You know, we young people are born with communication technology, and we can't do without it... you are totally out-of-date..." She can impose her power just because she is young and thinks that the future of the Company is in her hands...

Sister Elise BORTHEIRIE
Daughter of Charity

INTERACTION OF GENERATIONS IN COMMUNITY LIFE

II - Ordering relationships in community

This morning, we touched on the question of generations and the differences that make us up as human beings. This presentation reminded us that relationships with those different from oneself are both an opportunity and a challenge.

We saw that each one of us is different from the others with whom we live. What is unknown and different about the other, what annoys and rubs us the wrong way can cause obstacles and conflict; all this shatters dreams of unanimity.

We also mentioned the fact that new information and communication technology plays a major role in our modern reality. It influences our way of entering into life and community relationships and creates a gap with Sisters who do not have access to this technology.

However, we also have many things in common, which we can use as supports to build genuine community relationships here and now, where the Lord has placed us.

OUR REASON FOR BEING TOGETHER—SOME CONVICTIONS

The reason for living together is a building block of relationships in community. From time to time, especially at times when I feel at odds with my Sisters in community, it is good to ask myself the question, "Why do I live with others?" To be happy? To be stronger? For security? Or because I like them?

Even if we instinctively live more or less on the level of feeling or emotions - "I like the other person, I don't like her, I am comfortable with

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her or not, etc.”, feelings are not what should be the most important in our relationships in community. We have to return to another level. The Constitutions clearly define the reason for our living together: “*Called and assembled by God, the Daughters of Charity live a community life the better to fulfill their specific mission of service*” of Christ in persons who are poor (C. 32a).

If we are together, it is because we are Sisters in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and it is God who establishes us in this communal relationship.

From the beginning, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise had the firm conviction that it was God who desired the Company: He was the one who built it; He was the one who called Marguerite Naseau and all the other Sisters who came after her, down to our day: “*It wasn't Monsieur Portail, nor Mademoiselle Legras, nor myself; it was God who established you.*”

Now, allow me to recall some Gospel convictions.

1- “It was not you who chose me” (Jn 15:16).

Every local community of the Daughters of Charity is established in faith in *God who has called and assembled us* (cf. C. 32a). Jesus repeatedly tells us: “*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you*” (Jn 15:16). It is good for me to repeat this to myself; it is good to rekindle my heart in the experience of God's gratuitous love for me at the time of my initial call; it is good for me to express my gratitude to Him for this call, for His choice with which He has favored me.

It is also good for me to look at the other Sisters in my local community: they are also people called gratuitously by God as I am.

Yes, God is at the origin of my local community, such as it is today. It is He who chose us as we are and who assembled us as we are to live community life and bear witness to Him (cf. C. 9).

2- “God chose the foolish of the world... and God chose the weak of the world...” (1 Cor 1:27).

We know that the person who selects from among candidates seeking inclusion in a work group or an association first looks at their qualities, skills, experience and conformity to a job description.

When Jesus invited people to follow Him, He beckoned to people who were blind, lame, deaf and sick....

I would dare say that each one of us is aware that, despite all the qualities and skills that she may have, she also has weaknesses: areas of blindness, deafness, immobility, etc.

We are not ideal or choice individuals, nor saints... Our local community is made up of women who are very human, who know their personal limitations and know sin. We form a community of weak women who place their faith in the One who can do all things, for whom nothing is impossible.

A faith perspective helps us to recognize that our Sisters, like those who are poor, are intermediaries for meeting God. They can become objects of our contemplation: Jesus Christ gives Himself in them to be met, loved and served.

- Do we accept being weak before God?
- Do we accept being weak before others? If not, why?
- Do we accept being in a community where everything is not a success, that is not in perfect harmony and where, nonetheless, Jesus Christ is present and gives Himself to be met and loved?

By admitting the human poverty of our community life and accepting it, we bear overt witness to Jesus Christ. Our imperfect community life proclaims that God is not a god of elite, insider, powerful and perfect people, but God is the God of all, the God of the poor, of the least, of sinners; it proclaims that He is our Savior.

3- “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:34-35).

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The law governing the growth of a community of the Daughters of Charity is not the law of competition... it is the law of love.

“The local community is modeled on the Trinity, as desired by the Founders” (C. 32a). Trinitarian love is the law governing our growth in fraternal community. This love should not be confused with natural feelings of friendship. It is acceptance, esteem, respect, trust, and forgiveness (cf. C. 32a-b). It is expressed by the total gift of self to others, in a relationship that promotes mutuality. We can measure the extent to which we have adopted love by the kindness and generosity we express toward all, including those whom we like less.

Our life of caring mutual acceptance lets the truth shine through about human persons, who are fundamentally relational beings and grow through relationships. Every person is enriched and sustained by openness toward others, others who are different; every person is enriched by mutual calling into question and sharing of experiences.

Our different gifts bring about mutuality and result in a style of relating to others that does not seek to impose ourselves or hide our true self. Each Sister is called, on the one hand, to ask herself what another Sister might be lacking and look for how to help or support her; on the other hand, each Sister must recognize her personal limitations and be willing to accept assistance from the others.

Such mutual love, lived in community, is the sign that we are called by Christ; it cures us of all individualism and becomes “good news” for the world: *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13:35).

When our relationships among ourselves are characterized by communion, mutual giving and receiving, respecting and loving differences, our lives bear witness to the Triune God.

4- “Forgive one another” (Col 3:12-15).

Peter asks Jesus, *“If my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?”* Jesus answers, *“Seventy-seven times”* (Mt 18:21-22). This can be what is most difficult in some community situations. Forgiving

unconditionally, unreservedly, even if we consider that the other Sister is wrong, even if we are hurt by a behavior or words...

But I also hurt Sisters, and I can leave them out. I also need to be forgiven and accepted by one Sister or another in the same way that one Sister or another needs to be forgiven and accepted by me.

Fraternal relationships cannot really exist without forgiveness, offered and received. Forgiveness prevents tensions and hurts in our relationships from becoming breeding grounds for resentment and bitterness.

We discover our difficulties living as Sisters because of our sinfulness and that of others. So, how can we progress down the path of forgiveness and reconciliation?

The Virgin Mary plays a vital role in the experience of the community of Jesus' disciples. It is when Jesus is on the Cross, betrayed and abandoned by those whom He had chosen, that He gives Mary, his mother, as Mother for the disciple. He gives Mary the mission of accepting His disciples as her children and teaching them to build a new loving community based on relationships of mutual acceptance and forgiveness. Despite her pierced heart, Mary passes on all that she received at the foot of the Cross to the disciples, poor sinners. Her maternal attitude toward each disciple helps them to see themselves in a new way and to accept each other as brothers. Her caring and merciful heart consoles, comforts and encourages them to open their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit and to turn confidently and boldly toward the future. Mary makes sure that they remain united; her humble, simple presence of solidarity is a leaven of reconciliation and communion for each one of them.

The same goes for us: the Virgin Mary is tirelessly at work in our lives. She knows our difficulty in living as Sisters; she teaches us to love each other as children who share the same Father and the same Mother. But we need to be healed, saved. Let us turn frequently to Mary, our Mother. Let us implore her assistance without ever tiring of it; let us ask her to help us to forgive and to accept our Sisters' forgiveness in order to create true sisterly relationships. In that way, our community

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life will bear witness to Jesus Christ, our Redeeming God.

5- “If I, therefore...have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet” (Jn 13:14).

In every local community of the Daughters of Charity, the fundamental attitude in our relationships in community is a servant attitude, after the example of Jesus the Servant: on our knees before our Sisters.

Although a variety of factors could make us believe that we are better than our Sisters, let us look at Jesus the Servant. Let us contemplate the posture that Jesus chooses in order to demonstrate His greatness, His power and His divinity: He takes the lowest place, the place of the servant, and carries out the same actions towards each disciple; each individual is unique in His eyes.

This attitude of Jesus the Servant, which the Founders invited us to imitate (cf. C. 16b), witnesses to the truth that a successful person is not one who is self-sufficient; on the contrary, she receives from God and others and places all that she is and all that she has at the service of others, beginning with her Sisters (cf. C. 32b).

Let us call upon the Virgin Mary to help us in this. She is a created being like we are, but she is the most human woman because she is the humble servant of the Lord. As our Mother, she raises us to live as children of God, teaches us the inner attitudes needed to help others to exist and grow as human persons according to God’s plan.

In our community life, when we are beset by the desire for influence, power and domination, let us contemplate the Virgin Mary and implore her to help us freely choose a servant attitude in order to bear witness to our identity and our God: Christ the Servant.

By humbly and simply living out these convictions, our communities can become icons of the Trinity. Yes, it is possible to live sisterly relationships among Sisters from different generations and cultures thanks to rootedness in God and a relentless spiritual struggle.

MEANS THAT ORDER OUR COMMUNITY LIFE

Our life together in community is founded on the call that God addressed to each one of us. However, despite this, rule by the strongest, by the one who speaks the best or the loudest, by the one who puts up a fight or blackmails, can dominate a group. Therefore, unless these convictions are tied to concrete means to put them in practice, they are insufficient for ordering relationships in community life. I will highlight four means, among others, for progressing in life in common.

1- The Local Community Plan

What keeps relationships from being governed by the rule of the strongest? The Local Community Plan. It is a concrete adaptation of the Constitutions to the particular situation of a local community. The plan is developed together and accepted by each Sister. It organizes daily life in practical terms, and each Sister is involved and responsible for its implementation.

The Local Community Plan is the “rules of the game” of our life together in the specific local community to which we belong:

- The mission entrusted to us by the Company is the reason why we are in this particular place. How do we live it out? With whom? Do we collaborate with others?
- Spiritual life: when do we pray? Where?
- Community sharing: which types? What is their schedule? etc.
- Practical details of community life:
 - * distribution of duties
 - * concrete management of shared times, places and “tools”: from the bathroom to the TV to the computer ...
- The horarium for our life in common;
- Times for community relaxation, etc.

Amid all our feelings, our mixed emotions of pleasure and discomfort, fulfillment and annoyance, it is important to return to the “rules of the game” of our life together, which we determined together.

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The Local Community Plan may seem to reduce our relationships to a schedule. In fact, it allows us to manage relationships, and it is a simple means, among others, of living charity.

2- Communication with the Sister Servant

Relationships within community life governed by a Local Community Plan are not enough for me to respond to God's call in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. God in fact invites me to grow in my vocation until the end of my life; He invites me to conform myself more and more to Jesus Christ according to the spiritual experience of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

My identity as a Daughter of Charity, my deep existence as a humble, simple and charitable servant, takes shape little by little. It is strengthened through a deep relationship with the Lord, especially by listening to His Word, to those who are poor and to my Sisters. It is a matter of responding today, in the stage of life where I am, to the Lord's call to be an authentic Daughter of Charity.

Communication with the Sister Servant has its place and significance in this process. In faith, I accept my Sister Servant as the Sister whom the Lord has chosen to guide, support and encourage me on my vocational path. Whether I like her or not, the Lord gives her to me so that I might share my everyday experience with her. She is responsible before God not only for helping me individually to grow in my vocation, but also for helping the other Sisters to do the same.

3- Conversion to the Gospel

Community life implies ongoing conversion to the Gospel. When we speak about "conversion", we often think of moral conversion, of correcting our character and certain tendencies, but evangelical conversion is not primarily a moral conversion.

Evangelical conversion prepares us to live in faith, to look at our experience in the light of the Gospel and to allow ourselves to be molded into a resemblance to Christ, gentle and humble of heart (cf. C. 18) so that our thoughts, choices, actions and relationships reveal that Christ

is the Rule governing our life (cf. C. 8).

Community life is offered us so that we might "*in simplicity and humility... help one another to advance towards the Lord*" (C. 32b). It means that we encourage each other to live in a spirit of faith: to experience and "read" everything from the perspective of the Risen Lord, present and active in our lives, where His grace is ever at work to sanctify and save us. Our mission begins there: by letting the Good News of the Gospel pass through us (cf. C. 10).

Whoever we are, we have never finished being converted to the Gospel, being converted to Jesus' way of loving. It is a matter of moving forward together in following Christ by making his way of thinking, seeing and acting our own.

4- Apostolic reflection

"The Daughters of Charity live a community life the better to fulfil their specific mission of service" (C. 32). The heart of mission is an experience of God to share, Good News to proclaim, this Good News that runs through our life and life in community. It is also Good News to receive, especially from our brothers and sisters who are poor. Apostolic reflection allows us to listen together to Christ who acts in the heart and life of our suffering brothers and sisters whom we meet and serve. In this faith-filled listening, our hearts unite in order to recognize the face of Jesus in their lives, to be filled with wonder at His action and to give Him thanks for it.

Whatever our age or our age in vocation, we remain disciples of Jesus in the Company of the Daughters of Charity until the end of our lives. We will always have more to learn, understand and experience regarding what it means to bear witness to the charity of Jesus Christ crucified. At the side of those who are poor and our Sisters, we learn to become true servants after the example of Jesus Christ the Servant.

CONCLUSION

Fraternal life in community is thus not simply a way of living together with its customs, values, culture, choices and mentalities... but a way of

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life where everything is considered in the light of the Gospel (customs, values, culture, financial choices, structures, etc.). In other words, it is not a matter of imposing a culture; it is a matter of all of us together allowing all the aspects of our life to be examined from the viewpoint of our Constitutions. Community life is, above all, a path of conversion to the Gospel for each Sister; it is primarily from this communal space that the Good News of the Risen Lord can become credible for our world, for those around us: *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,”* Jesus says. This is really the requirement for us to become “missionary disciples” as Pope Francis recommends to us in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*.

A deep joy that is respectful of others and a support for our vocation can arise from our fraternal life in community.

In conclusion, allow me to read a passage (article 28) from a document, *Fraternal Life in Community*, by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, issued in February 1994 and still relevant today.

We must not forget, in the end, that peace and pleasure in being together are among the signs of the Kingdom of God. The joy of living even in the midst of difficulties along the human and spiritual path and in the midst of daily annoyances is already part of the Kingdom. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit and embraces the simplicity of existence and the monotonous texture of daily life. A joyless fraternity is one that is dying out; before long, members will be tempted to seek elsewhere what they can no longer find within their own home. A fraternity rich in joy is a genuine gift from above to brothers and sisters who know how to ask for it and to accept one another, committing themselves to fraternal life, trusting in the action of the Spirit. (...)

Such a testimony of joy is a powerful attraction to religious life, a source of new vocations and an encouragement to perseverance. It is very important to cultivate such joy within a religious community: overwork can destroy it, excessive zeal for certain causes can lead some to forget it, constant self-analysis of one’s identity and one’s own future can cloud it. (...)

Joy is a splendid testimony to the evangelical quality of a religious community; it is the end point of a journey which is not lacking in difficulties, but which is possible because it is sustained by prayer: “rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” (Rom 12:12).

Sister Elise BORTHEIRIE
Daughter of Charity

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Mary's Magnificat
is entirely woven from
threads of Holy Scripture,
threads drawn from the Word of God.

Here we see how
completely at home
Mary is with the Word of God,
with ease she moves
in and out of it.
She speaks and thinks
with the Word of God.

Here we see how
her thoughts are attuned
to the thoughts of God,
how her will is one with the will of God.

Since Mary is completely imbued
with the Word of God,
she is able to become
the Mother of the Word Incarnate.

Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 41

