

*E*choes of the Company



General Assembly 2021

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**Fraternal love
for a new
missionary
momentum**

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Letter of November 27, 2021

Dear Sisters,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us forever!

The General Assembly has just come to an end, and now we have the joy of celebrating these days called the “*Community feasts.*” It is a beautiful expression to describe our gratitude for belonging to the Company and that roots us ever more deeply in it. The Pope said this in his message to the members of the Assembly: “*It is beautiful, your vocation!*”

It is important for us to celebrate in communion with each other, to remember the humble life of a Daughter of Charity, Catherine Labouré, and the event that changed her life and also to recall our origins with gratitude. Let us open our heart to this history that shapes us if we take the time to revisit it. Let us take full advantage of the gift of these days!

Remember the humble life of a Daughter of Charity, Catherine, and the event that changed her life.

Reflecting on the opening prayer of the Mass for November 28 can help us, following the example of Saint Catherine, to go down a path of humility and service: “*Gracious God, you graced the holy virgin*

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Catherine with a close relationship with the Mother of your Son, and you taught her to surrender her life hidden in Christ to the service of the poor with joyful humility. May we who keep the memory of this holy woman always recognize your image in the needy that, as we serve them with simplicity of heart, we may be true witnesses of your love in the world.”

On the Lord’s initiative, Catherine was granted a spiritual experience through Mary. She drew from it the strength to serve humbly and faithfully; she acquired the certainty of the Lord’s closeness in all her everyday actions and of His presence in the persons who are poor whom she encountered.

We might say that this moment was Saint Catherine’s Ephata. She received Mary’s message as an invitation to come out of herself to go serve elderly men, those wounded in a civil war and the Sisters of her local community. The miracle of the Ephata continued throughout her long humble life as a servant.

In this sense, above and beyond the “extraordinary” event of the various apparitions of the Virgin Mary, we can see her as a witness of charity.

In a certain way, we can recognize ourselves in her. Each one of us has experienced an event that, while not extraordinary in the eyes of the world, was extraordinary for us because it changed our life completely. It is good for us to recall it, not to live in the past, but to be supported by our own Ephata in our mission today and in our local community today with the Sisters whom the Lord has also called.

God’s obvious initiative in our vocation is a call to bear witness to His love day after day. It is a call to be humble because the gifts that each one of us has received come from Him. It is a call to remain confident amid hardships like Catherine who, when tensions were rising during the Commune in Paris, said to the Sisters, *“Don’t get upset; nothing serious will happen!”*

Charity, humility and trust are three virtues of our vocation that Catherine practiced and placed at the service of others. We have the responsibility to try to progress constantly along this path and, better still, to help each other on it.

Recall our origins with gratitude

Let us listen to Saint Vincent alluding to the November 29, 1633, foundation of the Company: *“And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn’t then what it is now, there’s reason to believe that it’s still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it”* (February 13, 1646, CCD IX, 194). Saint Vincent repeats this to us today to sustain the love of our vocation, expressed by an unconditional generosity at every moment, and the joy of those who know that they are called by God.

We recall our origins, naturally, in order to be faithful to them with a living fidelity. Perhaps we could draw a parallel with a quote from Pope Francis about fidelity to tradition. He said, *“Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire”* (Speech for the closure of the Synod on the Amazon, October 26, 2019). Nothing could be clearer! Recalling our origins, being faithful to our origins, is a call to renewal, conversion and trust.

Recalling our origins is an act of faith, a commitment to live the charism whether we are in our prime or lack energy due to illness or age. Like breathing, we give and we receive. Sometimes, we have the impression that we are mostly giving; other times, we realize that we are receiving as well; still other times, it is clear that we are mostly receiving. God is waiting for us in all these moments that can follow closely upon each other. He is there and awaits our response to what He is asking of us in the present time.

Recalling our origins is also a means to strengthen our attachment to our family, which is the Company, in other words, to desire

Letter of November 27, 2021

to journey together in a concrete way. We thus need to find the right pace such that no one remains on the side of the road. The faster ones should think about those who are not keeping up, and the slower ones should try to speed up while all watch out for those who are going through a hard time and risk falling by the wayside. Belonging to the Company takes concrete form in everyday life and not in words.

The *Community feasts* are a privileged time to connect our personal histories with our History with a capital H where God is waiting for us! Let us be grateful for the beauty of our vocation, especially during this period when each Sister is requesting the grace of Renovation.

Now, I will quite simply share with you my initial reactions following our General Assembly.

I have to begin by mentioning the absence of three Provinces, Congo, Madagascar and Vietnam. They were present in another way, but we really missed them. The General Council will find the means for these Provinces to benefit like the others from the results of the General Assembly.

How many reasons there are to give thanks! Day after day, in a relaxed yet conscientious atmosphere, the discussions made it possible to bring out orientations for the Company, which you will receive in several weeks. The members of the Assembly entrusted the General Council with writing the final draft. This will take a little time, but be sure that important points came out, in particular fraternal life in community, sharing among Provinces and the defense of human rights. You will discover other aspects, notably in response to this question: *After Laudato si, can we continue living in the same way?* It will be up to you to give concrete form to all these orientations in your Provinces.

The last day, we extended our special thanks to the six General Councillors who finished their term. They are happy to return

to their respective Provinces and now eagerly await the mission that will be entrusted to them.

It will be a little while before the new Council can meet all together because the six new Councillors must first return to their Province for the handover of their different services, a detachment that they live with faith and generosity.

Thank you for having prayed so much for the General Assembly. You sent many messages, and I told the members of the Assembly, who thank you. This support was powerful, and we felt how much communion in the Company is a reality.

There would be much news concerning the Provinces to share, but for the time being, I will just mention the countries that are suffering most acutely. Let us pray for Ethiopia and Eritrea where the armed conflict is worsening, for Cuba that finds itself in a nearly unbearable social situation and for Lebanon that is sinking even further into uncertainty and poverty.

Before concluding, I remind you that the Provinces of Madrid-San Vicente and Madrid-Santa Luisa will become the new Province of España-Centro today, November 27, and that on November 29, the Province of San Vincenzo-Italia and the Province of Sardinia will also unite and become one Province, that of San Vincenzo-Italia. Let us entrust the future of these two new Provinces to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and to our Holy Founders.

Now, all that remains is for me to wish you happy “*Community feasts*.” May we always be witnesses of love and faith!

I also assure you of my prayer. With my sisterly affection,

Sister Françoise PETIT
Daughter of Charity

Letter for Advent 2021

The sick and the elderly,
strong builders of a bright
and hope-filled future

Dear members of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

Every year, the Church offers us the gift of the grace-filled period called “Advent” that helps us to prepare our hearts and minds in a special way for the Christmas season. Continuing the reflection on Saint Vincent de Paul as a “Mystic of Charity,” I invite all of us in this year’s Advent season to meditate on the indisputable and vital mission that the sick and elderly have in the Church and in the world, and, therefore, in our Congregations, Associations, communities, families, and groups.

If, on the one hand, society so often considers sick and elderly persons as useless for the development of a bright and hope-filled future for humanity; on the other hand, in the Bible, Jesus turns all those assumptions upside down, giving the sick and elderly a privileged role in the mission that the Father entrusted to Him to bring all peoples to Him, to His heart, to bring the Kingdom of God to its fulfillment.

This Biblical reversal derives from a radical distinction of who, in fact, is placed at the center. Who is the source for bringing the greatest meaning into our lives, to what we do, to that to which

we dedicate all our gifts and talents? Who is the font of ultimate happiness and joy? It is not the human person who is put in first place, but God.

Society often puts the human person at the center insofar as the person is physically and mentally able to bring some profit to it; God has no place or, if He does, He is put in third or fourth place, according to an individual's selfish views. The logical conclusion is that, at some point, the sick and the elderly become, as Pope Francis often repeats, "the discard of society" (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, nos. 19-20, 278), no longer useful for bringing a bright and hope-filled future to humanity.

Saint Vincent spoke about the role of the sick on several occasions:

"I've already said this many times, and I can't help repeating it once more now, namely, that we should be of the opinion that those suffering from illness in the Company are the blessing of the Company and the house, and that we should consider this to be all the more true since Our Lord Jesus Christ loved that state of suffering, through which He himself willed to pass and became man in order to suffer" (CCD XII, 26-27; conference 184, "The Good Use of Infirmities," 28 June 1658).

"We have good reason to praise God that, by His goodness and mercy, there are sick and infirm men in the Company who make of their inactivity and sufferings a theater of patience, in which they show forth all the virtues in their brilliance. We must thank God for having given us such persons. I've already said many times, and can't refrain from saying it again, that we must believe that its sick members are the blessing of the Company" (CCD XI, 61; conference 55, "The Good Use of Illness).

"But for the Company—the poor Company—nothing special should be permitted either in food or clothing! I make exception, as always, for the sick. Oh, the poor patients! For them, even

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the chalices of the Church should be sold. God has given me tender feelings in that regard, and I ask Him to give this spirit to the Company” (CCD XII, 334; conference 220, “Poverty,” [5 December 1659]).

In his message for the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis quoted *“a saintly elderly person who continues to pray and work for the Church,”* Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI: *“The prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others.”* Pope Francis commented, *“He spoke those words in 2012, toward the end of his pontificate. There is something beautiful here. Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need.”*

The Pope further affirmed, *“There is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel”* and defined the vocation of elderly people: *“To preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young and to care for the little ones”* (Pope Francis, Message for the First World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, 25 July 2021).

During the series of catechesis on the family, Pope Francis said: *“The elderly are the reservoir of wisdom for our people! [...] We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community.”* A society that cannot show gratitude and affection to the elderly *“is a perverse society. The Church, faithful to the Word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration.”*

“Where there is no honour for the elderly, there is no future for the young.” Moreover, *“The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don’t think it. And if we don’t learn how to treat the elder better, that is how we will be treated”* (Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, 4 March 2015).

Vincent understood these principles. In the *Common Rules*, the first *Constitutions* of the Congregation of the Mission, he wrote:

“One of the principal things Christ did was to visit and care for the sick, and especially persons who were poor. He very often recommended this to those He was sending into His vineyard. For this reason, the Congregation should have a special care for helping and visiting the sick, whether outside or inside the house” (VI, 1).

“Wherever we visit a sick person, inside or outside the house, we should look on this person as Christ rather than as just a human being, since Christ said that He regarded any service done to such a person as being done to Himself” (VI, 2).

Saint Vincent de Paul also addressed sick persons themselves with the following words:

“Members of our own Community who are sick should remind themselves that they are not kept in bed, or in the hospital, just to be nursed and brought back to health by medical help. They are also there, as if in a pulpit, to witness publicly to Christian virtues, especially patience and acceptance of the Divine Will, at least by their example. In this way they can make Christ present to those looking after them and to visitors. And through their sickness they themselves can grow in virtue” (VI, 3).

During this Advent, let us all discover more and more in our communities, families, and groups, the “living treasure” of our sick and elderly. They are the living presence of Jesus among us. They are Jesus, to whom we owe all our love, all the care we can humanly offer. They remain our teachers, models, and helpers in building a bright and hope-filled future, because it is Jesus who is speaking to us through them, showing us on what foundations we are invited to build our dreams, hopes, and objectives. We must not succumb to the mentality of some sectors of society who consider the elderly and sick as society’s

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trash: once the short-lived moment of joy is over, only sorrow, disillusion, frustration, and a meaningless life remain.

Vincent de Paul, in becoming a “Mystic of Charity,” came to understand and live the relationship with the sick and elderly as it was presented by Jesus.

May this Advent Season lead us ever more into the depths of Jesus’ message regarding the sick and elderly, so that, as we prepare to celebrate the Birth of our Savior, we might build together with them a bright and hope-filled future in the light of His presence.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Introduction

“Ephata! Break through the gate, go towards, encounter”: this was the theme of the 10th General Assembly, which took place in Paris from Friday, October 29 to Sunday, November 21, 2021.

After completing all the necessary procedures to obtain vaccines, visas, tickets, flights, etc., almost all the Visitatrixes and delegates arrived at the Motherhouse, coming from one Region and 46 of the 49 Provinces that should have been represented. Because of administrative restrictions due to the health crisis, 3 Sisters from the Province of Vietnam, 3 Sisters from the Province of Madagascar and 2 Sisters from the Province of Congo could not participate in this General Assembly.

The members present numbered 116 out of the 124 convoked members (59 ex officio members and 57 delegates). Three newly-designated but not yet installed Visitatrixes participated in the Assembly as auditors; the fourth was unable to attend for administrative reasons.

On October 19, 2021, the Sisters began an eight-day retreat to prepare to live this General Assembly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Father Bernard Schoepfer, Director General, who led this retreat, helped the Sisters to “*go out to*

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meet Jesus in order to let Him encounter us.” Contemplating Jesus’ behavior in His encounters with the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, Pilate, the Canaanite woman, the good thief, Mary of Magdala and Peter, each member of the Assembly felt challenged to let the Charity of Christ dwell ever more deeply in her.

On Friday, October 29, the General Assembly opened with Eucharist concelebrated by Father Tomaž Mavrič, Superior General, and Father Bernard Schoepfer. We might note that half of the members were participating in a General Assembly for the first time. Twenty-five Sister translators and two lay interpreters enabled good communication among the Sisters.

On October 30, Sister Françoise Petit brought out the major events that had marked the life of the Company over the past six years, especially emphasizing the work accomplished: in the peripheries, with migrants, emergency situations/mobile response teams, modern forms of slavery... That same day, Sister Teresa Sanno, Treasurer General, presented the financial report of the Company.

The following days, the Sisters were invited to make use of the reflection questions for group work, developed based on the synthesis of responses from the Provincial Assemblies.

The reflection focused on the four challenges chosen as concerns shared by all Provinces:

- passing on the faith and Christian values to younger generations,
- the mystique of “living together,”
- care for our “common home,”
- respect of human rights.

Each topic was enriched by the presence of a speaker who opened new horizons.

The members of the Assembly gathered in work groups and then in plenary sessions to share on these challenges and discuss them. A great missionary momentum emerged from these encounters and reflections. The Inter-Assemblies Documents will bear witness to this and will put forward recommendations to pursue in the concrete realities of our lives.

The entire Assembly had the joy of hearing a video message from Pope Francis addressed to the new Superioress General, Sister Françoise Petit, and to the members of the Assembly.

This issue of the *Echoes of the Company* reports on this Assembly. The presentations and missionary testimonies that could not be included in this issue will be published in the next one.

Please do not photocopy these articles on the General Assembly, which are for the Daughters of Charity's internal use.

Conference for the opening of the 2021 General Assembly

Father Tomaž Mavrič, Superior General
Motherhouse, October 29, 2021

Good morning, Sister Françoise, Father Bernard, Sisters. I am delighted to be with you today for the opening of your General Assembly. Sister Françoise, the members of her Council, the translators, secretaries, and the Sisters of the Motherhouse have worked very hard over many months to prepare for this day and those that will follow. I am most grateful for all their efforts. It certainly has not been easy for them, especially having had to postpone the Assembly from the spring until now in the hope that the pandemic would subside and enough Sisters would be vaccinated to be able to travel and make this truly an Assembly that represents the entire Little Company.

As we begin the Assembly, we call upon the light of the Holy Spirit, asking for wisdom and guidance in all the discussions and decisions. However, I also want to ask the prayer and intercession of Sister Kathleen Appler, whom, I trust, is looking down on each of us today. She directed the initial preparations for this Assembly, so we also owe her a deep debt of gratitude.

Over the past two years, each of you, in your respective local communities and Provinces, has dialogued on the theme, “EPHATA! Break through the gate... Go towards... Encounter.” I have no doubt that those discussions were very fruitful, as can be seen by the Synthesis of the responses that eventually reached the General level.

You began your work by taking a step backward, evaluating the Inter-Assemblies Document from the 2015 General Assembly, which had for theme, “The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum.” Perhaps you have noted already that the members of the synthesis committee for the evaluation of the Inter-Assemblies Document presented their work in a rather creative fashion, as an imagined conference that Saint Vincent might have given to you, Daughters of Charity of the 21st century.

I am not going to comment further on the Synthesis. Instead, I would like to concentrate on the four challenges on which you chose to focus during your Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. I trust you know already how they relate to the theme of this Assembly.

The first challenge is human rights and holistic development for those most abandoned in society. This touches the very essence of your vocation: the service of Christ in the person of the poor. Today we often speak of systemic change. That is, we want to assist the poor in helping themselves, in expressing their needs, and in finding ways to address the issues that make them poor. In other words, we no longer wish to serve them by giving them directly what they may need, nor deciding what those needs might be without their input. In doing so, we truly will promote their holistic development and support them in the struggle for their human rights.

As Pope Francis reminds us:

“The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of color, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development” (Fratelli tutti, 118).

Conference for the opening of the 2021 General Assembly

Saint Vincent, as Chaplain General of the Galleys, recognizing the human dignity of the convicts, did what he could to relieve the suffering of those confined to the ships. He contributed to the establishment of a hospital in Marseilles to care for them. Nevertheless, he was not always able to respond as he would have liked and lamented, *“I can only be deeply grieved by the intense sufferings of the poor slaves and by my inability to procure some relief for them; may it please God to have pity on them!”*¹

I have no doubt that you often find yourselves in Vincent’s shoes. You see the needs of the poor but are unable respond to them as you would like to do. In those cases, you should follow his example and place them in God’s hands.

Care for our “common home” is another theme dear to the heart of the Holy Father. As you know well, his first encyclical, *Laudato si’*, addressed this topic. Interestingly, he recognized in it:

“The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: ‘Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest’” (*Laudato si’*, 48).

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 VII, p. 523; letter 2819 to Jean Le Vacher, Consul in Tunis, 18 April 1659. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials *CCD*, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, *CCD VII, 523*.

Therefore, it is essential that, as Daughters of Charity, you do everything in your power not only to strive personally to care for our common home, but also to collaborate with others in working to provide a clean, sustainable environment for everyone. The poor, too, must be included in these efforts, helping them see that being good to the planet is to their advantage. This will contribute to the systemic change I mentioned earlier.

Saint Louise recognized that the first Sisters, who were mostly village girls, were used to farming. They knew how to use God's blessings, which came to them through the land, the sun, and the rain. They would not have been inclined to abuse these gifts from the Almighty. Louise confided to a Sister, "*If you could see them all working, tilling the soil, you would truly hope for good fruit from this earth.*"²

"Living together" is certainly a challenge, perhaps now more so than in previous eras. In the past, families were more united, and children learned to work and play together, share, and take care of each other. Nowadays, many have a more independent spirit, that of everyone for oneself. Such an attitude does not contribute to living together harmoniously. Community living under such circumstances may not be the paradise for which Saint Vincent hoped. In a conference on "Gracious Condescension and Mutual Support," he noted that a motive for practicing these virtues was that they are "*a means of fostering a holy friendship among you and of living in perfect union and thus to be able to create a paradise even in this world.*"³

2. *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, Correspondence and Thoughts*, edited and translated from the French by Sister Louise Sullivan, DC; New City Press, Brooklyn, 1991; page 146; letter 458 to Sister Madeleine Mongert at Angers, (c. May 1646). Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials *SW*, followed by the page number, for example, *SW* 146.

3. *CCD* X, 384; conference 95 on "Gracious Condescension and Mutual Support" (Common Rules, Article 38), 30 May 1658.

Conference for the opening of the 2021 General Assembly

Saint Louise also expressed her concern that the Sisters live these virtues. *“My dear Sisters, what do you think our good God is asking of you in return for the many graces He bestows on you? It is fidelity to His service in every point of your Rule; especially, my dear Sisters, cordial support of one another, graciousness and submission, and perfect harmony.”*⁴

In his most recent encyclical, the Holy Father mentions that some small groups plan authoritarian and abstract universalism and present it as an ideal. He goes on to say:

“One model of globalization in fact ‘consciously aims at a one-dimensional uniformity and seeks to eliminate all differences and traditions in a superficial quest for unity... If a certain kind of globalization claims to make everyone uniform, to level everyone out, that globalization destroys the rich gifts and uniqueness of each person and each people.’ This false universalism ends up depriving the world of its various colors, its beauty and, ultimately, its humanity. For ‘the future is not monochrome; if we are courageous, we can contemplate it in all the variety and diversity of what each individual person has to offer. How much our human family needs to learn to live together in harmony and peace, without all of us having to be the same!’” (Fratelli tutti, 100).

Therefore, you must work toward an acceptance of all peoples, including your Sisters in Community, recognizing each one’s gifts and limitations, so that you may live together in peace and harmony.

Your fourth challenge is to pass on the faith and Christian values to younger generations. It has been said that young people are the future of the Church. Pope Francis disagrees with this statement. In fact, on 27 January 2019, at Mass in Panama during the 34th World Youth Day, he told those gathered before him:

4. *SW* 182; letter 160 to Sister Élisabeth Martin at Nantes, (October 1646).

*“You, dear young people, are not the future. We like to say, ‘you are the future.’ No, you are the present. You are not the future of God; you young people are the **now of God**. He invites you and calls you in your communities and cities to go out and find your grandparents, your elders; to stand up and with them to speak out and realize the dream that the Lord has dreamed for you.”⁵*

Therefore, it goes without saying that the Holy Father would want you to strive to pass on the faith to young people. Those gathered in Panama that day were surely among the youth who do believe and who try to exemplify Christian values. However, there are millions of other young people who need to be approached, mentored, and guided so they will learn to follow Jesus and serve their less fortunate sisters and brothers.

Our Vincentian Family is blessed with a number of associations, which can be of assistance in that regard: the Vincentian Marian Youth, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the International Association of Charities, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, and MISEVI. Introducing young people to one or more of these associations is a perfect way to help them grow in their faith and develop Christian values. If there is none in the area where some of your Sisters serve, I urge you to have them start one.

Saint Louise encouraged the Sisters in their work with youth. She wrote to Sister Turgis saying, *“I beg you, Sister, to be most careful in the instruction of the young and to maintain good order in your school... I also urge you to read from the Catechism to the older girls on Sunday and feast day afternoons, and to talk to them about devotion.”*⁶

5. Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Panama on the Occasion of the 34th World Youth Day, 27 January 2019.

6. *SW* 181-182; letter 163 to Sister Turgis at Richelieu, 29 October (1646).

Conference for the opening of the 2021 General Assembly

In a conference to the first Sisters, Saint Vincent mentioned:

“The ... Holy Father has given the Priests of the Mission authority to establish the Confraternity of the Ladies of Charity in France and Savoy. Now, since it was obvious that the Ladies couldn’t devote themselves to the service of the sick poor as they might have desired, it was decided, in order to remedy this, that it would be a good idea to get some young women of the lower class and to instruct them in this matter. That’s what Mlle Le Gras has been doing for the past twenty-five years, with great blessings from God.”⁷

As is obvious from just those two citations, both Vincent and Louise promoted the formation of youth. Without doubt, they would want you to continue doing likewise.

Allow me to conclude by encouraging you to listen carefully to each other throughout this Assembly. Each of you has ideas and programs to share, and the others should be attentive to them. There is a richness in the diversity of your international Company that you must not fail to recognize and put to good use.

Make every effort to come up with concrete ways of responding to each of the challenges so they are not just words on paper, but actions that will produce positive effects. Reflect and discern carefully on all your decisions for the good of every Sister and the poor whom you serve with such devotion.

I promise to continue holding each of you in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten you and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and all the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family to intercede for you before our heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus.

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

7. CCD X, 82; conference 69 on “Fidelity to the Rules,” 8 August 1655.

Report on the last six years and issues for the Company today

Motherhouse, October 30, 2021

Father Tomaž, Father Bernard, Sisters.

Yesterday, the Assembly was declared officially open by Father Tomaž, who communicated a message of trust to us and an invitation to remain steadfast in faith and attentive to the Spirit all throughout these weeks that are so important for the Company. Thank you, Father.

We thank Father Bernard for his constant presence with the General Council and for his very brotherly relationship with the Daughters of Charity. This is certainly what Saint Vincent and Saint Louise would have wanted.

Our thanks to Sister Evelyne for being here with us and remaining so devoted to the life of the Company and so close to the Provinces and each one of us in prayer.

Today, I am going to present you with a report on the past six years. However, before entering into the topic at hand, I will say a few words about the composition of our Assembly.

As you know, *“The number of delegates must be at least equal to the number of ex officio members. When the number of delegates is less than that of the ex officio members, the Superioress General with her Council determines a method to complete the required number”* (C. 87c).

Report on the last six years and issues for the Company today

This is what we did during our Special Council meeting in September 2019. As the number of ex officio members was 62 and the number of delegates 57, we had to choose a method to designate five additional delegates. After reflection and study, the General Council decided to ask for an additional delegate from:

- the Region of Albania, the only Region in the Company,
- the Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia because of its recent union with the Province of Thailand and the greatest number of countries (9) making up a Province,
- the Province of Rosalie Rendu because of the union of the Province of Great Britain with the Province of Australia,
- the Province of Madagascar, the Province in Africa with the most Sisters,
- the Province of North India, the most populous Province in Asia with less than 500 Sisters.

I would add that the average age of the 124 members anticipated for the General Assembly is just over 59 years old and that 71 of the 124 members, or 57%, have not previously participated in a General Assembly.

Circumstances related to Covid-19 changed both the organization and, to a certain extent, the face of our General Assembly, which in the end numbers just 116 members present.

Beyond the numbers, let us keep in mind that we are here to represent the Company as a whole, to be the voice of every Daughter of Charity, whatever the country or Province where she is at the service of Christ in our poorest brothers and sisters. It is essential to become ever more aware how much our diversity is an asset for the future, and that the enrichment is mutual. Let us be open to ensure the broadest possible thought and reflection.

The Church itself is beginning a synodal process, and we can be thankful for this. Let us humbly acknowledge the good fortune we have because the Company offers us the means to

take this path of synodality whenever we prepare a General Assembly: the Visitatrixes' Inter-Assemblies Meeting to suggest a theme for reflection by the Company as a whole, Domestic and Provincial Assemblies, consideration of propositions during the General Assembly and the guidelines that will take shape in the Provinces depending on specific contexts in Local Community and Provincial Plans, which allow all Sisters to express themselves for the common good.

Synodality, however, is not just a question of organization; above all, it is for each one of us a state of mind to maintain, and the *Ephata* theme is clearly part of that movement: mutual listening, an openness of heart and mind, a desire to discover and understand different realities, letting go of one's opinion sometimes, a readiness to act for the Company as a whole.

From this time forward, we are invited to act in this spirit that can give credibility to all that might be passed on to the Provinces. The General Assembly is the privileged time to go forward and serve Christ in our brothers and sisters together.

I. THE LIFE OF THE COMPANY SINCE 2015

To begin, a few words on what shook all of us deeply. I am referring to the sixteen months of Sister Kathleen's illness and then her death. It seems natural for me to begin with her because it should have been her here today. This was a difficult experience for each one of us. Fortunately, I can say that we experienced it together, that is, all the Daughters of Charity throughout the world, at a distance but in communion. The General Council felt this, and it was a real support despite our many questions, the difficult day-to-day experience and very real and deep pain. This evening, we will celebrate in faith her passing along with that of all those who have left us since 2015, especially those who died as a result of the pandemic.

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We wanted to offer you this moment as a time of thanksgiving and gratitude for what these Sisters were and for the mission that each of them carried out until the end of her life: mission with persons who are poor, mission at the service of the Company, mission of presence. In faith and hope, we will pray with the Daughters of Charity throughout the world because this prayer service will be live-streamed on the website of the Company.

Now, let us take a look at what has happened since the last General Assembly.

- a. Some realities of the Company
- b. Missionary commitments in the Provinces
- c. Formation
- d. Some significant events

These four sections, I hope, should provide you with an overall picture of the life of the Company.

a. Some realities of the Company

- *Shifts*

Statistics

Statistics do not tell the whole story, but they are indispensable for a realistic reflection on the present and the identification of possible signs for the future of the Company.

Total members: If you look at the graph, the message is clear. For some perspective, look back to 2009 when we were a total of 18,832 Sisters; in 2015, 15,591 Sisters; and in 2020, 12,855 Sisters. The decrease is constant and relatively regular. The fundamental explanation is simple: the number of deaths is high and increasing, especially in Europe and North America. To this, we must add the relative decrease in the number of women

entering. We have gone from 118 entrances in 2009 to 83 in 2015 and then 91 in 2020.

It is perhaps a little risky to try to predict the future, but we might imagine that at the next Assembly, we will still have about 10,000 Sisters, maybe somewhat fewer.

An overall study is not sufficient. Let us now look at the evolution in the number of Sisters by continent. Little by little, three lines are going to meet, in all likelihood: those of Europe, South America and Asia. What will make the difference is the average age. If we look at this variable since 2009, we note that it increases by 1 to 2 years every six years. In Europe, the current average is 77 years old (up 1.5 years), in South America almost 68 years old right now (up 1.5 years) and in Asia, 55.5 years old (up 1 year).

Women entering the Company

In Asia, there were 33 admissions per year between 2015 and 2020, approximately 36% of the admissions to the Company as a whole (a total average of 90 per year over this same period). This number of 33 Sisters represents 1.87% of the current total number of Sisters in Asia.

Next, you see the blue line corresponding to Africa. The average age is 49.2 years old. The statistical progression seems slow, but it is exponential. In fact, there are about 25 Sisters who enter each year, representing 27.7% of the total new members for the Company and, more significantly, 2.5% of the current total number of Sisters in Africa. The line should change shape and intersect the other lines.

As a comparison, South America has an average of 21 Sisters entering each year, which represents 0.70% of its total members, North American entrances are 0.42% of members and European entrances 0.15%.

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This reality does not shock us even if the question of vocations remains a mystery. Who knows, we could be surprised in Europe and North America! The Lord continues to call.

Whatever the case, these figures and percentages show that the physiognomy of the Company will quite simply be different in six years: fewer Sisters overall, fewer in Europe and North America, a less striking decline in South America and Asia and more Sisters in Africa. What will the average age be? It is possible that it may decrease because 13% of our Sisters are currently over 90 years old (72% of whom are in Europe, or 1,212 Sisters out of 1,688 total 90-plus year-olds).

I conclude this section with a suggestion: rather than considering the overall decrease in our numbers as an inexorable fall towards something “less,” look at it as an opportunity to seize for better closeness, flexibility and simplicity. This could be a call to convert how we look at our situation, convinced that Christ is waiting for us in it. That’s what hope is.

Departures from the Company

The departures that we will now mention, while always painful, are limited in number. However, it is important to reflect on this issue because it touches all Provinces.

During General Council, we studied what was happening in the Company, relying on statistics and looking more closely at the reasons for departures. We must admit that some of them are inevitable and sometimes even preferable, but the Provinces question themselves. What are the weak points that were not noticed and that become breaking points on some Sisters’ journeys?

In terms of figures, we observed that, since 2003, there are fewer departures overall in raw numbers per year. This is to be expected because the total number of Daughters of Charity is declining.

From 2009 to 2014, an average of 88 Sisters per year left, and from 2015 to 2020, 65 Sisters. In 2020, there were 57.

We see that the situation differs by continent. In contrast to entrances, we can observe that the percentage of departures is higher in Africa than in Europe. They are the two extremes: 0.2% in Europe compared to 1.1% in Africa. This is logical because departures mostly take place in the age range of 30-60 years old and no longer after age 80!

The percentage of departures in relation to the total number of Sisters is stable and even in slight decline (about 0.47%). In the Company, we could not speak of a “hemorrhage” (an expression used in the document, *The Gift of Fidelity, the Joy of Perseverance*), but rather of a constant phenomenon that we should examine lucidly yet without fear.

How can we bring up the dimension of fidelity and perseverance in the current context? Do we need to reexamine formation programs? How can we strengthen community life as a place of formation, growth and mutual support in difficult moments?

- *Reconfigurations of Provinces*

Since 2015, eight reconfigurations have taken place. In chronological order: Belgium-France-Switzerland, España-Sur with North Africa, St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, España-Norte, España-Este, San Vincenzo-Italia (with the Province of Naples), St. Louise de Marillac-Asia a second time (with Thailand, for a total of nine countries) and Rosalie Rendu (Great Britain with Australia).

How might we evaluate this new organization? The Sisters from these Provinces could explain better than I, but they have expressed themselves on various occasions, and, in summary, this is what we have heard:

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Positive consequences

Fewer Sisters are tied up in leadership roles, fewer Treasurers, fewer Secretaries. They have been freed to respond to apostolic calls. We can give thanks because it is one of the objectives of these reconfigurations.

The richness of diversity is a reality that the Sisters discover in practice and that progressively leverages an opening of mindsets and sometimes a shaking up of customary ways of acting. It takes time to get to know each other. We have observed the efforts of Visitatrixes and their Councils to dream up gatherings and hold various ones by region, by theme, by ministry... There is no age limit to opening oneself, and the elderly Sisters are interested and often motivated by all these offerings.

When there are several countries in a new Province, the Sisters who accept to cross a border acknowledge, after the inevitable period of adaptation, that they have grown humanly and spiritually in their vocation. Their perspective has expanded, giving them more energy. Sometimes, they even regret not having this experience earlier. Their availability is a witness and gives new momentum to the Province.

Some reconfigurations have had the effect of prompting a new reflection on missionary priorities and have given Provinces a breath of fresh air.

More difficult consequences

Resistance to change and the lack of availability among some Sisters weigh heavily in a Province and limit missionary boldness. We must acknowledge this aspect that really requires working on Ephata, especially personally: being open to transformation, which translates into trust and availability.

It is clear that the issue of distances is often mentioned by Sisters after a reconfiguration and especially when the Province includes several countries, sometimes with bureaucratic restrictions on going from one country to another. Distance is perceived as an obstacle to a close relationship with the Visitatrix. It also has a financial cost. It is not a question of denying these realities; nonetheless, we must also consider that Provinces that have not been reconfigured and that consist of only one country experience similar realities. Some examples: Madagascar, North or South India, Amazonia... in these very vast regions or countries, distances are huge and transportation means sometimes very limited. Visitatrixes must thus spend two or three days to reach some local communities.

This feeling of the lack of a close relationship sometimes leads us to wonder about the role of Provincial Councillors. Are they sufficiently recognized? Are the delegations that the Visitatrixes entrust to them adequate, well-defined and implemented?

There can also be the fact that different languages within a Province are perceived as a real barrier among the Sisters. It is true that one could ask how a Visitatrix who only speaks one language could communicate with a Sister of another language. This can result in suffering, misunderstanding, frustration. It is a challenge in these new Provinces.

Having said this, each General Assembly insists on learning languages, and the reality is that no real progress is made. What could we do to make headway in this area? Some Congregations require that their members learn a specific language, in general that of their Founders. Another solution: necessarily learn a language from a list of choices? It is a subject to take seriously to lead to more actual results.

- *Collaboration*

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From the beginning, collaboration has characterized the life of the Company. It continues, in a different way, of course, and is tending to expand. It is now well-established that it is unthinkable to work alone, wherever we are. All the Provinces have this experience with international or local associations, other Congregations or partners. I would like to recall some more or less recent collaborations on the international level today, for the internationality of the Company also plays out in its participation in these networks.

DREAM: Since 2005, this partnership has continued with Sant'Egidio in Mozambique (2 centers), in Nigeria (2 centers), one center each in Cameroon, in Democratic Republic of Congo, in Kenya and in Tanzania. In total, there are 8 centers that authorities in these countries recognize for their quality medical care and their respect of persons.

Depaul (Non-profit at the service of people who are homeless) began in London in 1984 and has since expanded into several countries. The partnership with the Daughters of Charity comes naturally since it is based on a shared passion to reach out to people experiencing homelessness.

Vincentian Family: In January 2020, a meeting in Rome brought together 250 leaders from various branches of the Vincentian Family. Some left heartened, having discovered to their surprise that the Vincentian Family is a reality. In September 2021, a video-conference formation session was offered to international leaders: “Pray, dream and collaborate in the service of those who are poor.”

You all know the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) and the “13 Houses” Campaign to which the Provinces contribute generously, both on a local and General level. I invite you to visit the FAMVIN website.

United Nations: You were recently informed about changes in staffing, which will take effect in the near future.

What the Daughters of Charity say in the commissions in which they participate is the voice of the servant-Church, and it is valued. On the website of the Company, their articles can be considered not just informational but also formative for all of us on major current issues in the light of the social doctrine of the Church.

The institutional Church: The Company's collaboration has taken concrete form through its presence in:

- The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. You surely recall that in Summer 2019, Sister Kathleen was appointed a member of this Congregation. She was not able to put work into it, but it is a fact to bear in mind that the Church trusts the Company. I think that she would have been able to bring the different perspective of a Society of Apostolic Life.
- The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development: two Daughters of Charity are present there. Sister Carol Keehan, as I had informed you, is a member of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission, created for the organization of an equitable distribution of the vaccine in the world, and Sister Mary Louise Stubbs is very involved in Project WASH, which aims to improve water access and hygiene conditions in Catholic health facilities in several countries.

Collaboration with our brothers and sisters who are poor has progressed but deserves to be further expanded. How can we consider them not just as active players but also more as our brothers and sisters? *Fratelli tutti* offers us some good guidance on this subject. I imagine that the Assembly will afford us the opportunity to develop this line of action.

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- *The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic*

I leave you simply with a few points of reference. I won't say any more now because our Assembly will be marked by it, and Sunday afternoon you will have the opportunity to informally discuss this ongoing crisis that has affected the entire world.

On a human level, in the Company, 169 Sisters died as a result of Covid-19 in 2020, and unfortunately, 56 more Sisters died of it between January 1 and August 31, 2021. We could say that we have a 25% excess death rate compared to the average number of deaths annually.

Provinces were impacted on an organizational level: closures of local communities earlier than planned but also the opening or adaptation of some works; concerning the renewal of terms of Sister Servants, extensions that shouldn't have occurred; sending on mission or vows for the first time that were postponed; the difficult issue of salaries, especially in schools and services receiving the public...

The suffering of seeing poverty explode. Faced with this, you were haunted by a sense of helplessness; at the same time, your creativity increased tenfold, as well as your courage. We could give so many examples!

The dramatic introduction of modern means of communication has changed our way of working and relating. You were obliged to use video calls for Council meetings, Provincial Assemblies... there are lessons to take from this for both our very being as Daughters of Charity and our actions.

The financial impact on the Company. Sister Teresa Sanno will speak to you about it this afternoon.

My description of changes in the situation of the Company since 2015 was a little long; now, we will turn to the second point.

b. Missionary commitments in the Provinces

We observed that all the Provinces made ample use of the Inter-Assemblies Document to act on some priorities that were emphasized six years ago, in accordance with the actual possibilities of each Province.

Thanks to the study of Provincial Plans and Formation Plans and during visitations by General Councillors, we noted the priorities that the majority of Provinces implemented. During the Assembly, you will have the opportunity to speak about this again, so here I will just mention the broad outlines:

- The peripheries: everywhere, and it's an obvious choice because they are so much in line with our charism.

- Migrants, with very specific commitments in the Provinces (in Italy, Ethiopia, Ecuador, USA, Brazil...)

- Emergency situations - mobile teams - Interprovincial missions: mobility is alive and well in the Company, even if we would always wish for more! (in Mozambique, Spain, Latin America, Ukraine, the Philippines...)

- Modern forms of slavery. For this final point, just a comment. Modern forms of slavery are a real concern for all Daughters of Charity, and some Provinces have indeed taken initiatives, but we are far from having reached the goal expressed in the Inter-Assemblies Document, "*a concrete commitment in each Province that will contribute to combatting modern forms of slavery.*" Something to look at, perhaps.

c. Formation

Provinces are very much aware of the importance of formation, both initial and ongoing.

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Your formation plans are complete, dense, detailed. They are based on the Initial Formation Guide while accounting for your contexts, the situation of young women who come, the number of Seminary Sisters and the availability of external formation programs. The trend is toward “personalizing” formation and stressing the human dimension. This is good and necessary, but perhaps we should be more attentive to balance the human, spiritual and Vincentian dimensions. This is simply our reaction when reviewing your plans.

Creation of Interprovincial Seminaries: slowly, they are being established since in some Provinces, the number of Seminary Sisters is insufficient, and it is clear that young women need to interact with others, experience community life, enrich each other and get to know each other better. Moreover, as with Provincial reconfigurations, this also makes it possible to reduce the number of Sister formators and to dedicate more attention to these Sisters’ level of competence.

The final draft of the Guide *Preparation for vows*.

A trend seems to be developing, that of Interprovincial or continental formation sessions, especially with the youngest Sisters. It is certainly a door to open wider. The younger Sisters are asking for this.

Sessions at the Motherhouse continued. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the last session in March 2020 came to an abrupt end before the scheduled date, an unforgettable event for both the Sisters present and the Councillors responsible for the organization of that session!

A question remains unresolved for the General Council as to the need to update the Guide for Initial Formation. During this Assembly, it would be good for you to discuss this and offer your opinion.

d. Some significant events

In 2017, the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism was celebrated in all the Provinces, and a good number of Daughters of Charity participated in the Symposium in Rome.

In 2018, the Daughters of Charity returned to Fiji (Province of South India).

In 2019, a retreat of the Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia at the Motherhouse allowed several young Sisters from China to come to Paris.

The same year, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Papua-New Guinea (Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia).

In 2020, the website of the Company was updated with a new team. The Sisters are from six Provinces (Quasi-Province, Belgium-France-Switzerland, St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, Mozambique, Warsaw and Madrid-Santa Luisa). They did much work on video conferences, and almost all of them were able to gather in July 2021 to prepare for communications during the General Assembly.

In late 2020, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Senegal (Province of España-Sur).

In 2021, the Daughters of Charity returned to Uzbekistan (Province of Chelmno-Poznan).

Recently, the membership of the International Finance Commission was changed in part with the replacement of a Sister from the Province of Slovenia by a Sister from the Province of Central Africa.

II. NEVER-ENDING CONVERSIONS

In addition to the major primarily missionary challenges and other challenges that you have studied and that you will further explore, I am going to put into words, because I think you are already aware of them, what I call “never-ending conversions” that could further strengthen the vitality of the Company.

a. Faith and trust: foundations of our fidelity

Faith is no longer self-evident in a great number of countries, but neither is simple trust.

Concerning faith, the Inter-Assemblies Document brought out the need to revitalize “*the quality of spiritual life*” and to “*return constantly to the Gospel.*” The section on “*a close relationship with Christ*” also offers practical avenues. It is an ongoing issue, and we are so convinced of this that we risk hearing it without really drawing sufficient consequences for a conversion that never ends and that is nonetheless essential, both on a personal level and for the Company.

Let us shore up our faith life, which is all the more necessary since we live in a superficial society that can have a powerful influence on us. Our life is founded on the cornerstone of Christ, nothing else. This is a call to strengthen our interior life, to draw constantly from it in order to remain true disciples of Jesus and missionaries of the Gospel and to form younger Sisters in this aspect so that they might know the joy of the gift of self and the joy of fidelity.

Trust: On the whole, there is not necessarily a crisis of trust, but it has been put aside. People think they can live autonomously, without depending on others. The individual trumps everything and “trusting” is sometimes considered an obstacle to freedom. We also live in an era of doubt in which everything is quite often

questioned, especially when it comes from authority figures, politicians, scientists (for example, concerning global warming, the pandemic, vaccines...). People do not grant others their trust.

Suspicion becomes a reflex, which is added to a lack of nuance in discussions or dialogue, resulting in hardening ideologies and the temptation of individualistic self-centeredness and nationalistic or ethnic insularism.

All these tendencies can insidiously seep into our own life. This can come out in weaker relationships – for trust is the basis of encounter –, in discouragement, joylessness, even leaving one’s vocation. Constant distrust of everything and everyone can poison our personal life and our local communities. It seems to me that we need to identify these thorns and pull them out as quickly as possible. Trust, which is not the same as gullibility nor blindness, means believing in the other person, believing in what is possible. What witness can we offer of this?

Faith supports us, but it must be nourished. Trust gives us a joyful, generous and free confidence, but it must be built. It is up to us to find the means because these are the foundations of our fidelity.

b. The service of fraternity: a mission for today

You have studied the theme of “living together,” and we will continue our reflection during this Assembly. “Living together” has its two components, community and relationships outside it.

The Sisters 7-10 years of vocation placed a lot of emphasis on the importance they give to relationships within community. It seems that they are aware of being missionary disciples and express their need for community support and a place to renew themselves for the mission.

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For the same reason, you also highlighted repeatedly during your Provincial Assemblies that the local community should be this place of faith, fraternity and formation. You believe that, in addition to this dimension of support, community “living together” is also a witness, that of the Gospel.

Today more than ever, fraternity is what the presence of a community can offer the world. Experiencing its lack because of the pandemic has made evident what every human being needs: real, not virtual, relationships that are faithful and authentic.

The law can, or could, offer more equality, security, health and even education, but while fraternity could be decreed, it cannot be legislated, at least not completely. However, we all know now that it is a priority for a world experiencing indifference, fear, violence, disrespect of human dignity, etc. Otherwise, how could we explain the excitement surrounding *Fratelli tutti*?

How could we more fully be a presence that places humanity at the center and considers the quality of relationships essential? Relationships among us, relationships with our brothers and sisters. How can we make them simpler, more loving? How can we make sure that all the means that we must use do not become priorities that take up all our attention, in the name of efficiency?

Today, perhaps, we should be attentive to giving more importance to human aspects, to taking time, being fully present with our brothers and sisters, tending to our relationships, allowing ourselves to be moved like the Good Samaritan, putting ourselves in the other person’s shoes and working on our relationship with Christ because He is the source of all that we are and can be with our brothers and sisters.

Fraternity, considered as an attitude, a way of being, could take on a full-fledged missionary dimension, another way to be present to the world.

It involves envisioning a real conversion: changing and even evangelizing our relationship to time, technology, the community-mission balance and our way of relating to others.

c. The challenge of hope: sign of the resurrection

Life has changed, society changes. Against a background of a crisis, we constantly hear the call to generously strengthen our gift of self to God in the service of our brothers and sisters, an invitation that the Holy Spirit whispers to us. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise continue to inspire us and help us to keep newness and energy in our vocation. *“If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame”* (Saint Vincent, August 22, 1659, CCD XII, 250).

Zeal, creativity and courage exist in the Provinces. This reality is a source of hope for building the future together. Just read all those testimonies in the *Echoes* and on the website. It is the life of the Company.

The motor driving all this is faith, hope. Hope is a movement, a dynamic energy that pushes forward, that opens breaches towards what is possible. It is a call to take life as it is and decide to be involved in it. Hope does not remove obstacles, difficulties and suffering, but it makes it possible to approach reality as it is without keeping gates closed out of hand. It involves going from “It’s impossible; we have to be realistic” to “Why not?” Let’s give it a try!” The Assembly is a privileged time to build on what is already happening and to dare to open gates without fear because God trusts us and we trust Him.

Hope therefore has nothing to do with a willful and tense attitude but is rather receptivity to the intuitions that the Spirit traces out for the future, with the Lord, with our brothers and sisters living in poverty.

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In the person of Pope Francis, the Church insistently invites us to this. *Laudato si* (2015) and then *Fratelli tutti* (2020) are two documents that shook up the world, the people of God, the Company. We have assimilated the principle that “*everything is connected.*” We have heard that we need to “*hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (*Laudato si*, 49).

Our response today is Ephata! Let us open the gates of courage, simplicity and fraternity in order to continue to serve our brothers and sisters increasingly well and be with them. Our hope before the many empty tombs in our society – suffering, despair, solitude and so many others – is a sign that getting back up is possible. The world needs witnesses who open the gate of hope.

I conclude with a text by a volunteer from an association for people experiencing homelessness, written after an encounter, an unconditional encounter that opens up to hope: “*He came this morning, and I asked him, ‘Tea, coffee or broth?’ He looked at me, and I looked at him. His hand spoke of his dire poverty, and he took some bread. A little further down the street, I caught sight of him, and he recognized me. He looked at me, and I looked at him. We no longer had any words. Our elbows knocked. He was there in the street, still chilled to the bone. And he looked at me, and I looked at him. We communicated through this regard alone. In each of our hearts, warmth reigned. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!*”

Yes indeed, all our “Ephatas” open us to encounter, to everyday encounters. They are good news for us and for others because we belong to the same humanity straining toward hope. Let us believe in this Good News!

Sister Françoise PETIT
Daughter of Charity

Election of the Superioress General

Monday, November 8, 2021

On Sunday, November 7, the members of the Assembly prepared themselves in silence and prayer for the election of the new Superioress General.

On Monday, November 8, a concelebrated Eucharist presided by Father Tomaž Mavrič, Superior General, opened the day.

In his homily, commenting on the day's readings, Father Tomaž recalled the mission of the Superioress General in the Company, the Church and the world today.

The Assembly then proceeded to the election
of the Superioress General:

Sister Françoise PETIT
was elected for a six-year term.



Elections

Relying on the grace of God, the assistance of Fathers Tomaž Mavrič and Bernard Schoepfer and the collaboration of all the Sisters, Sister Françoise placed herself at the service of the Company.

The bells of the Motherhouse announced the news, and all the Sisters gathered in the garden around the Conference Hall to express to Sister Françoise their affection, their gratitude and the assurance of their prayerful support. The news quickly spread by email to all the Provinces throughout the world.

Election of the Superioress General Homily of Father Tomaž Mavrič

Monday, November 8, 2021

Readings: Wisdom 1:1-7; Psalm 139; Luke 17:1-6

My very dear Sisters, because, as we just heard in the first reading from the Book of Wisdom, “*the Spirit of the Lord fills the world, is all-embracing,*” you are gathered here today to implore the inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the election of the Superioress General. You know from your Constitutions that “*the General Assembly enjoys supreme authority to elect the Superioress General*” (cf. C. 87d). I have no doubt that you take this task very seriously. Not only did you prepare for the Assembly by making an eight-day retreat, but you prepared for today’s election by spending yesterday in prayer and discernment.

The first Rules of the Company indicated:

“The Superioress will have the entire direction of the Confraternity...; she will be like the soul who animates this body, will see that the present Regulations are observed, will receive into the Confraternity those whom she finds suitable, and will form them in all that concerns their duties, but especially in the practice of the Christian virtues proper to their salvation, teaching them more by her example than by her words” (cf. CCD XIIIb, 123; Document 145, “Regulations of the Daughters of Charity” (1645)).

Elections

“*She will be like the soul who animates the body*” — what a wonderful way of describing the Superioress General. You must, therefore, elect someone whom you feel is permeated with the love of God and the Vincentian spirit, and who can animate the entire body of the Company.

Your present Constitutions follow up on the first Rule by saying,

“The Superioress General, the successor of Saint Louise de Marillac, imbued with the teachings of the Founders, exercises her authority in such a way as to ‘manifest to all the Sisters the love the Lord has for them’ (cf. Perfectae caritatis, no. 14).

In an attitude of service, she sees that unity is maintained in fidelity to the spirit of the Company and in obedience to the Superior General and to the Church.

The Superioress General is responsible for the affairs of the Company. She promotes collaboration on the part of all the Sisters for the good of the Company. The Daughters of Charity obey her as the one chosen by God to guide them” (C. 66a).

In today’s Gospel, we heard the following words: “*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*” Jesus promises us that faith as tiny as a mustard seed offers us immense potential. Therefore, you can be assured that, by trusting in the Lord’s assistance, you will make the right decision in today’s election. You need simply to keep repeating the refrain to the psalm, “*Guide me, Lord, along the everlasting way.*”

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Elections of the General Councillors and the Assistant General

November 15 and 18, 2021

On Monday, November 15, 2021, the General Assembly elected General Councilors to assist Sister Françoise Petit in the governance of the Company:

Sister Alicia Margarita CORTES CAZARES - Mexican nationality, Province of Mexico

Sister Ana Amélia CUNHA - Brazilian nationality, Province of Fortaleza

Sister Hanna CYBULA, re-elected - Polish nationality, General Curia

Sister Theresa EKE - Nigerian nationality, Province of Nigeria

Sister Luisa FARRI - Italian nationality, General Curia

Sister Antonia GONZALEZ GRANADO - Spanish nationality, Province Madrid-Santa Luisa

Sister Julie KUBASAK - American nationality, Province of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Sister Anna WIWIEK SOEPRAPTIWI - Indonesian nationality, Province of Indonesia.



On November 18, 2021, the General Assembly elected **Sister Julie KUBASAK** Assistant General of the Company.

Election of the General Councillors

Homily of Father Tomaz Mavrič

November 15, 2021

Readings: 1 Maccabees 1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-64; Psalm 119; Luke 18:35-43

All of today's readings speak to us of faith. The first reading from the First Book of Maccabees begins with a rather sordid description of how some of the Jewish people were seduced by those who broke the law. They joined the Gentiles, began to follow their example and adapt to their customs. However, at the end of the reading, we hear that "*many in Israel were determined and resolved in their hearts not to eat anything unclean; they preferred to die rather than to be defiled with unclean food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.*" These faith-filled followers of God's covenant were willing to face martyrdom in defiance of the King and in fidelity to the law.

The psalm, an excerpt from Psalm 119, begins with both a statement of fidelity and a request for God's assistance. "*Though the snares of the wicked are twined about me, your law I have not forgotten. Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may keep your precepts.*" The psalmist assures God that he has been faithful to the law, but also recognizes that he relies on the Lord's strength to continue keeping it.

Lastly, the Gospel we just heard presents us with the familiar story of the blind man of Jericho. From his position of begging

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at the entrance to the city, he was aware when something unusual was taking place but had to ask what it was. When informed that the crowd passing by was accompanying Jesus, he began to proclaim his faith in the latter, crying out, “*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*” Although those around him tried to silence him, he called out all the louder, “*Son of David, have pity on me!*” By using the title, “*Son of David,*” he professed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. It was then that Jesus welcomed him, calling the blind beggar to Himself and asking what he wanted. On learning that he wanted to see, Jesus told him, “*Have sight; your faith has saved you.*” The blind man, although he could not see, recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah. Jesus, in turn, recognized the man’s faith and healed his physical blindness.

What do these three readings say to us about faith, and how do they apply to the election that will take place in this hall today? It seems to me that each of them seeks to confirm our own faith in Jesus and his law. As in the first reading, we too must be willing to stand up for our beliefs without fear despite the currents in today’s world that run contrary to those beliefs. Secondly, we must recognize our need for the Lord’s assistance in keeping his commandments and remaining faithful to him. Lastly, we must not hesitate to proclaim, whenever and however possible, in word and deed, that Jesus is Lord, our Redeemer and Savior.

Today, you will elect the members of the General Council, who will serve as Sister Françoise’s advisors and supporters. As your Constitutions say, “*They assist her in the government of the Company, in fidelity to the Constitutions and Statutes*” (C. 68a). I trust that you already have reflected in prayer about the Sisters who might best serve in this capacity. You probably will know the ones who have been proposed from your own language or continental group, but others you may not know. For those, you will rely on advice you received from those who do know them and especially on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To the extent possible, look for Sisters who are filled with the faith mentioned in today’s readings. The General Councillors must

be women of faith, deeply imbued with the Vincentian spirit, and not afraid to speak their mind. In that way, they truly will be of invaluable assistance to Sister Françoise. Your votes today are, in some sense, an act of faith. You believe that the Holy Spirit will guide you in making the right choices, and you are convinced that those elected will be most suitable for serving as General Councillors.

I ask the Lord Jesus to pour out His Spirit of wisdom and intelligence on each of you today as you fulfill this delicate task entrusted to you. May she who so loves the Company, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, along with your Holy Founders, Saint Louise and Saint Vincent, intercede for you throughout this day.

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Election of the Assistant General
Homily of Father Tomaz Mavrič

November 18, 2021

Readings: 1 Maccabees 2:15-29; Psalm 50; Luke 19:41-44

On Sundays throughout the liturgical year, there is often a very close correlation between the first reading and the Gospel. This usually does not happen on weekdays because both readings generally are continuations of one of the books of the Old Testament or one of the letters of the New Testament and one of the Gospels. However, obviously by chance, we can see a connection today between the two readings.

In the First Book of Maccabees, we are again presented, as we were last Monday, with a scene in which many of the Jews are yielding to the King's orders in defiance of the covenant with the Lord. However, thankfully, there are those who are committed to remaining faithful to the Lord. So it is that Mattathias, a leader among the Jews of the city, is filled with zeal to the extent that he attacks and kills one of his brethren who came to offer sacrifice according to the King's orders. He tears down the altar of sacrifice and then goes through the city, calling others to join him in remaining faithful to the Lord, after which he flees into the mountains with his sons. Previously, when encouraging him to follow the King's orders, the officers informed him that all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those who were left in Jerusalem had done so, but Mattathias resisted, saying, "*I and my sons and my kin will keep to the covenant of our fathers. God*

forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. We will not obey the words of the king nor depart from our religion in the slightest degree.”

In the Gospel, we find Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem, predicting that the days are coming when its enemies will encircle it and hem it in on all sides, killing its inhabitants, because the people did not recognize the time of their visitation. Here it is not a case of facing up to persecution, but rather a refusal to see in Jesus the promised Messiah and to accept His teachings.

On the one hand, Mattathias and his kin kept the Lord’s covenant for a very good reason. They refused to adore and sacrifice to idols as was clearly forbidden by the commandments given to Moses. The people of Jerusalem in Jesus’ time, on the other hand, although they were awaiting the Messiah, failed to be open enough to realize that He had come in the person of Jesus. They were close-minded for all the wrong reasons.

These readings remind us that we must be receptive to whatever God holds out for us through persons and events. Naturally, we must discern carefully, but be open nonetheless. God speaks to us in a variety of ways.

Today, you will elect the Assistant General. As your Constitutions state, *“The Assistant General, elected by the General Assembly from among the General Councillors, replaces the Superioress General during her absence. If the office of Superioress General becomes vacant, she replaces her until the next Ordinary General Assembly”* (C. 67a).

This year, probably more than in the past, you are aware of the importance of this office. Who would have suspected that, when Sister Kathleen Appler was elected Superioress General just over six years ago, her death would lead to Sister Françoise Petit, as Assistant General, taking up that role? Therefore, you must choose for Assistant General from among the General

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Councillors, the one whom you feel is most qualified to become Superioress General, should the case arise.

Once again, I implore the Holy Spirit to be your inspiration in this election. I have no doubt that Jesus will guide you so that you may, now and always, as this morning's psalm proclaimed, "*Offer to God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High.*"

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Video message from Pope Francis
addressed to the members of the General Assembly

November 20, 2021

My very dear Sisters, you are gathered in Assembly, in Paris, in your Motherhouse at the rue du Bac, to reflect on your mission in the light of the Gospel.

The theme that you have chosen is courageous: *Ephata*, and it leads you to consider the need to “break through the gates...,” untiringly “go towards...” and “encounter.”

This has characterized you since the beginning. A Company of women created to bring the love of Christ to those who are poor.

This has led you, throughout the entire world, not only to care for poor people in large institutions, hospitals, orphanages and schools, but also to visit them, to go to encounter them in the places where they live, to participate with them in pathways of human growth, in promotion of life and spiritual care.

I invite you to look at the beauty of your vocation. It is beautiful, isn't it? God has confided people who are poor, his preferred ones, to you! You are their mothers and their sisters, not their mothers-in-law... Mothers and sisters.

Mothers, because by your love, your attention to their needs, you manifest God's love to them, and you open once more for them the beauty of life.

In communication with the church

Sisters, because you support them in their condition, and you accompany them in rediscovering their dignity in the numerous pathways of life that you take with them.

In this way, you become more and more Daughters of Charity, which means, according to the thinking of your Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul, to be Daughters of God, the image of the greatest love that God himself has witnessed to us.

As Daughters of Charity, in this time marked by so many contradictions and so many forms of marginalization, you have an historic role as women who live a particular form of consecration, that of accompanying many of our brothers and sisters who are victims of violence, of discrimination, and to contribute to the growth of children, first victims of abuse by adults, to safeguard and defend life around you, by your smile, your care, your dedication to the service of the least.

I invite you to work so that the fundamental rights that assure dignity of life are guaranteed to all, to contribute to caring for our common home, to pass on the faith and Christian values to new generations, and to teach them to take care of one another. There is much to be done.

God calls you to respond with your generosity. God calls you to encounter, to listen, to go forth in history, to go forth together to share in the story of humanity.

You remain for the Church and for the world a great spiritual force. I pray that the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, the only Mother of your Company, will guard you in your vocation and give momentum to your mission.

May God bless you and may the Virgin protect you. And please, don't forget to pray for me! Thank you!

Pope Francis

Sharing the faith
and Christian values
with younger generations

November 2, 2021

In any discussion on how to deal with the youth of today, it is necessary to understand their context. I did some research. There have been many studies on this topic. For the first part of my conference, I will share some results of a survey conducted by the *Gravissimum Educationis Foundation* founded by Pope Francis in 2015 in support of integral education and fraternal coexistence. In preparation for the Synod of Bishops in 2018 on the theme “Young People, Faith and Vocation Discernment,” the Foundation did a survey involving 16,773 young people ranging from 16 to 29 years of age studying in 68 universities and 28 schools (Catholic and non-Catholic institutions) present in 5 continents. While the survey focused on the educational challenges faced by the youth today, the results depict their contexts in three main areas: I, WE and THEY. I will quote parts of the study that will be helpful for developing the topic assigned to me. Please bear with the long citations. I encourage you to patiently and prayerfully listen to the voices of the young people reflected in the survey results.

First Part

An “I” that is illusorily self-sufficient.

“...one of the mechanisms that many young people could be using to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the anguish of uncertainty is to concentrate on the present, which, in turn, would

Sharing the faith and Christian values with younger generations

encourage them to seek meaning in their immediate and close circles. Underlying the satisfaction that they express about their present life is the danger that they fail to venture outside these small groups and extend their horizons. Moreover, the findings clearly suggest that many young people develop an omnipotent I in compensation in order to affirm self-command, whereby they think they can do anything they set out to do and are confident that they can achieve this on their own. This could result in a feeling of self-sufficiency in which they do not count on others and even get to the point of distrusting others because they can prove an obstacle in their way, except of those who belong to their own circle. Maintaining this omnipotent and self-sufficient I in the context of uncertainty in which they live today requires constant reaffirmation and the ensuing recognition from others. As several studies on young people indicate, many seek this reaffirmation by exhibiting themselves and what they do in an almost compulsive way on social media in order to receive ‘likes’ constantly from their circle and anybody who accesses their profile.

“The three aspects (out of a total of 11) mentioned most frequently by the young people as regards projecting their sense of self are their interests, likes and personal values, and in third place, their own plans for the future. Few would present themselves to others by referring to what their parents do and the university they attend, and even fewer would display their religious and political beliefs. What takes precedence in these responses is the image of young people focused on themselves; a self-referential I, for whom value lives within them and in what they want and believe they are rather than in belonging to special social groups... To preserve this self-referential I, young people tend to limit the scope of their interests to their immediate and close circle, which offers them the freedom to develop their identity supported by the security of the familiar... The omnipotence and self-sufficiency of the I that young people present to the world is therefore illusionary to some extent, as it reduces the anxiety created by the uncertainty they experience and leads them to seek approval in small groups of peers whom they resemble.

“...what takes precedence in the projects of these young people is the desire to achieve stability and personal well-being, a well-being that can also lead them to prioritize what makes them feel good or happy above any other achievements. This suggests they are not willing to make major sacrifices to attain certain goals they might desire and adjust their goals instead to what is more easily attainable... The limited horizons in which the I of young people unfolds is also demonstrated through the low interest religion holds for them, occupying one of the bottom places on the list of aspects that they state form part of their identity. Surprisingly, this does not mean they do not identify with a specific religious faith... However, it does not follow that young people practice their religion... nor does their religion serve as a guide for the decisions they take in life... However, there is a practice to which young people do adhere regardless of their faith, namely private prayer. Again, this points to the subjective and individualistic tendency of young people’s sense of self.”

“WE”: Social withdrawal

“The author (Byung-Chul Han) adds, ‘the digital inhabitants of the Net do not assemble. They lack the interiority of assembly which would bring forth a ‘we.’ They form a gathering without assembly, a crowd without interiority...’ He also states that ‘subjects from the neo-liberal economy do not constitute a ‘we’ that is capable of collective action. The mounting egoization and atomization of society is making the space for collective action shrink. We have become isolated individuals; what characterizes today’s society is not the crowd but loneliness.

“...we live in a society that not only shows no concern about present generations, but also about future generations... We live in a society of individualism and lack of concern for others, to which we can add, as cause or effect, deep inequality... This is the society in which our young people live, and the data from the survey indicate regrettably that neither the family nor their educational centers are doing enough to promote the social

Sharing the faith and Christian values with younger generations

formation of young people to generate a change towards a more fraternal society. A society where the ‘we’ extends beyond the small family or peer group they live with on a daily basis... The family and educational centers, places where young people meet others, have become an experience where horizons are narrowed instead of broadened, forming a closed and impenetrable circle, making ‘we’ an experience principally concerned with self, ‘a mere prolongation of me.’”

“THEM”: Lack of concern about others

“We live in a society that is increasingly globalized, more interconnected, with more networks, yet paradoxically we care less and less about others. Although we are more connected, we do not communicate more... Underpinning this behavior of reducing circles of loyalty or social withdrawal lies the belief that we stand alone against the various social institutions that operate in one’s country: we cannot trust the political, judicial, health or social systems or the forces of law and order.

“The data from the survey analyzed here also indicate a high level of distrust of young people in others and a very low level of participation in social organizations, which could help to promote behaviors, attitudes and civic values that extend confidence in institutions and foster civic commitment... the data from the survey indicate that young people use social media as a way of bonding with others but seldom to create a meeting space with otherness, more as a space to showcase themselves... This opportunity to exhibit oneself has proved much more attractive thus far; much more effort has gone into building shelters than into knocking down walls and opening windows (Bauman).”

I invite you to pause and absorb what we have just heard. Can you imagine what is going on in the minds and hearts of the youth who participated in the survey? Try to imagine yourself as one of them. Remember that the worlds inhabited by the young people today are the worlds that we have also created for them.

Part Two

Do the contexts depicted above present problems for sharing the Christian faith and values with younger generations? We agree that they pose a tremendous challenge to us. But the same contexts provide fertile ground and unique opportunities for evangelizing the youth. Because they are searching for their identity, for a community and for people to trust, they are ripe for evangelization.

We remind ourselves at the outset that faith in Jesus as Lord is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). Our first task is to pray to the Holy Spirit to grant faith to the youth. We also pray that the Holy Spirit, who is the primary agent of evangelization, may transform us into discerning, creative, courageous and zealous partners in imparting the Christian faith.

To share the faith means primarily to share Jesus, the love of God in human flesh. To share Jesus is to share the goodness, mercy, justice and truth of God present in Jesus. To share Jesus is to allow His beauty to attract or to draw the youth to Him. To share Jesus is to offer the best friend that young people could ever have.

The “I” of Jesus is not based on an illusion. He finds His true self and mission in God whom He calls Father. *“Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me”* (John 14:11). In Jesus we learn that we cannot discover our true selves by isolation but only in relationship with God. God will not deprive us of identity. On the contrary, God’s love enables us to be our real selves.

Jesus’ “I” shines forth in a “we” relationship with God and neighbors. *“As the Father loves me, so I love you,”* Jesus says in John 15:9. Love of God leads to love of others. They are not mutually exclusive. He adds, *“I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father”* (John 15:15). In Jesus we have a friend, a compassionate

brother and a shepherd who lays down his life for us (John 10:15).

Jesus' "I" and "we" relationships encompass the many people considered "they" or "them" by society. His family is not limited to blood ties but is open to those who obey the will of God (Mark 3:31-35). He praises as examples of faith and values those considered outsiders or pagans like the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the generous and good Samaritan in His parable about becoming a neighbor (Luke 10:25-37), the repentant criminal crucified with Him (Luke 23:39-43) and the Roman centurion who confessed Him as the Son of God when He breathed His last (Matthew 27:54). He identified with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, ill, imprisoned (Matthew 25). "They" are all part of Jesus' "I" and "we."

The world considers Jesus as a scandal and foolishness. But in Jesus Crucified, we see the greatest love that offers an "I" as gift so that all the "them" may live as "we" in communion with God, sisters, brothers and creation. Jesus, Love Crucified, is "*the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Cor 1:24).

Part Three

At this point, I would like to share some mindsets, attitudes and approaches that might be useful in sharing the Christian faith and values with our beloved young people. They come from my experience in the Synod of Bishops on the Youth and my pastoral life. The list is obviously not exhaustive.

A. We asked the representatives of the youth in the Synod how they and their peers regard the clergy and religious men and women or members of Societies of Apostolic Life. The youth give them the respect due to them and their position in the Church. But most of the youth commented that Church leaders come across as angry, unapproachable, critical, legalistic and judgmental. They focus on rules, order and the faults of other people. The young

people expressed the desire to have Church leaders who are ready to listen, easy to approach, available and relationship-oriented. They long for guides in prayer, discernment and direction in life.

B. We also asked them about their experience of parishes, Catholic schools and institutions. Many of them described our institutions as “cold.” Rules and laws count more than relationships. Since many young people come from wounded families, they long to find in their parishes and other Church institutions an experience of family, welcome and acceptance. The poor, migrants, displaced persons and lonely young people turn to religious sects for the warmth of family. Unfortunately, some of them become victims of criminal groups that offer them a false sense of companionship. We should not forget that the milieu or atmosphere could be a bearer of faith or a block to the sharing of faith.

C. We inquired about their experience of the programs and methods for the passing on the faith to the young. Many of them commented that most of the programs are heavily intellectual, doctrinal and moralistic in content and approach. The language employed does not exist in the world of the youth. With this heavy-handed method, some young people feel frustrated; some even feel alienated because they do not see themselves good or worthy enough to receive the faith as presented to them. They conclude that they do not belong to the Church, for they are weak and sinful. The Synod delegates clamored for a more experiential approach to the transmission of faith that touches their hearts, their wounds and dreams, their experiences and hopes. Narratives, music, theater, the arts, sports and symbols should be employed more often. The opportunity to get involved in humanitarian service is an effective venue for passing on the faith. Pastoral care of families includes forming families to pass on the faith to the young. Pope Francis reminds us that youth ministry should be “popular” rather than elitist. It should be open to all types of young people, and its approaches should encompass the widest range of sensibilities.

Sharing the faith and Christian values with younger generations

D. We cannot prevent young people from using social media. The young generations were born into the world of internet and the web. Spiritual and pastoral leaders must learn the intricacies of social media, especially their effects on the young, so they could guide them. The use of social media for sharing the Christian faith and values must be promoted. If the young people inhabit that world, we should be present in that world and evangelize that world. And as the young people grow in the use of artificial intelligence, we should guide them in developing contextual intelligence, relational intelligence, cultural intelligence and inspired intelligence.

E. We cannot ignore the lack of trust that young people have towards institutions, including religious ones. Their distrust might hinder them from receiving what our institutions are imparting to them. The best way to heal distrust is to give a genuine witness to the faith and values we are professing and passing on to them. The sincere, loving, selfless and joyful testimony of individuals and institutions gives flesh and face to the Jesus whom we are proclaiming. The message of the young saints to the young generations of today should be rediscovered. Our parishes and institutions should strive to be like the early Christian communities in the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 2 and 4, in leading a coherent life of listening to God's word, prayer, sacraments and sharing with the poor so that more people, young people, would adhere to the faith.

Sharing the Christian faith and values with younger generations requires conversion on our part. I invite you to add to this list of proposals, based on your rich faith and missionary service. Like the young Jesus who patiently dealt with His young disciples, let us be compassionate, hopeful and joyful companions or co-journeyers of the youth.

Cardinal Luis Antonio TAGLE

Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

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“Ephata!”

“It is a call for the entire Company,
a call to open hearts and minds:
to open to God,
to our brothers and sisters around us
and to our Sisters in community...

From the beginning,
this call has been heard in the Company;
it is just the words that have changed...

Ephata concerns all the dimensions of our life:
first and foremost, welcoming the One
who sends us as He sent His disciples.

Then, there are interior Ephatas,
Ephatas in perspective, in relationships,

geographic Ephatas,

Ephatas that impel us to conversion,

missionary Ephatas...”

Sister Françoise PETIT
Superioress General

