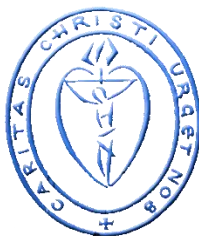


Preparation for vows

a commitment...

a challenge...

a journey to undertake!



Guide

Paris, August 15, 2021

Dear Sisters,

On this feast of the Assumption, it is my joy to present you with this Guide ***“Preparation for vows,”*** approved by the General Council during its April 28, 2021, meeting. It is the fruit of lengthy labors by several successive committees, whom I sincerely thank.

Indeed, during Assemblies and various meetings of Visitatrixes, formators or others, you expressed the desire that the *Instructions on the Vows*, published in 1989, be updated in its content and simplified in its form. This solid document allowed several generations of Daughters of Charity to deepen their reflection on the vows, and it remains a reference.

Updating this text was necessary because, on the one hand, the modified Constitutions were promulgated in 2004 and, on the other hand, the context, the situation of young women entering the Company, the needs of formation, the way of approaching different aspects, etc. have changed considerably.

This Guide is intended for all Daughters of Charity but first and foremost for Sisters preparing to make vows for the first time and those under 10 years of vocation. It is at the disposal of formators and local communities accompanying Sisters of this age in vocation.

During the period of initial formation, a Daughter of Charity acquires the foundations that allow her to give herself totally to God by the vows of service of those who are poor, chastity, poverty and obedience as passed on to us from Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. This Guide is an instrument at the service of this human, Christian and vocational growth. Preparation for vows really is ***a commitment... a challenge... a journey to undertake!***

A commitment: *“In Scripture, when choosing someone for a special vocation, God promises to point out the way. Gradually, by the light of the Spirit, the path becomes clear”* (C. 49). The Lord takes the initiative and gives His grace. In faith, each Daughter of Charity recognizes that God will be present all along the path as He has promised.

The Company commits as well by offering specific formation for the different stages so that each Daughter of Charity can develop all the talents that the Lord has given her in order to become more and more a disciple of Christ. *“The Company gives great importance to both initial and ongoing formation”* (C. 49).

Finally, it is a commitment that each Daughter of Charity makes personally by actively collaborating in her own formation, welcoming in faith and trust what is passed on to her. *“Formation is, before all else, the work of God living and acting in the heart of the person who is called. Next, it is the work of the Sister herself, prompted by her desire for increasing fidelity to her vocation”* (C. 51).

A challenge: Preparation for vows and deeper assimilation of the Gospel and the charism naturally require effort, perseverance and change but above all an attitude of listening to the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, events, people encountered and community discussions.

This openness of heart is given to those who ask it of God and welcome the prospect of the gift of self in accordance with the Gospel and with the Constitutions and Statutes.

This challenge also includes the desire to enter, step by step, into the Company and to become a full participant. *“Formation allows the woman to live her vocation as a progressive modeling of herself on Christ, with renewed fidelity to the Spirit and to the aim of the Company”* (C. 49).

A journey to undertake: Preparation for making vows for the first time is the beginning of a life-long journey. The gift of self through vows is not accomplished once and for all. On the contrary, it is a continual movement made up of discoveries, conversions, successes and failures, joys and sorrows.

Commitment... challenge... journey to undertake... This life process has a particular intensity during the first years of vocation. Therefore, the Company has a keen interest in initial formation and the accompaniment of those who are ready to take this path and offers them the necessary tools, including this new document.

The first six chapters directly concern the vows. Each of them should be read, studied, reflected upon, discussed... The questions and the references indicated at the end of the chapter help to deepen the reflection. They are simply suggestions that aim to inspire the desire to go further, individually and with others. The formators and the Sisters themselves will determine the order and manner to use this Guide to move forward in faith and joy.

Mary accompanies us. The final chapter is entirely dedicated to her because she is the *“model and teacher of the spiritual life.”* She is there for all those who have recourse to her. Let us trust her and walk in her footsteps; they lead us to her Son, He whom we wish to follow.

It is indeed our entire life that is directed towards and for Christ through the four vows of service of those who are poor, chastity, poverty and obedience: *“Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity.”*

Have a good journey!

Sister Françoise Petit
Daughter of Charity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	3
Chapter 1 – Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity	13
A. Spiritual identity of the Daughters of Charity	14
1. In fidelity to their Baptism	15
2. The Daughters of Charity give themselves entirely	16
3. In community	16
4. In the service of Christ in those who are poor	17
5. In an evangelical spirit	18
B. Identity of the Company of the Daughters of Charity in the Church	19
1. The Company recognized by the Church	19
2. The Company is of pontifical right and is exempt	20
3. The Company, recognized as a Society of Apostolic Life	20
4. The internationality of the Company and the universality of the charism	23
C. For an ever-renewed fidelity	24
1. Root themselves ever more firmly in Jesus Christ	24
2. Discern the cries of those who are poor in community	24
3. Keep the charism alive with conviction	25
4. Be faithful to the Constitutions	25
5. Live the sense of belonging to the Company	25
6. Serve with others	26
To go further	28
To go deeper	29

Chapter 2 – The vows of the Daughters of Charity	31
A. Vows in the Christian life	31
B. The evangelical counsels	31
C. The vows of the Daughters of Charity	32
1. “Non-religious” vows	32
2. Annual and always renewable	33
3. A specific vow	34
4. According to the Constitutions and Statutes	34
5. Rooted in the mystery of the Church	35
D. Vows for the first time	35
1. At four years of vocation	36
2. Three months before the date envisaged	36
3. The celebration of vows	36
E. Renovation of vows	36
1. Vows: a deepening of vocation	37
2. The request for annual renewal of vows	37
3. Exceptional cases	38
F. Vows: rights and obligations	39
To go further	40
To go deeper	41
Chapter 3 – The service of Christ in those who are poor	43
A. Following Christ	43
1. Christ, source and model of all charity	43
2. Live in a state of charity	45

B. The vow of service of those who are poor	48
1. Serve every poor person	49
2. Serve everywhere	51
C. For an ever-renewed fidelity	53
1. Listening	53
2. Discernment	54
3. Formation	55
4. The call to ecological conversion	56
To go further	58
To go deeper	59
Chapter 4 – Chastity	61
A. Following Christ	62
1. Christ, model of chastity	62
2. Chastity, a response to a gift from God	63
B. The vow of chastity	65
1. The virtue of chastity	65
2. The vow of chastity in celibacy	66
3. Chastity at the service of charity	67
C. For an ever-renewed fidelity	67
1. An inner life to cultivate	68
2. An emotional balance, a balanced life	68
3. Openness to accompaniment and discernment	71
To go further	73
To go deeper	74

Chapter 5 – Poverty	77
A. Following Christ	77
1. Poverty after the example of the Son of God	77
2. Evangelical poverty	78
B. The vow of poverty	79
1. The vow	79
2. Choose poverty in order to share better	81
C. For an ever-renewed fidelity	84
1. The desire to live evangelical poverty	85
2. A life simplified by the Gospel	85
3. Personal and community reviews	86
To go further	87
To go deeper	88
Chapter 6 – Obedience	91
A. Following Christ	92
1. Jesus’ obedience	92
2. Taking on Christ’s obedience	93
B. The vow of obedience	94
1. The vow	94
2. A life of obedience in order to serve together	95
C. For an ever-renewed fidelity	98
1. Form oneself continually	99
2. Nourish one’s interior life	99
3. Live the Paschal Mystery	100
4. Give of oneself with more and more joy	100

To go further	102
To go deeper	103
Chapter 7 – Under the protection of Mary	105
A. Mary, model and teacher of the spiritual life	106
1. Mary, open to the Spirit	107
2. Mary, totally given	107
3. Mary, model of maternal love	108
B. Mary, Servant	109
1. Mary, available for God’s plan	109
2. Mary, model of the poor in spirit	110
3. Mary, Mother of Mercy	110
C. Mary, model of fidelity	111
Let us pray to Mary	113

Chapter 1 – Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity

Every Christian is called to follow Christ and can say with Saint Paul: *“To me life is Christ”* (Phil 1:21). It is a commitment, a challenge, a journey to undertake.

The person of Christ is the reference point common to all Founders in the Church. He is the rock on which their vocation is built. Each one discovered certain characteristics of Christ in the Gospel that he or she chose to live more particularly. These specific traits would give meaning to their entire life and work.

Since the Second Vatican Council, this is what the Church has called the charism of the Founders.

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise recognized Christ in the person of the poor (Cf. Mt 25:35-40). Therefore, they committed to follow Him by contemplating Him and serving Him in the most suffering members of humanity in order to continue the mission of Christ the Servant (Cf. Jn 13:1-11).

The Daughters of Charity follow Christ in the way of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. The Constitutions express it in this way:

*“Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity. They endeavor to follow Him as Scripture reveals Him to them and as their Founders perceived Him: **Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan, Evangelizer of those who are poor**” (C. 8a).*

- *Christ, Adorer of the Father:* This way of seeing Christ leads the Daughters of Charity to consider God as the only absolute in their life. The virtue of simplicity is a consequence of this faith conviction. *“God is very simple, or, rather, He’s simplicity personified”* (Saint Vincent, CCD XI, 40).
- *Christ, Servant of the Father’s Loving Plan:* Because Christ was the Servant, the Daughters of Charity are called to be servants and to

serve like servants. This aspect of Christ is associated with the virtue of humility. *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves”* (Mt 11:29).

- *Christ, Evangelizer of those who are poor*: The Good News is addressed especially to the poor and humble. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise understood this well, and the Daughters of Charity continue the mission of Christ who evangelized all those who are poor. This dimension of evangelization of people who are poor is inseparable from the virtue of charity. *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father”* (Mt 25:34).

Such is the charism of the Founders: it is the way that they felt called by Jesus Christ to participate in His life and mission.

A. Spiritual identity of the Daughters of Charity

“The Daughters of Charity, in fidelity to their Baptism and in response to a divine call, give themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ in their brothers and sisters who are poor, in an evangelical spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity” (C. 7a).

This passage from the Constitutions defines the spiritual identity of the Daughters of Charity.

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise experienced events on which they looked back in the light of the Gospel. These spiritual experiences gradually led them to define the identity of the Daughters of Charity. The three conferences from February 1653 clearly explain it. Saint Vincent spoke then about the particular spirit of the Company.

“When God created the Company of the Daughters of Charity, He gave it a spirit of its own. It’s the spirit that animates the body. It’s

important for Daughters of Charity to know in what this spirit consists” (February 2, 1653, CCD IX, 457).

1. In fidelity to their Baptism

“Children of God by Baptism and living members of the Body of Christ, the Daughters of Charity go to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit” (C. 17a).

This line from the Constitutions echoes Saint Paul’s affirmation: *“For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13).*

The texts of the Second Vatican Council recall this: there is one single consecration, that of baptism. Through this sacrament, *“we are formed in the likeness of Christ” (Lumen gentium, 7).*

Thus, like all baptized Christians, the Daughters of Charity aspire to *“the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (Lumen gentium, 40).* This entails placing Christ at the center of their life and living their vocation as children of God.

For that reason, the Daughters of Charity are invited to allow the Holy Spirit to guide them, to be *“good Christian women,”* in the words of Saint Vincent (October 18, 1655, CCD X, 102), to be servants of those who are poor according to the example of Jesus the Servant.

Following Christ under the influence of the Spirit is the cornerstone of the spirituality of the Daughters of Charity.

“Since the sacrament of Baptism is a spiritual birth, it follows that He, in whose name we are baptized, is our Father and that, as His children, we must resemble Him. Consequently, we who are baptized in Jesus Christ are baptized in His death” (Saint Louise, A. 23, Spiritual Writings, p. 786).

2. The Daughters of Charity give themselves entirely

“To follow Him and carry on His mission, the Daughters of Charity choose to live totally and radically the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, making them available for the purpose of their Company: the service of Christ in persons who are poor” (C. 8b).

The total and radical gift of self to God is a fundamental element of the Daughters of Charity’s identity.

According to the spirit of the Founders, the Daughters of Charity are totally given to God for, in and through the service of persons who are poor:

- for the service of persons who are poor: this is the purpose that directs and unifies their entire life;
- in the service of persons who are poor: it is where, together, they strive for the perfection of charity, the following of Christ;
- through the service of persons who are poor: it is the school where their servant identity is formed because those who are poor are their “lords and masters” who teach them and constantly take them back to Jesus Christ.

3. In community

“The Founders considered community life one of the essential supports of the vocation of the Daughters of Charity... They bear joyful witness to Jesus Christ and continually strengthen one another with a view to mission” (C. 9).

Chronologically, mission preceded community, but quickly, as early as 1633, the Founders recognized community life as a support for mission and vocation.

Community life and mission have become two inseparable dimensions. Mission shapes and gives energy to community life,

which is all the more formative for mission when each Sister feels responsible for participating in building it.

“What a marvel! God chooses and brings together young women from various places and provinces to unite them and join them together with the bond of His charity in order to show people in so many places the love He has for them and the care His Providence takes of them, to assist them in their needs, and to have God recognized in this way” (Saint Vincent, September 1659, CCD X, 534).

The foundation of this community life is theological and spiritual. For Saint Louise, this life together should reflect the relationship within the Trinity. *“Following the example of the Blessed Trinity, we must have but one heart and act with one mind as do the three divine Persons”* (Saint Louise, A. 85, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 771).

Christ, who unites the members of the community, gives it its reason for existing, which is to serve together and in a lasting way, following His example. It is an evangelical fraternity.

“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

Community is a faith reality that makes it possible to bear witness to the Gospel. In this sense, it is possible to say that the community, in and of itself, is mission.

4. In the service of Christ in those who are poor

“Through faith they see Christ in those who are poor, and they see those who are poor in Christ. They serve Him in His suffering members ‘with compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect, and devotion’” (C. 10b).

The service of Christ in those who are poor is the expression of the total gift of self to God and structures to the entire life of the Daughters of Charity.

“In serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ... You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here” (Saint Vincent, February 13, 1646, CCD IX, 199).

In a spirit of availability and generosity, the Daughters of Charity are always ready to go towards those who are most poor and thus to pass from affective love to effective love.

“Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love” (Saint Vincent, February 9, 1653, CCD IX, 466).

5. In an evangelical spirit

“The evangelical virtues of humility, simplicity, and charity are the path along which the Daughters of Charity allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit” (C. 13).

Contemplating Christ, the Founders discovered the three virtues of humility, simplicity and charity. These virtues are the characteristics of a servant following the example of Christ the Servant.

They are the three attitudes that best translate the spirit of the Company. This spirit gives the Company an original energy, a common spirit, a family likeness.

“If humility, simplicity and charity, which produce support, are well established among you, your little Company will be made up of as many saints as there are persons” (Saint Louise, L. 505, January 8, 1657, Spiritual Writings, p. 532).

However, the prevailing culture does not favor the practice of these virtues. Sometimes they even go against current thinking that excessively values appearance, personal development, the quest for success, etc.

And yet, the virtues are favorable ground for reaching out to those who are most poor, living authentic relationships in community and growing in a personal relationship with the Lord.

Only gradual rootedness in Christ, listening to the Holy Spirit, regular reading of the Word of God and the exploration and practice of these virtues will lead a Daughter of Charity to love them and wish to live them more and more deeply.

B. Identity of the Company of the Daughters of Charity in the Church

The chapter of the Constitutions, *“The Company in the Church,”* specifies the juridical identity of the Company.

1. The Company recognized by the Church

“The Daughters of Charity form a Company recognized by the Church under the name of Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Servants of the Poor. The Company participates in the Church’s universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of its Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac” (C. 1a).

“It’s God who has given this name to the Company” (Saint Vincent, March 4, 1658, CCD X, 379).

Saint Vincent exhorted the Sisters to live in a way compatible with their name: **Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor** (Cf. C. 1a). This name indicates both the mission and the way of life that the Daughters of Charity are called to assume.

“Have great respect for this holy name, Sisters, and act in such a way as always to show that you’re worthy of bearing it” (Saint Vincent, January 6, 1642, CCD IX, 44).

By approving the Company, the Church recognizes that it is a gift of God made to the Church for the world, an instrument that participates in its universal mission of salvation, according to the charism of its Founders.

2. The Company is of pontifical right and is exempt

“On January 18, 1655, the Company was approved by Cardinal de Retz, Archbishop of Paris, and on June 8, 1668, it received pontifical approval from Pope Clement IX” (Constitutions, page 19).

The Company is of pontifical right because it has been approved by the Holy See.

The Company enjoys an exemption that gives it greater autonomy in its internal life and government. This exemption allows for greater flexibility and availability to respond according to the charism to the calls of the Church and of persons who are poor.

This autonomy is to be lived out in obedience to the local Ordinary for religious worship and apostolic activity while respecting the spiritual and juridical identity of the Company.

“The whole patrimony of an institute must be faithfully preserved by all. This patrimony is comprised of the intentions of the founders, of all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions” (Code of Canon Law (CIC) c. 578).

3. The Company, recognized as a Society of Apostolic Life

“From the very beginning, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, in response to the needs of their time, sent Daughters of Charity to the relief of those who were poor. In this way, they were able to maintain the necessary mobility and availability and to live among those whom they were serving” (C. 12a).

In the time of the Founders, Societies of Apostolic Life did not exist, and it is indeed Saint Vincent and Saint Louise who introduced into the Church this specific way of following Christ, specially expressed in the Charter (Cf. C. 12a).

The Charter describes how secularity is understood in the Company. Secularity is another characteristic of the identity of the Company. *“The Daughters of Charity are not nuns, but Sisters who come and go like seculars”* (Saint Vincent, February 7, 1660, CCD VIII, 277).

Secularity takes concrete form in the way of living mission in the world, in a real proximity with persons who are poor. It requires mobility and availability to respond to the sufferings of every poor person, everywhere.

Today: *“The Company of the Daughters of Charity is a Society of Apostolic Life in community. By a bond defined by the Constitutions, its members take upon themselves to live the evangelical counsels”* (C. 1b).

The 1983 Code of Canon Law (CIC) defines Societies of Apostolic Life in the following way: *“Societies of apostolic life resemble institutes of consecrated life. Their members, **without taking religious vows**, pursue the **apostolic purpose proper** to each society. **Living a fraternal life in common** in their own special manner, they strive for the **perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions**”* (CIC c. 731, 1).

“Among these societies are some in which the members, through a bond defined in the constitutions, undertake to live the evangelical counsels” (CIC c. 731, 2).

All these elements can be applied to the Company.

- Without taking religious vows

“These vows are ‘non-religious’, annual, and always renewable” (C. 28a).

Non-religious vows: In the Company, *“someone is not a Daughter of Charity because she makes vows, but she makes vows because she is*

a Daughter of Charity and to always be so more perfectly” (Fr. Michel Lloret, CM).

Annual and always renewable vows: Annual renewal allows for a progressive, dynamic and ever-relevant deepening of the total gift of self to God in the Company (Cf. p. 32-34 of this Guide).

- Apostolic purpose

“The Daughters of Charity, given to God for the service of Christ in persons who are poor, find in this aim their unity of life” (C. 16a).

The Company was born in response to the call of God to place itself at the service of persons who are poor. The aim of the Company is what the Church calls its proper apostolic purpose.

This means that all the dimensions of the life of a Daughter of Charity are oriented towards and for service. Service gives meaning to community life just as the relationship with God constantly gives new energy to this way of giving oneself to God: to serve those who are poor, to continue the mission of Jesus Christ.

“To be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth. And what did He do mainly? ... He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation. How fortunate you are, Sisters, to be called to a state of life so pleasing to God!” (Saint Vincent, July 5, 1640, CCD IX, 14)

- Living a fraternal life in common

“Called and assembled by God, the Daughters of Charity live a community life the better to fulfill their specific mission of service” (C. 32a).

Community life is a constitutive element of Societies of Apostolic Life. The Company considers “living together” formative and strengthening for mission and spiritual life.

- Strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the Constitutions

The Constitutions are “*a spiritual way, an apostolic and missionary way, a communal way*” (Introductory letter to the Constitutions, page 8).

For Saint Vincent, *the Rules* (the Constitutions) explain God’s plan for the Company. They are rooted in the Gospel. “*They help you to achieve what God asks of you*” (August 8, 1655, CCD X, 79). They are “*a route God has traced out*” (May 30, 1647, CCD IX, 249). They “*contain the means of helping you make your way to Christian perfection*” (May 30, 1647, CCD IX, 251).

Striving for the perfection of charity results in a gradual discovery of the joy of the gift of self and makes acceptance of personal limitations possible. The Constitutions “*propose... a way of loving*” (Introductory letter to the Constitutions, page 7). It is a life-long journey.

- In which the members undertake to live the evangelical counsels

According to the Constitutions, the Company is a Society of Apostolic Life in community whose members take upon themselves to live the evangelical counsels through a bond defined by the Constitutions. By the vows, they ratify their total gift of self to God (Cf. C. 28a).

4. The internationality of the Company and the universality of the charism

“The Company is international. The charism is incarnated and made visible in various cultures and countries throughout the world” (C. 6).

The Company is international because it is present in many countries and its members are of different nationalities. This nature makes it

necessary for each Daughter of Charity to develop her availability, open-mindedness to the entire Company, respect of differences and her practice of intercultural dialogue. It is a call to unity in diversity.

The charism is universal because it is a gift that the Spirit makes to the Church. It goes beyond time and space. It is based on the Gospel and expressed by charity. It is a call to communion in Christ.

C. For an ever-renewed fidelity

“The call heard by the first Sisters is ever the same. Throughout the world it continues to raise up and assemble Daughters of Charity, who strive to rediscover at the source the inspiration and intuitions of their Founders, so that they may respond with ever-renewed fidelity and availability to the needs of their time” (Constitutions, pages 19-20).

In order to remain faithful to their identity today, the Daughters of Charity strive to:

1. Root themselves ever more firmly in Jesus Christ

The necessity of rootedness in Jesus Christ is more fundamental than ever for serving Christ in the person of the poor over time. From a faith perspective, every encounter with persons who are poor is an encounter with Christ. Prayer helps to unify life progressively, to cultivate the interior life and to build communities of faith and mission founded on the Gospel.

2. Discern the cries of those who are poor in community

From the beginning, the Company has been attentive to the signs of the times and to new forms of poverty. It is thus faithful to the inventiveness and boldness of its Founders. Today, the Daughters of Charity have the responsibility for pursuing this missionary momentum with a constant interest in collaborating for justice and effective charity. Dialogue and a common seeking in everyday life,

reviews of life and Assemblies are means that the Company offers to favor discernment.

3. Keep the charism alive with conviction

The Company has a long history composed of the life of thousands of Daughters of Charity who have followed the path traced out by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Initial and ongoing formation is essential in order to persevere in fidelity to the charism of the Founders.

Over the centuries, many groups were inspired by Vincentian spirituality. They make up the Vincentian Family. In a spirit of fraternity, the Daughters of Charity share with them the values taught by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, cooperate in shared apostolic projects and together assure the passing on of the charism in words and above all by their Gospel witness.

4. Be faithful to the Constitutions

Saint Vincent compared the “*Rules*” (Constitutions) to wings. *“As birds have wings with which to fly and which are no incumbrance to them, so Daughters of Charity have their Rules, which serve them as wings to fly to God. Far from weighing them down, when their Rules are carefully observed, they enable them to fly”* (August 8, 1655, CCD X, 79).

The Constitutions help the Company to remain faithful to its original spirit and maintain unity among the Daughters of Charity and communion in the Company.

In order to remain faithful to the Constitutions and make them one’s own in a spirit of faith, it is essential to know them well and to study them.

5. Live the sense of belonging to the Company

“A postulant becomes a member of the Company at the time of her admission to the Seminary” (C. 5a).

“The local community is the primary place of belonging for the Daughters of Charity” (C. 34).

Living the sense of belonging entails responding to the call to an openness of heart beyond one’s country, Province and continent, to communion among the Sisters, to a greater availability and to an effective mobility beyond all sorts of borders.

The dimension of communion makes the witness of the entire Company credible.

The fact that Sisters accept to set off in order to serve in any location strengthens the international nature of the Company. Being available is a sign of belonging.

The sense of belonging grows to the extent that it is nourished by an interest in the life of the Company and by the desire to participate fully in it.

6. Serve with others

In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, Mother Guillemin, in 1964, had the intuition of putting forward necessary changes to encourage the Company to be more fully in the world. She invited consecrated people to transition from:

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

Even if the situation has changed and collaboration has become more commonplace, these “transitions” remain reference points for the Company. It is a state of mind to maintain (Cf. S. 9).

The Daughters of Charity are led to share the charism with others, join in the pastoral work of the Church, serve with the Vincentian Family and other associations, network, participate in projects and form themselves professionally.

Networking is one of many tools. It makes it possible to act more efficiently without, nonetheless, losing sight of the importance of quality relationships.

To go further

1. *“Who do you say that I am?”* How can I keep alive and develop my personal relationship with Christ?
2. The charism is a gift from God to live, pass on and share. How?
3. Reread the Charter (C. 12a) in parallel with the definition of Societies of Apostolic Life and our spiritual identity.
4. *“As long as charity, humility, and simplicity exist among you, one may say, ‘The Company of Charity is still alive’”* (Saint Vincent, February 9, 1653, CCD IX, 467).
Which commitments should be taken to make these virtues evident today through our life style?
5. The evangelical project of the Daughters of Charity is expressed in the Constitutions. They contain the “spiritual patrimony” of the Company. How can one review one’s life in the light of the Constitutions?
6. How can the “transitions” of Mother Guillemin (see page 26) be understood and lived out today?

To go deeper

- **Code of Canon Law (CIC)**

Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ (c. 208).

Societies of Apostolic Life: c. 731 - c. 746

- **Text from the Second Vatican Council**

From the very beginning of the Church, men and women have set about following Christ with greater freedom and imitating Him more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels, each in his own way leading a life dedicated to God (*Perfectae caritatis*, 1).

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)**

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is "the perfect man," who invites us to become his disciples and follow him (520).

- **Apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata***

The specific identity of this form of life [Societies of Apostolic Life] is to be preserved and promoted; in recent centuries it has produced many fruits of holiness and of the apostolate, especially in the field of charity and in the spread of the Gospel in the Missions (11).

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts of the Founders: pages 162-167

Chapter 2 – The vows of the Daughters of Charity

A. Vows in the Christian life

At certain moments in life, all Christians could be led to make a commitment by a promise made to God. Some sacraments require this: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders. The promise can also be for an act, a prayer, a pilgrimage, etc.

What is a vow in the Church? A vow is *“a deliberate and free promise made to God, concerning some good which is possible and better [and] must be fulfilled by the virtue of religion”* (Cf. CIC c. 1191).

- *A promise*: a commitment made to do or not to do something.
- *deliberate and free*: made in all freedom, before God, after discernment, in full awareness of its consequences.
- *made to God*: it is a way of glorifying God and recognizing Him as the one Lord.
- *some good which is possible and better*: the good promised is reasonably possible to fulfill and better because it helps to advance in holiness.

Through a vow, baptized Christians give God His due honor while manifesting to Him their dependence as creatures. A vow thus becomes prayer, praise, an act of worship.

Vows express a commitment while giving spiritual and missionary momentum.

B. The evangelical counsels

“In order to serve Christ in persons who are poor, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves to live their baptismal consecration through the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty,

and obedience, which receive from this service their specific character” (C. 27).

All baptized Christians are called to live the evangelical counsels. They are especially described in the Beatitudes, a life program for all Christians.

The Church recognizes the practice of the evangelical counsels as a means to be closer to what Jesus Himself lived: love, closeness to those who are poor, justice, reconciliation, total gift of self and obedience to the Father.

In the history of the Church, the specific evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience have been considered a path of total gift, a particular expression of Christian discipleship.

In vowing to live them, the Daughters of Charity commit to model themselves on the chaste, poor and obedient Jesus Christ.

C. The vows of the Daughters of Charity

“The Daughters of Charity make four vows: service of those who are poor, chastity, poverty, and obedience... These vows are ‘non-religious’, annual, and always renewable, according to the Constitutions and Statutes. The Church recognizes them as they are understood in the Company, in fidelity to its Founders” (C. 28a).

The vows as they are lived in the Company and recognized by the Church are:

1. “Non-religious” vows

The expression “non-religious” vows means first of all that the vows of the Daughters of Charity are different from those of nuns. In religious life, Sisters profess the evangelical counsels by public vows and, by that act, become nuns. It is the heart of their consecration.

The Daughters of Charity express their total gift of self to God by continuing the mission of Christ the Servant on the path of charity: *“making no other profession [than]... the offering they make to God of all that they are and of their service in the person of the poor”* (Saint Vincent, August 24, 1659, CCD X, 530). The heart of their consecration is thus the service of Christ in the person of the poor.

This is why a postulant becomes a Daughter of Charity at her entrance to the Seminary. Nonetheless, vows are necessary to remain in the Company.

The expression “profess vows” is not used with the vows of the Daughters of Charity. The Constitutions use the verbs: choose, take upon themselves, practice, ratify, but never “profess” because profess implies to proclaim publicly.

2. Annual and always renewable

“The annual renewal of vows permits the Sisters to strengthen their determination to be faithful to their vocation, while it assures the stability of their service of Christ in the Company” (C. 28d).

This expression, “annual and renewable,” means that the vows are renewed every year.

This principle in no way diminishes their importance nor their radicality. To the extent that they are lived in truth, they really are a life choice. In this, they are prophetic signs.

“It would be better not to make them at all than to have the intention of obtaining a dispensation whenever you wished” (Saint Vincent, July 19, 1640, CCD IX, 22).

The annual Renovation is the opportunity to say “yes” once again while in no way interrupting the commitment over time. Indeed, it is a continual process of conversion and perseverance that allows each

Sister to review her life, to re-energize herself and to recommit in fidelity. It is a means for human, spiritual and vocational growth.

3. A specific vow

“They commit themselves by a specific vow to serve... those who are poor” (C. 24a).

This is the most defining trait of the Company and a fundamental aspect of the vows of the Daughters of Charity since the purpose of the Company corresponds to this specific vow: the service of Christ in those who are poor.

The vows of chastity, poverty and obedience should be understood and lived in reference to service; in other words, the vow of service of those who are poor leaves its mark on each of the other three vows.

The vow of chastity: *“for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor” (C. 29a).*

The vow of poverty: *“concerned with sharing the lot of those who are poor, they strive each day to work toward their own conversion to evangelical poverty” (C. 30b).*

The vow of obedience commits *“... to a common seeking and humble, loyal acceptance of God’s will, made known to the Company in many ways: through the cries of those who are poor, the calls of the Church, the signs of the times, and the Constitutions and Statutes” (C. 31b).*

4. According to the Constitutions and Statutes

The Church has approved the Constitutions and Statutes and recognizes the vows of the Daughters of Charity *“as they are understood in the Company, in fidelity to its Founders” (C. 28a).*

The commitment to live the vows in accordance with the Constitutions and Statutes is included in the two vow formulas: *“... in*

accordance with our Constitutions and Statutes”; “... and in accord with its Constitutions and Statutes, I vow for one year...” (C. 28b).

Everything concerning the vows in the Company requires the authorization of the Superior General (Cf. C. 28 and C. 64c).

The Constitutions and Statutes are the Daughters of Charity’s primary reference document for understanding the way of living the vows in the Company as intended by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

5. Rooted in the mystery of the Church

The vows are *“a source of strength and a covenant deeply rooted in the mystery of the Church” (C. 28a).*

It is at the heart of the Eucharist, center of their life and mission, that the Daughters of Charity’s total gift of self takes on its full significance: *“They offer themselves with the Lord Jesus in the memorial of His Paschal Mystery” (C. 19c).*

The vows are made after the Gospel and homily. They thus come as a response of faith and love to the Word of God. They are followed by the Creed, which amplifies this act of faith. Then, the prayer of the faithful incorporates all of humanity through the Church’s intercession.

D. Vows for the first time

“The Sisters make vows for the first time between five and seven years of vocation, according to their dispositions, and in agreement with the competent authority. On this occasion, they pronounce them aloud” (C. 28c).

Vows confirm the commitment made at entrance to the Company, that is, the day of admission to the Seminary. For the vows to be valid, it is necessary to have the authorization of the Superior General, make them freely and pronounce them aloud.

Preparation for vows takes place in a local community as a gradual progression. The Company commits to accompanying the Sisters in this preparation. The Sisters themselves feel personally responsible for this process. This time of preparation is the occasion to mature on a human level and in the total gift of self to the Lord in the service of persons who are poor. To make vows for the first time, several steps are necessary:

1. *“At four years of vocation, the Sister writes to the Visitatrix and to the Superioress General to make known her dispositions with regard to her commitment in the Company and her desire to begin a more intensive preparation for vows. These letters must be accompanied by a report from the Sister Servant” (S. 15a).*
2. *“Three months before the date envisaged in agreement with the Visitatrix and the Sister Servant for making vows for the first time, the Sister writes to the Visitatrix to present her request, which is transmitted to the Superioress General” (S. 15b).*

The Superioress General transmits the request to the Superior General.

3. *“The celebration of vows takes place in joy and thanksgiving and is characterized by simplicity and poverty” (Guide for Initial Formation, p. 101). It “is celebrated simply, preferably in the local community” (Guidelines for Initial Formation after the Seminarium of May 2011, p. 6).*

Until ten years of vocation, participation in initial formation on mission is indispensable in order to pursue a deeper understanding of the vows (Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, p. 102).

E. Renovation of vows

“The annual renewal of vows permits the Sisters to strengthen their determination to be faithful to their vocation, while it assures the stability of their service of Christ in the Company; it implies a free act of the will, inspired always by love” (C. 28d).

1. Vows: a deepening of vocation

With the first Sisters, the Founders stressed the importance of vows for spiritual growth. They encouraged them to make them and to renew them.

Vows are progressively understood and lived more deeply because the total gift of self encompasses all the dimensions of a Daughter of Charity's life. It involves the capacity to give increasingly more space to God. This openness to grace gives the strength and joy to persevere over time.

This spirituality of the Renovation requires preparing oneself at the time of the request, forming oneself and especially being open to transformation by the Spirit, others and events. Renewal is an opportunity offered to the Daughters of Charity to progress throughout their life.

“Each Sister must be conscious of her personal responsibility for her own formation and avail herself of the opportunities afforded her, especially those the Company suggests to her” (C. 58b).

2. The request for annual renewal of vows

Each Sister makes her request for the renewal of vows to her Sister Servant (Cf. C. 36b).

Each Sister Servant makes her request for the renewal of vows to the Visitatrix and transmits to her those of the Sisters of her local community (Cf. S. 64b).

Each Visitatrix makes her request for the renewal of vows to the Superioress General and transmits to her those of the Sisters of her Province (Cf. C. 73e).

The Superioress General makes her request for the renewal of vows to the Superior General and transmits to him those of all the Daughters of Charity, with the consent of the General Council (Cf. C. 66f).

In the February 2 letter, the Superioress General informs the Sisters of the grace of Renovation granted by the Superior General. This letter also offers the Daughters of Charity throughout the world a suggestion for reflection for a more intense preparation for the renewal of vows. This letter has existed in the Company since 1687.

The renewal is made in silence during the Eucharist on the feast of the Annunciation, the day chosen by Saint Louise to associate her own gift of self to Mary's "yes" (Cf. C. 28e).

"Each Sister testifies to having renewed her commitment by signing the form that will be sent to the Visitatrix" (C. 28e).

3. Exceptional cases

Renovation implies living the demands of the vows and the desire to grow. If a Sister is having difficulties with these demands, the Company may propose, accept or impose a delay in the renewal of vows (Cf. C. 44). In all cases, reflection takes place at different levels through a dialogue with the Sister and between the Sister Servant and the Visitatrix to assure the most accurate discernment possible.

A Sister may ask for a delay in the renewal of her vows. This period allows her to step back, review and discern in order to understand better if her desire matches that of God. The Company will help her and offer her the necessary accompaniment.

This delay may also be imposed by a decision of the Superior General at the request of the Visitatrix and her Council and the consent of the Superioress General with her Council. The reasons are given to the Sister, and an accompaniment is offered her.

F. Vows: rights and obligations

In the Church and thus in the Company, two principles govern the rights and obligations of members: equality and progression (Cf. C. 40).

This means that all the members have the same rights and obligations, but they are acquired in stages, specifically: at admission to the Company, at sending on mission, at the time of vows for the first time and at 10 years of vocation (Cf. C. 42b).

- Obligations: As a member of the Company, each Sister has the obligation to observe the Constitutions, obey legitimate Superiors and, at the appointed time, make vows and then renew them.
- Rights: They are exercised, among other situations, by participation in Assemblies, consultations, elections or governance. The conditions are specified in the Constitutions.

To go further

1. Vows: a commitment, a challenge, a journey to undertake. What meaning do I personally give to this life-long process? How is it Gospel-based?
2. How do the vows favor a relationship with Christ? with others?
3. Preparation for vows requires self-knowledge: gifts, limitations, ability to let go... Am I ready to recognize all that makes up my personality and to pursue a path of transformation towards what the Lord wants of me?
4. How do the vows imbue my spiritual, missionary and community life? How can we help each other to live the vows?
5. In the Company, the vows are non-religious, annual and always renewable. How do I understand this specificity? What are the implications?
6. In today's world, some realities (trends of thought, ways of life, etc.) lead to life and others to death. I take the time to note them and to assess their impact in my life and especially in the practice of the vows.

To go deeper

- **Code of Canon Law**

Each institute, taking account of its own special character and purposes, is to define in its constitutions the manner in which the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are to be observed in its way of life (c. 598).

- **Text from the Second Vatican Council**

Members of each institute should recall first of all that by professing the evangelical counsels they responded to a divine call so that by being not only dead to sin but also renouncing the world they may live for God alone (*Perfectae caritatis*, 5).

- **Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata***

The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practicing the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life (21).

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts of the Founders: pages 168 and 169

History of the vows: pages 206-214

Chapter 3 – The service of Christ in those who are poor

“The main purpose for which God has called the Daughters of Charity and brought them together is to honor our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor” (Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity, I, 1).

The Daughters of Charity make the vow of giving themselves to God through the service of those who are poor. This vow is fundamental and orients the three other vows.

The Daughters of Charity draw their inspiration from the example of Christ who, by washing the feet of His disciples the night before He gave His life for human salvation, traced out the path of humble service: *“I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do”* (Jn 13:15).

The vocation of the Daughters of Charity is thus to **follow Christ** by **the service of those who are poor** in an **ever-renewed fidelity**.

A. Following Christ

“Jesus went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people” (Mt 4:23).

1. Christ, source and model of all charity

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise encouraged the Daughters of Charity to contemplate Christ the Servant.

“Our vocation is in keeping with the life the Son of God led on earth” (Saint Vincent, December 25, 1648, CCD IX, 354). *“You’ve been chosen*

to imitate the holy life of the crucified Jesus on earth” (Saint Vincent, August 16, 1640, CCD IX, 33). “By serving poor persons, we honor what the Son of God did while on earth in His holy humanity” (Saint Vincent, March 16, 1642, CCD IX, 51).

To follow Christ and draw progressively closer to Him, the Daughters of Charity return constantly to the Gospel. Meditation on the Word of God is a means to *“deepen their knowledge of the person of Christ and His attitude towards those who are lowly and oppressed” (C. 22a).*

Jesus, who came to take on our humanity, is the source and model of charity. He teaches us to go out to meet people and how to relate to them. Towards all people and especially excluded people, the sick and foreigners, He was compassionate, close, attentive, etc. He respectfully and mercifully sought to lift people up. *“The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (Lk 15:1-2).*

The Gospel teaches that persons who are poor represent Christ:

“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). These words of Jesus are the basis for the mystique of service that consists in seeing those who are poor from a faith perspective. This means recognizing the presence of Christ in one’s brothers and sisters. Saint Vincent illustrated this with the expression *“turn the medal” (CCD XI, 26).* It is a way of calling for a holistic consideration of the person.

This faith perspective animates the Daughters of Charity. Their passion for Christ nourishes and energizes their passion for persons who are poor. They are at the heart of the Company and dwell in the heart of each Daughter of Charity.

“A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there” (Saint Vincent, February 13, 1646, CCD IX, 199).

Inspired by Scripture, the seal of the Company, which represents a heart encompassed by flames, with the figure of Jesus crucified, symbolizes this passion that impels the Daughters of Charity to go, in the name of Christ, to encounter their brothers and sisters, the *“truly poor”* (C. 11b), in order to serve them: *“The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us”* (Cf. 2 Cor 5:14). The seal is the symbolic expression of the centrality of Christ and shows that Jesus is the source of the boldness of Charity. It recalls our belonging to God and our mission on behalf of those who are poor.

2. Live in a state of charity

“For the Daughters of Charity, the service of Christ in those who are poor is an act of love – both affective and effective love – which directs their entire life and is the expression par excellence of the ‘state of charity’” (C. 24a).

The “yes” to the call of God in the Company is a “yes” that involves all the dimensions of the life of the Daughters of Charity for the service of those who are poor. In other words, persons who are poor are at the heart of the everyday life of local communities: prayer, mission, concerns, reflection, stances against injustice.

The state of charity is a “constant state” as servant. Saint Vincent said it in this way: *“We can say that we’re in a state of charity because we’re constantly engaged in the actual practice of love or are disposed to be so”* (May 30, 1659, CCD XII, 224).

Charity is the energy, the fire that urges the Daughters of Charity to be constantly ready for service. It is a way of being and acting, whether in ministry, in community or in any other relationship.

This state of charity finds concrete expression especially in these traits: giving generously of self, being animated by the Gospel spirit, accepting to be evangelized and transformed by those who are poor.

- Giving generously of self

“From the very beginning, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, with the audacious courage of the apostles, sent forth their Daughters on the highways of the world” (C. 25a).

From the beginning of the Company, the Daughters of Charity came and went according to needs. *“In that you do what Our Lord did. He had no home of His own; He went from town to town, from village to village, and healed everyone He met”* (Saint Vincent, February 2, 1653, CCD IX, 459).

“They left everything and followed Him” (Lk 5:11).

The vocation of the Daughters of Charity is indeed characterized by an openness of heart to the universal that implies a readiness to move and adapt and an openness to unknown places and missions. It is a call to a service without borders, be they external (geographic) or internal (reluctance, fears, personal choices).

Generosity, detachment, *indifference* Saint Vincent would have said, and joy are the signs of a Daughter of Charity who is happy to be totally given to God and missionary, whatever the place and type of service.

The service of those who are poor should be preferred to all things when an urgent need calls for this. Saint Vincent expresses it in this way: *“leave God for God”* (May 30, 1647, CCD IX, 252).

When a Daughter of Charity responds courageously and creatively to the calls issued to her, she personally contributes to the fidelity of the Company to the charism.

- Being animated by the Gospel spirit

“Whatever their particular type of work and level of professional competence, the Sisters maintain toward persons who are poor an attitude of servant, which implies the practice of the virtues of their state: humility, simplicity, and charity” (C. 24d).

Humility makes it possible to recognize one’s limitations as well as gifts. It implies knowing oneself well in one’s humanity, accepting a dependence on the Lord and a need for one another. Humility is a source of mutual respect, benevolence and attentiveness.

Simplicity leads to desiring the truth. Sincerity and honesty in relationships build local communities based on the Gospel. Interior and exterior simplicity facilitates relationships and especially the encounter with people made vulnerable by different forms of poverty.

The charity of Christ dwells in the heart of each Daughter of Charity. It is at the origin of her vocation and a life-long path. Charity makes a person more like Christ day after day. Serving charitably bears witness that each individual is a child of God.

Living the Gospel spirit by the practice of humility, simplicity and charity corresponds to the spirit of the Company. It affects the Daughters of Charity’s being and doing and should be their primary distinctive sign.

“As long as charity, humility, and simplicity exist among you, one may say, ‘The Company of Charity is still alive’” (Saint Vincent, February 9, 1653, CCD IX, 467).

From these three virtues flow great human values such as compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect and devotion (Cf. C. 10b).

- Accepting to be evangelized and transformed by those who are poor

“They are open to receiving from poor persons and to allowing themselves to be evangelized by them” (C. 24b).

Saint Vincent often repeated that those who are poor are *“our lords and masters”* (June 14, 1643, CCD IX, 97). He was convinced that they teach, convert and construct the very being of a Daughter of Charity. He knew that service is a school that makes it possible to live faith in a more consistent way and to mature humanly and spiritually. It thus can be said that it is in serving that someone becomes a servant.

Jesus could have acted alone, but He asked His disciples to participate. *“Give them some food yourselves”* (Mt 14:16). Similarly, service implies involving people suffering from poverty more in projects, living fraternity with those who are most poor, journeying with them and engaging in an approach of mutual acceptance.

It involves entering into an authentic encounter with those experiencing poverty, through sharing, solidarity and friendship.

B. The vow of service of those who are poor

“They commit themselves by a specific vow to serve, corporally and spiritually, those who are poor, in accord with the Constitutions and Statutes” (C. 24a).

The vow to serve those who are poor corporally and spiritually is the Daughters of Charity’s specific way of giving themselves to God; it is what characterizes and unifies their life.

“This service nourishes their contemplation and gives meaning to their community life, just as their relationship with God and their life in common continually revitalize their apostolic commitment” (C. 16b).

From the beginning, the Founders recognized a stumbling block that always threatens the Daughters of Charity: prioritizing either the spiritual dimension or the corporal dimension. However, the whole person must be served. With the words of their time, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise had already expressed the necessity of holistic service.

“That’s your main concern – to make God known by the spiritual service you owe to poor persons while serving them corporally” (Saint Vincent, May 1658, CCD X, 382).

The Constitutions and Statutes spell out that to which the Daughters of Charity commit themselves in making the vow of service of those who are poor: *serve every poor person, serve them everywhere* (Cf. C. 10 and C. 11).

1. Serve every poor person

“You have a vocation obliging you to help equally all sorts of persons: men, women, children, and in general every poor person who needs your assistance” (Saint Vincent, January 6, 1658, CCD X, 363).

The Daughters of Charity commit to serving their brothers and sisters experiencing poverty. In order to be in accordance with the spirit of the Constitutions, there are certain conditions.

- Be sent by the Company

“The Sisters are conscious of acting as members of the Company and of being sent forth by the Company. Therefore, whenever options present themselves to a local community or to an individual Sister,

they are discussed in a spirit of cooperation and approved by the competent authority” (C. 5c).

Daughters of Charity are sent by the Company throughout their life and in a particular way at each missioning. The Company and the Church are committed in each Sister’s mission, witness and words (Cf. S. 8a), which explains the importance of dialogue and community discernment.

- Respond to all forms of poverty

“At the school of the Son of God, the Daughters of Charity learn that no type of distress should be foreign to them... Multiple are the forms of poverty and multiple the forms of service...” (C. 11a).

The Daughters of Charity are ready to discover and respond to all forms of poverty. The mission can be exercised in different areas with a spirit of creativity and audacity in order to adapt to times and places. The Sisters are involved in many familiar mission fields and in the field of new forms of poverty.

- Prioritize the *“truly poor”* (C. 11 b).

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise did not found the Company for a specific type of mission. They chose the service of all poor persons but with priority given to *“the truly poor.”* This desire should be nurtured, and it is the criterion that should always guide the Company, Provinces, local communities and each Sister individually.

The notion of *“the truly poor”* is broad and varies depending on the country and the era. It can involve both material, spiritual and emotional poverties and situations stemming from injustice and a disregard for human rights.

- Favor close relationships

“From the very beginning, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, in response to the needs of their time, sent Daughters of Charity to the relief of those who were poor. In this way, they were able to maintain the necessary mobility and availability and to live among those whom they were serving” (C. 12a).

Saint Vincent wanted the Daughters of Charity to be close to people. The importance that he gave home visits expresses this intuition well. This is illustrated by the Charter (Cf. C. 12a) as well as by many conferences in which he stresses the necessity of “going towards.”

Respectful attention, a prerequisite for all service, is also facilitated by a closeness of life with those who are most poor. It takes place in service, relationships, a way of being and doing and a life style as close as possible to that of persons who are poor.

Closeness is also expressed by solidarity with those who are poor, participation in the defense of their rights, fraternal relationships with them and being in communion with their joys and sufferings.

“Social friendship and universal fraternity necessarily call for an acknowledgement of the worth of every human person, always and everywhere” (Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, 106).

2. Serve everywhere

“They are ready to serve wherever they are sent, convinced that they are contributing to the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to them by the Church” (C. 25b).

All the Daughters of Charity are missionary since they are sent in the name of Christ to be disciples. They give themselves entirely to His service in the person of the poor to continue His mission.

The Daughters of Charity are characterized by their availability and mobility. To respond to the cries of the poor and the needs of the Company, they are ready to change local community and service when this is asked of them. These changes are also opportunities to grow humanly and in vocation since they require leaving behind habits, relationships and points of reference. The mutual assistance of the community and prayer are real supports for living this letting go.

The Company sends the Sisters where they are needed. They thus prepare to let go of what they know, to learn and to accept in order to serve humbly in another region, a new country, a new culture.

“You must be ready to serve persons who are poor, wherever you’re sent: with the army, as you did when called there, with poor criminals and, generally speaking, wherever you can assist poor persons, since that is your purpose” (Saint Vincent, October 18, 1655, CCD X, 104).

Sometimes, a Province calls upon another so that one or more Sisters join a temporary mission, for example, in an emergency missionary situation. The Daughters of Charity then prove their availability to participate in this Interprovincial assistance.

Some Sisters will be sent on mission *Ad Gentes* (Cf. C. 25 and S. 13). This is defined, among other things, by the proclamation of the Gospel in places where Christ is not yet known or in countries where the transmission of the faith has been interrupted or in countries that are hostile to Christianity. In that case, evangelization takes place through the presence and witness of a local community, a sign of universal fraternity.

C. For an ever-renewed fidelity

Attentive to the cries of those who are poor, the Daughters of Charity remain ready to “go forth” to go to the peripheries and to invent new forms of service in line with the charism of the Founders.

To remain faithful to the charism, depending on the era, the place, the types of poverties, social and political circumstances, the Daughters of Charity remain alert and ready to renew themselves with a bold missionary spirit: *“Christ appeals constantly to their Company through their suffering brothers and sisters, through the signs of the times, and through the Church”* (C. 11a). It is thus important to give special emphasis to **listening, discernment, formation** and **ecological conversion**.

1. Listening

The disposition to listening is fundamental. It is welcoming the Holy Spirit who makes Himself known through the Word of God, the words of the Church, the cry of those who are poor, Sisters, collaborators... In all cases, it involves opening one’s heart and letting oneself be shaped, challenged and sometimes disturbed.

Listening to the Word of God gives consistency to the gift of one’s life and enlightens everyday choices.

Listening to the words of the Church: Reading and studying its documents give guidance, strengthen faith and the sense of belonging to the Church and rekindle passion for living the Gospel.

Listening to those who are poor: It takes time to learn to listen to suffering and welcome it respectfully. It is, however, the essential first step of all action.

Listening to Sisters: The Sisters listen to each other in order to serve better, understand the reality of those who are poor more fully, plan, evaluate and renew themselves.

Listening to collaborators: It presupposes the conviction that service is shared in respect and reciprocity.

2. Discernment

Discernment implies a constant seeking of the will of God in everyday signs: *“We must remember that prayerful discernment must be born of a readiness to listen: to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways”* (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 172). God is present in events, in the calls of those who are poor, in the everyday experience of local communities. Discernment requires time and approaching people with an attentive heart.

Saint Vincent says, *“To discern this correctly, those poor people should be observed in their own homes so you can see for yourself who are the most needy and who are less so”* (July 21, 1657, *CCD VI*, 388).

Discernment is a personal and communal act. It implies having an open mind during discussions and being able to accept others’ points of view.

In the Company, *“choices are always made in function of the service of Christ in persons who are poor, according to the spirit of their vocation”* (C. 61). Apostolic reflection, the revision of works, Assemblies and the Local Community Plan are tools for discernment.

Apostolic reflection (Cf. S. 11) on the life of service helps to discern, in the light of the Word of God, the necessary conversions of mind and heart and to determine appropriate attitudes and means.

Revision of works: The world is constantly changing. For this reason, services should be regularly reviewed to verify if they still correspond to a need, or if it is appropriate to change to respond better to the current needs of charity and evangelization, according to the different contexts.

Assemblies also have this function of discernment: *“In the Company of the Daughters of Charity, the role of Assemblies is to evaluate and promote fidelity to its specific charism and its apostolic vitality”* (C. 84a).

The Local Community Plan (Cf. C. 83 and S. 67) is written in a climate of discernment, trust, dialogue, an attitude of conversion; it further requires prayer and charity.

3. Formation

Going deeper and progressing in one’s vocation requires tending to one’s spiritual, community and apostolic life through formation.

This is because formation *“is not only a need; it is a question of justice toward persons who are poor and toward each Sister”* (C. 52a). The Sisters take advantage of the means the Company offers them. They show interest in this and dedicate the necessary time to it. In what concerns service, they are careful to acquire professional skills and to keep abreast of current legislation in order to act in accordance with justice, always inspired by charity.

Today more than ever, formation for collaboration with employees and volunteers and the advancement of attitudes of reciprocity, respect and consultation are essential.

It is very important as well to learn to work with people in situations of poverty so that they become agents of their own promotion (Cf. C. 24e).

The social doctrine of the Church is one of the fundamental references that it is crucial to know in order to be able to *“commit themselves to work for social transformation to change the unjust structures that cause poverty”* (C. 24e).

4. The call to ecological conversion

“They openly affirm respect for and the defense of human life in all its stages, and the right to peace for all peoples and nations. They denounce situations that exploit and exclude people” (S. 8c).

“Convinced that the goods of the earth form a common patrimony, they foster responsible use of natural resources and the equitable distribution of goods” (S. 8d).

The encyclical *Laudato si* (Pope Francis, 2015) stresses the fact that persons who are poor are the primary victims of injustice, trafficking, lack of water, pollution, national debt, climate change, arms trafficking, etc.

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (*Laudato si*, 139).

It is a question of clearly understanding that everything is connected: peace, justice and care for creation; this motivates the call to change behaviors in consumer styles and relationships and to join in the struggle for peace and justice and in a closer relationship with the weakest members of society. This is called ecological conversion.

It is all connected, and the life of the Daughters of Charity can only be unified by seeking a Gospel-based coherence. This coherence is expressed in missionary priorities, life style, the quality of everyday acts and the quality of relationships.

To go further

1. *"You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor"* (Saint Vincent, February 13, 1646, CCD IX, 199). How can I progressively grow in this faith perspective? I share an example in which I have already concretely experienced this.
2. *The state of charity*: to what extent is it a reality in my life?
3. The vow of service of those who are poor gives a specific character to the other vows. What does this mean in practical terms?
4. In what way am I attentive to people who live in poverty? I share some experiences of listening.
5. The Company is missionary by nature. How do I feel affected by its international dimension?
6. How can an intense missionary activity be compatible with the necessary spiritual and community renewal?
7. The Founders considered fraternal life in common a support for mission. To what does this way of seeing community life commit me?

To go deeper

- **Text from the Second Vatican Council**

Therefore, in order that their members may first correspond to their vocation to follow Christ and serve Him in His members, their apostolic activity must spring from intimate union with Him. Thus, love itself towards God and the neighbor is fostered (*Perfectae caritatis*, 8).

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

“The Church’s love for the poor is part of her constant tradition.” This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to “be able to give to those in need” (Eph 4:28). It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty (2444).

- **Encyclical *Laudato si***

Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (49).

- **Encyclical *Fratelli tutti***

Listening n°48-50; Solidarity n°115-116

- **Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium***

A Church that goes forth n°46-49

- **Apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate***

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel (vv. 31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed. If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. "I was hungry..." (Mt 25:35-36)... Holiness, then, is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: "If we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified." The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is "not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ." In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate (95-96).

- **Final Document of the General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences in Aparecida**

The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (Cf. 2 Cor 8:9) (Introduction).

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts of the Founders: pages 191-201

Chapter 4 - Chastity

“The Daughters of Charity... embrace chastity as a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor” (C. 29a).

“Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort (Cf. Gal 5:22)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 2345). In faith, the Daughters of Charity welcome this inexhaustible gift from God.

Like all gifts from God, chastity makes a person capable of loving more.

“A response of love to a call of Love” (C. 29b), chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom frees the heart of a Daughter of Charity so that it burns ever more ardently with love of God and of persons who are poor.

“Embrace chastity as a gift that frees their heart” (C. 29a). It is a life journey, a progressive process consisting of letting go and transcending personal interests in order to love better, in other words, to love with *the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ*. It is necessary to rely on God’s grace, be patient and demonstrate great humility.

Chastity bears witness to preferential love for the Lord. It is a faith conviction that the Founders held deeply. Saint Vincent described it clearly: *“It’s to love [God] more than anything else – more than father, mother, relatives, friends, or any creature whomsoever; it’s to love Him more than ourselves” (July 19, 1640, CCD IX, 17).*

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise often said that chastity concerns relational and emotional dimensions. It thus is expressed in attitudes, ways of thinking and ways of loving.

In order to live chastity, the Daughters of Charity freely choose to enlarge their heart to love unexclusively, **following Christ**, to commit themselves by **the vow of chastity** and to take appropriate measures to persevere in **an ever-renewed fidelity**.

A. Following Christ

“In following Jesus Christ, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves by vow to a life of chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom” (C. 29a).

1. Christ, model of chastity

“Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life” (CCC, 2394). The Gospel shows how Jesus lived chastity: love for all, without exclusion, close, free, totally given. *“Jesus loved His own in the world, and He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1).*

Christ is the model of chastity. With whomever He met, He situated Himself at the proper distance, that is, at the right place, that which respects difference and does not invade the interior space of the other person. He did not impose Himself, did not dominate and did not constrain. His way of relating was not captative. When He attracted a person, it was so that person would serve others, in all freedom: *“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).*

Jesus’ relationships with the disciples, crowds, sick people and individuals manifest simplicity, kindness and the art of bringing out

the best in those encountered. The Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery and so many others recognized this. They felt loved, respected in their difference and free to accept or not what Jesus offered them.

It is interesting to note that Jesus' relationships consist of both distance and proximity. On the one hand: "*Woman, how does your concern affect me?*" (Jn 2:4), "*Stop holding on to me!*" (Jn 20:17); on the other hand: "*Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around His waist*" (Jn 13:5), "*And Jesus wept*" (Jn 11:35). The night of the Last Supper, Jesus described the meaning of His presence and mission in profoundly human terms: "*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*" (Lk 22:15).

He thus shows that affectivity has its place in relationships as long as it is imbued with maturity and appropriateness. Jesus invites people to freedom, growth and emotional maturity, in other words, chastity as He lived it.

Christ called some people to follow this way of life. As disciples of Christ, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise understood that offering oneself totally to God to serve Him in the person of the poor necessitates chastity. A chaste person is free in mind and body, detached from personal projects, from the image he or she wants to project and from all sorts of enslaving idols.

2. Chastity, a response to a gift from God

God calls unconditionally and expects a generous and free response. This is a choice to make, for speaking of chastity also means speaking of freedom in one's response.

Indeed, it involves making the decision to commit oneself, or not, to following Christ and to participating in His Paschal Mystery, the

mystery of death and life, which revealed His great love to us. *“The love God expects from us in chastity is not a love exempt from struggle or unobstructed by weakness, but a love that accepts having to grow through trials that purify it”* (Mother Rogé, February 2, 1977).

“In a spirit of gratitude and joy, they live chastity, a source of spiritual fecundity and a sign of the Covenant between God and His people” (C. 29b).

Chastity is a source of spiritual fecundity: *“It was... I who chose you... to go and bear fruit that will remain”* (Jn 15:16). Jesus exhorts His disciples to bear fruit. This fecundity is spiritual because it expresses God’s presence to the world.

Good soil, welcoming soil, cleared of all that gets in the way, is required in order to bear fruit. For chastity to be a source of spiritual fecundity, it is necessary to let go of both material goods and relational goods. This frees up space to grow in a personal relationship with Christ and in the gift of self to others.

Sign of the Covenant between God and His people: The Covenant is the expression of God’s fidelity towards His people and of the chosen people’s faithful response to their God: *“I will betroth you to me with fidelity”* (Hos 2:22).

Chastity, a sign of this covenant between God and His people, expresses belonging to Jesus Christ. It is at the heart of the total gift of self and encompasses all the dimensions of the person. It frees from exclusive relationships, personal interests and distractions focused on what is secondary and demonstrates that God can bring a person fulfillment.

Inner freedom, peace, joy and gratitude are the signs of chaste love, which is lived out in the total gift of self to others.

B. The vow of chastity

“The Daughters of Charity commit themselves by vow to a life of chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom” (C. 29a).

1. The virtue of chastity

Chastity is a virtue acquired progressively. The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of *“an apprenticeship in self-mastery”* (CCC, 2339) and says, *“One can never consider it acquired once and for all”* (CCC, 2342). However, it is accessible to every man and woman of good will in consecrated life, marriage and celibacy.

Chastity is choosing to live sexuality, desires and privations in a freeing and joyful way in relationships with others and with oneself, in a way consistent with one’s commitments.

Because chastity is a path of humanization and of fulfillment of the person, it is not an obstacle to encounters but rather a condition for a right relationship with God, oneself and others.

With God: Accepting to be loved by Him, loving Him *“with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, with all one’s mind and with all one’s strength”* (Cf. Mk 12:30) and gradually making Him the center of one’s life. It also means having an unconditional relationship with Him, expecting nothing in return, out of love.

With oneself: Accepting one’s gifts, failings and limitations. This means rejecting the idea that one is all-powerful, advancing down a path of conversion, learning to come out of oneself, distancing oneself appropriately from emotions, not allowing emotions to overpower oneself but integrating them progressively.

With others: Chastity is a virtue that regulates and harmonizes relationships among people, particularly relationships of affection, love or friendship. This virtue contributes to considering each person met as a person who cannot be appropriated. It means considering the person not as an object, something to use for personal pleasure or benefit, but as a unique subject endowed with freedom.

A chaste relationship, whatever a person's state of life, is a relationship that respects difference. It means giving up the idea of being everything for the other person or of the other person being everything for oneself. It means refusing fusion and confusion in order to discover the joy of genuine communication.

2. The vow of chastity in celibacy

Chastity in celibacy is something new contributed by the Gospel and Christianity.

By vow, the Daughters of Charity commit to practicing the virtue of chastity in celibacy. This implies giving up marriage and all sexual acts. In no case does it entail the depreciation of the body but rather the choice of a total gift of self to the service of Christ in those who are poor. "Total," that is, following Christ with all one's being, history and body. The vow of chastity in celibacy requires accepting one's personality, femininity, gifts and limitations.

The vow of chastity is not "less" love; it is "more" love because it is unexclusive openness to all others: *"a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ"* (C. 29a).

Chastity in celibacy lived in the midst of the world is a way of living encounters with others – persons who are poor, Sisters and all those who make up everyday life – that is imbued with the very love with which Jesus loved His own. *"Love one another as I love you"* (Jn 15:12).

This freely chosen way of living in the name of the Kingdom of God is a prophetic sign and witnesses to the spirit of the Beatitudes.

3. Chastity at the service of charity

Chastity... *“for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor”* (C. 29a).

Far from being a norm to apply or a withdrawal of oneself, the vow of chastity allows the Daughters of Charity to live in the midst of the world as people who are free and ready to love more and love better. It is *“openness and presence to the world”* (C. 29b).

A Daughter of Charity wishes to expand her heart to the dimensions of Christ’s love and, following His example, dedicate her time and all her energy – physical, spiritual and emotional – to the service of others.

In order to live her service in a chaste way, a Daughter of Charity learns from experience, review of life and prayer to consider all people living in poverty as brothers or sisters, to recognize their ability to be agents of their own promotion and to listen before acting, just as Jesus modeled.

These characteristics of chastity are those of the Daughter of Charity who is not possessive or controlling of those who are poor but recognizes their equal dignity as children of God.

C. For an ever-renewed fidelity

The Daughters of Charity welcome in faith this gift of God, which they will never finish discovering or making bear fruit. This is a long process, sometimes a struggle, so that chastity progressively becomes a source of joy, peace and inner stability.

Living chastity in the current context, impacted by the culture of immediate pleasure, consumerism and, in some societies, ignorance of the Gospel, is a real challenge.

This requires the Sisters' real self-knowledge and human and spiritual growth.

Certain conditions are essential for such progress.

1. An inner life to cultivate

Chastity is understood in faith. Contemplation of Christ is what makes it possible to live this total, generous gift of self as He lived it: in His divinity, by His relationship with His Father; in His humanity, by His relationship with the world.

“Following the footsteps of Christ, we vowed chastity because of God, through God, and for the love of God” (Mother Guillemin, February 2, 1966).

In order to remain faithful to the vow of chastity, each day should be entrusted to the Lord in prayer, the Eucharist and meditation on the Word of God. Then, fears fade and difficulties are put in their place. It is a question of maintaining a personal relationship with Christ, reflecting calmly, stepping back, seeking assistance and continuing to pray.

The sacrament of Reconciliation helps to cultivate this inner life in order to deepen one's relationship with Christ.

2. An emotional balance, a balanced life

To advance on the path of chastity, human maturity is fundamental. It finds expression particularly in emotional balance and a balanced life, which are acquired little by little, with periods of progress and

regression. By definition, any balance is unstable, and in order to reach it, it must be readjusted throughout life.

Desires and emotions are natural feelings. One should not be surprised by these inner movements nor fear them but rather recognize them and determine how to integrate them without being overwhelmed by them.

Everyday life (prayer, service and community life) should be organized in such a way as to be a real support for living chastity freely and joyfully. It is also advisable to be careful to reserve enough time for rest, relaxation in common, silence and solitude.

Trying to do everything and activism, which can be escapes from community life, are well-known risks. Apostolic commitment, if it becomes the excessive and exclusive interest, can cause exhaustion and a gradual loss of the meaning given to vocation and specifically to the vow of chastity.

Nonetheless, it is important to be aware that at certain moments in life, this vow may be more difficult to live. This can take the form, for example, of the feeling of an emotional emptiness, the awaking of romantic feelings, questions about one's vocation or calling faith into question.

Open communication with the Sister Servant and spiritual accompaniment are means to discern together the origin of this difficulty and to overcome it.

To support this path towards balance favorable for chastity, the Company also offers other means.

- Fraternal life in community

Community life is an essential support for living chastity. It is based on interpersonal relationships of freedom, friendship and forgiveness.

To the extent that the community atmosphere is joyful and relaxed and communication takes place in trust, community life helps to live chastity, and chastity reinforces community life. The quality of community life depends on each individual Sister.

Life in community is above all a faith reality to build up day after day by attending especially to the quality of interpersonal relationships among all the Sisters. Friendship is good when it does not create emotional dependence and when it favors the sisterly atmosphere of the whole local community.

The local community is a privileged place of formation and renewal. It fosters growth in human and spiritual maturity.

It must also simply be recognized that chastity *“demands transcending a certain loneliness of heart”* (C. 29b).

Solitude is an inevitable reality, even in community, since it is part of the human condition. The other person will always remain a mystery because each person is unique, after the example of the Trinity, model for community life. If solitude is misunderstood, it runs the risk of becoming a sense of isolation that could lead to focusing only on oneself and losing interest in the life of others.

However, learning to live solitude serenely does one good because it is also synonymous with peace and renewal.

- A path of humility

Chastity sets a Daughter of Charity off down a path of humility because it constantly takes her back to what she really is with her limitations and complexity. The gift of chastity is a *“treasure that we hold in earthen vessels”* (Cf. 2 Cor 4:7); therefore, it is important to care for it as for the most precious things.

Being conscious of one's limitations makes it possible to assume one's condition as a creature loved by God and to choose clearly, over and over again, chastity based on this reality and not on an idealized self-image.

In this sense, humility is a necessary virtue for living chastity; it is also a trait of those who wish to live it.

"Humility is a very excellent means for acquiring and preserving chastity" (Saint Vincent, November 13, 1654, CCD XI, 162).

- Asceticism, a path for encountering God

"Intimate union with Christ, strengthened... by prayer and asceticism, ensures their fidelity" (C. 29d).

The objective of asceticism is to free up and to leave more space for God. It is a process of removing clutter on a material level, the level of thoughts or over-urgent desires. It is demanding without, nonetheless, being burdensome.

Taking on asceticism as a means of liberation demands attentiveness to the movements of one's heart and to all that happens within oneself, to what overwhelms and leaves one unsatisfied.

It is a matter of not allowing oneself to be dominated by this, while not falling into the dangerous illusion that it is possible to control everything.

3. Openness to accompaniment and discernment

Accompaniment and discernment are supports that help in living happily in a way that is consistent with the vow of chastity.

Dialogue, communication and openness of heart with those who have the mission of guiding and advising within the Company strengthen vocational fidelity. For accompaniment and spiritual direction, the

Sisters turn to people who know the spirit of the Company, preferably Priests of the Mission and Daughters of Charity (Cf. C. 20b).

Accompaniment allows for growth in humility, the spirit of faith and trust. It heightens self-knowledge, sheds light on ways of reacting and helps to recover, as necessary, inner freedom, peace and joy.

“Each day, at a time prescribed in the Local Community Plan, they review their life in a desire for conversion, to discover the action of the Spirit, to thank God, and to verify their fidelity” (S. 4).

Discernment is fundamental whenever there is a choice to make concerning the way of being with people, in community, in service, about what is useful and necessary for a better service of those who are poor.

Formation of conscience is necessary. It gives discernment a greater depth and a greater fidelity to God.

Concerning means of communication, it is important to make a real discernment based on human and Gospel criteria so as not to get lost or trapped in this new technological age.

To go further

1. How did Jesus live chastity?
2. *“Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life”* (CCC, 2394). As a Daughter of Charity, what meaning do I give to this statement?
3. Self-control, a fruit of the Spirit, is one of the components of chastity. How can it be lived in order to grow in inner freedom? How are self-control and charity connected?
4. How does the vow of chastity enrich the way of living service of those who are poor?
5. To what extent does community life favor the living of the vow of chastity? How do I contribute to an atmosphere of fraternity and mutual assistance?
6. Have I already felt fears related to what chastity means I must give up? Can I identify them and find their cause? What is my reaction to difficulties in this domain? What are the means to help me to overcome them? With whom can I speak about this?
7. Am I aware that modern means of communication can help me or, on the contrary, become an obstacle for living chastity? How? What are the practical implications?

To go deeper

- **Code of Canon Law**

The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy (c. 599).

- **Texts from the Second Vatican Council**

The chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven... should be counted an outstanding gift of grace. It frees the heart of man in a unique fashion so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men (*Perfectae caritatis*, 12).

Perfect chastity thus becomes “an incentive to charity, and is certainly a particular source of spiritual fecundity in the world” (Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 42).

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Charity is the form of all the virtues. Under its influence, chastity appears as a school of the gift of the person. Self-mastery is ordered to the gift of self. Chastity leads him who practices it to become a witness to his neighbor of God’s fidelity and loving kindness (2346).

Other references: 2337-2359

- **Apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata***

The consecrated life must present to today’s world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity. Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the

pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ. Precisely because they are immersed in this mystery, consecrated persons feel themselves capable of a radical and universal love, which gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline necessary in order not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience. Enlightened by faith in the Risen Lord and by the prospect of the new heavens and the new earth, it offers a priceless incentive in the task of educating to that chastity which corresponds to other states of life as well (88).

- **Address to the participants in the plenary assembly of the International Union of Superiors General** (Pope Francis, May 8, 2013)

Chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven shows how the emotions have their place in mature freedom and become a sign of the world to come, to make God's primacy shine out ever brighter. But, please, let it be a "fruitful" chastity which generates spiritual children in the Church. The consecrated woman is a mother, she must be a mother, not a "spinster"! Excuse me for speaking like this, but motherhood in the consecrated life is important, this fruitfulness! May this joy of spiritual fecundity motivate your life; be mothers, as a figure of Mary, Mother, and of Mother Church. It is impossible to understand Mary without her motherhood; it is impossible to understand the Church apart from her motherhood and you are icons of Mary and the Church.

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts of the Founders: pages 170-177

Chapter 5 – Poverty

By entering the Company, the Daughters of Charity choose to live interior and exterior poverty in conformity with their vocation of servants of Christ in the person of the poor.

“Who would want to be rich when the Son of God willed to be poor? ... Sisters, you chose Him at the time you entered the Company; you gave Him your word and, since He led a life of poverty, you must imitate Him in that” (Saint Vincent, August 20, 1656, CCD X, 166 and 169).

In the Founders’ eyes, perseverance in one’s vocation is tied to the practice of poverty. Saint Louise *“always felt that the happiness of your Company lay in... poverty”* (Saint Vincent, July 3, 1660, CCD X, 573) while Saint Vincent affirmed, *“It’s the basis and foundation that sustains it”* (August 20, 1656, CCD X, 177).

In order to live poorly, the Daughters of Charity freely choose to possess nothing, to place everything in common, **following Christ**, to commit by **the vow of poverty** and to take appropriate means to persevere in **an ever-renewed fidelity**.

A. Following Christ

1. Poverty after the example of the Son of God

“The Son of God assumed poverty in a spirit of abandonment to the Father and as a sign of His mission in the world” (C. 30a).

The Daughters of Charity live evangelical poverty after the example of Jesus Christ. He shared the life of all and especially of those who are poor. Throughout His public life, He reached out to people suffering from insecurity, rejection, illness, etc. He felt one of them, went out

to meet them, ate with them in their homes, experienced the simple joys of everyday life and maintained fraternal relationships.

He owned nothing of His own, which allowed Him to live completely free from all attachments.

“Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head” (Mt 8:20).

The most important aspect of Jesus’ way of living poverty is His spirit of surrender and of dependence on the Father and His fidelity to the mission entrusted to Him.

He who was God totally assumed in His Incarnation this ultimate form of poverty that He expressed at the moment of His death on the cross: *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).*

Following His example, the Daughters of Charity learn to live dependence and to place their life freely in God’s hands.

“... Blessed are the Daughters of Charity who have chosen a way of life having as its principal aim the imitation of that of the Son of God, who, being able to possess all the treasures in the world, spurned them and lived so poorly that He didn’t have a stone on which to lay His head” (Saint Vincent, August 20, 1656, CCD X, 167).

2. Evangelical poverty

“Concerned with sharing the lot of those who are poor, they strive each day to work toward their own conversion to evangelical poverty as it was lived by their Founders” (C. 30b).

Jesus’ example and the life of persons who are poor lead the Daughters of Charity to seek an increasingly real poverty of spirit. Indeed, poverty does not only concern material goods. Evangelical poverty touches the very “being” of a Daughter of Charity. It evokes the first Beatitude: *“Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6:20).*

It involves being poor in spirit, open to others, open to the Word of God, free and simple in order to love.

“This poverty finds its fullness in poverty of spirit... Poverty of spirit is openness to the Spirit and to the love of all persons” (C. 30a).

Living evangelical poverty is a path, a progressive conversion, which makes it possible to let go not only of material things but also of an excessive preoccupation with oneself and of self-sufficiency, which gets in the way of truly sharing in the life of those who are poor. It is a simplification of the way of being, living, receiving, relating within community and with others; it is a witness that makes Gospel simplicity visible.

Living evangelical poverty also means being free with regard to wealth, which risks enslaving the heart. *“Not that I say this because of need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be self-sufficient. I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things, I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need” (Phil 4:11-12).*

It is a “letting go” in order to let God act and to trust Him.

B. The vow of poverty

“By their vow of poverty, [they] commit themselves to total dependence in the use and disposal of the goods of the Company, as well as in the use of their personal goods” (C. 30a).

1. The vow

- Total dependence in the use and disposal of the goods of the Company

“They are co-responsible for the management and use of these goods, in dependence on their Superiors and according to the spirit of the Company” (C. 30c).

Goods belong to the Company, which has the duty of managing them for the service of those who are poor. No Sister may consider herself personally the owner of these goods, neither in fact nor in spirit.

Saint Vincent explained this very concretely:

“They shall have nothing of their own and therefore will put everything in common... So, you’re not allowed to dispose of the goods of the Community or of your own, for you have nothing and must have nothing without your Superiors’ permission” (August 20, 1656, CCD X, 166 and 169).

Co-responsibility and dependence are mentioned together in the Constitution on poverty. Indeed, co-responsibility does not dispense from dependence.

The Sisters, local communities and Provinces are effectively responsible for good administration but should nonetheless inform and be accountable at all levels, as well as ask permissions for expenses according to the established amounts.

The Constitutions and Statutes enumerate very concretely different situations that express this dependence. For example, all salaries, benefits, retirement or disability/invalidity pensions must be placed in their totality into a community account, after the example of the first Christian communities, who placed everything in common (Cf. C. 30c).

Gifts received personally as members of the Company are also to be given to the local community or to the Province (Cf. S. 16b).

Accountability concerns each Sister in relation to her Sister Servant, a Sister Servant in relation to her Visitatrix, a Visitatrix in relation to her Council, the Visitatrix with her Council in relation to the General Council.

This is the Daughters of Charity's way of proceeding according to the vow. It commits them to dependence and to the development of a state of mind in order to carry out all these processes in faith, dialogue, detachment, generosity and trust.

"In an evangelical spirit of detachment, the Sisters refrain from acting as proprietors and 'avoid any semblance of luxury, excessive wealth or accumulation of goods' as well as 'anything superfluous'" (C. 88b).

- Total dependence in the use of their personal goods

Personal goods include inheritances, real estate income, certain pensions, gifts received as a private individual... (Cf. Instructions on the Vows, pages 74-78).

"With the permission of the competent authority, they may use the income accruing from them for what are commonly termed 'good works'" (C. 30d).

The competent authorities in this domain are the Sister Servant or the Provincial Director, according to the amounts specified in the Province (C. 30d).

The glossary of the Constitutions gives the definition of good works: *"Worthy causes to which donations may be made for purposes of charity or piety."*

2. Choose poverty in order to share better

- A way of life

"The Sisters choose a modest, simple life style. With great trust in Providence, they are satisfied with spending what is necessary for their apostolic works and for their life as servants" (C. 30b).

“A theoretical poverty is no use to us. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, in the poor, in the sick and in children” (Pope Francis to the International Union of Superiors General, May 8, 2013).

With the first Daughters of Charity, the Founders often insisted on the importance of a poor life style to the point that Saint Louise affirmed *“the need the Company has, if it is to endure, to appear poor and humble in everything”* (Saint Louise, L. 392, c. April 1656, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 504-505).

It is the responsibility of each Sister to contribute to the life style of the local community. Nonetheless, decisions in this matter are made after community discernment in which each Sister strives to listen to the different points of view. It sometimes takes time to find common ground and come to a decision.

What is important is to question oneself based on the Gospel message and particularly on what concerns sharing and solidarity, resulting in a certain moderation.

Saint Vincent strongly insisted on this idea: *“How necessary moderation is for the Daughters of Charity, Sisters! You’ll know that you’re truly abstemious if you maintain the sobriety of country women, especially those who were called from the beginning to serve the poor, for they lived very abstemiously”* (January 25, 1643, *CCD IX*, 70).

A modest and simple life style comes as close as possible to that of neighboring poor families. Therefore, it is good to question regularly what is really necessary in order to reduce the gap separating the local community from them.

Saint Vincent said it this way: *“You have a right only to your food and clothing”* (January 25, 1643, *CCD IX*, 74).

- A way of being

Persons who are poor are “our lords and masters”; they are also brothers, sisters, friends. In order to be close to them in truth, some concrete attitudes are necessary. These attitudes facilitate encounters and relationships. For example: exercising hospitality, accepting to be disturbed and sometimes disrupted in one’s routines, letting oneself be evangelized, welcoming differences and, finally, making oneself available.

These ways of being and acting are determined in community in order to assure a balance between each Sister’s mission and everyone’s needs for physical and spiritual renewal.

A poor and simple way of life is a credible witness of fraternity for our brothers and sisters.

- Solidarity

“The Daughters of Charity see those who suffer, those stripped of human rights and dignity, and those in poor health as children of God and brothers and sisters with whom they are in solidarity” (C. 16c).

Solidarity is lived in different ways: through actual sharing of resources, by giving up a certain comfort and excess, by refusing privileges, by respecting labor laws.

Living in solidarity means fighting against injustices alongside those who are its victims as well as practicing justice: *“We are all connected to each other, for better or for worse... [Solidarity] refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity... It is not merely a question of helping others; it is a matter of justice”* (Pope Francis, Catechesis, September 2, 2020).

In line with the Gospel and the Daughters of Charity’s vocation, living solidarity with those who are poor is a necessity and an obligation.

The Church has taught this since its inception up to today. Solidarity is one of the principles of the social doctrine of the Church.

“Solidarity is also an authentic moral virtue, not a ‘feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all’ (John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis, 38)” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 193).

- The practice of asking permission and being accountable

The poverty of the Daughters of Charity is characterized by dependence, which takes concrete form in asking permissions and being accountable. This practice is assumed not only because the Constitutions require it but from a faith conviction, in transparency and authentic responsibility. It is a process that depends on maturity and honesty and entails willingness to accept whatever response is given. This state of mind gives a Daughter of Charity a sense of peace and inner freedom.

It is also one of the means for being close to people who are poor, who constantly experience dependence, waiting and the inability to act autonomously in many areas.

C. For an ever-renewed fidelity

Fidelity to the vow of poverty is only possible by living the vow after Christ’s example, out of love and in solidarity with those who live an imposed poverty and for whom everything possible should be done to eliminate such poverty.

Supports for persevering are the desire to live evangelical poverty, a life simplified by the Gospel and the practice of personal and community reviews.

1. The desire to live evangelical poverty

The deep desire to model oneself on Christ is fundamental. It is the driving force for gradually translating the spirit of poverty into attitudes and a way of life in one's spiritual, community and apostolic life.

“Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack” (Laudato si, 222).

It is in prayer that the Daughters of Charity ask God to keep this desire alive so that poverty becomes real in their life.

“The entire future of the Little Company depends upon the way in which we shall understand and live holy poverty... The love of poverty, the understanding of poverty, the desire and the strength to practice poverty, can only come from the contemplation of Christ's poverty” (Mother Guillemin, February 2, 1965).

2. A life simplified by the Gospel

A life simplified by the Gospel is expressed in a humble, authentic and joyful way of being and acting. The Daughters of Charity commit to this in choosing to live poverty.

This process requires a real dynamic of conversion. It involves being open to the transforming Spirit. Spiritual charity is one of the means that can help to advance in this area (Cf. C. 32b).

In practical terms, a Daughter of Charity wishes to detach herself little by little from material goods, to have a greater concern for the common good, to use means of communication with discernment, to take part in the preparation of the local community budget and to have a genuinely simple life style.

The virtues recommended by the Founders support this process of simplification: humility to recognize one's inconsistencies, simplicity to dare to speak about them and accept assistance. Poverty then becomes an act of charity and solidarity towards those who endure inhuman conditions, psychological wounds and so many other forms of suffering.

Lived step by step in trust, the poverty of a life simplified by the Gospel is a journey of inner liberation and of spiritual growth.

3. Personal and community reviews

"The Sisters often make a personal and community review in which they discern their real needs, their use of goods and of the earth's resources, their life style, and their duties of justice and charity" (S. 16a).

So that local communities pay attention to all these aspects (use of goods and of the earth's resources, life style, duties of justice and charity), it is important to review them regularly in prayer and reflection.

Community reviews with regard to poverty concern everyday objects, the use of movable goods and property as well as the way of living relationships, of living charity in justice and of sharing among the Sisters and with others.

These times of review in the light of the Gospel, the social doctrine of the Church and the Constitutions help to regain courage and strength to *"guide the steps that go astray,"* that is, whatever would be in contradiction with the chosen ideal of poverty.

To go further

1. How did Jesus live poverty?
2. In everyday life, how can poverty of spirit be lived? What attitudes should be developed?
3. How does an awareness of my own poverty change my relationship with others?
4. The insecure situation of the people around me causes me to compare their life with mine, which is often couched in security and comfort. Based on this observation, what can I change in my life style?
5. *Laudato si* is a call to multiple conversions because “everything is connected.” What personal and communal commitments are necessary to be close to those who are poor, care for creation and tend to relationships?
6. Dependence is a key aspect of the vow of poverty. What is the connection between this imperative and the spirit of poverty?

To go deeper

- **Code of Canon Law**

The evangelical counsel of poverty in imitation of Christ who for our sake was made poor when he was rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches. It also involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute's own law (c. 600).

- **Texts from the Second Vatican Council**

The spirit of poverty and charity are the glory and witness of the Church of Christ (*Gaudium et spes*, 88)

By it [poverty] they share in the poverty of Christ who for our sakes became poor, even though He was rich, so that by His poverty we might become rich (*Perfectae caritatis*, 13).

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

In the Beatitudes "poverty" is the virtue of sharing: it calls us to communicate and share both material and spiritual goods, not by coercion but out of love, so that the abundance of some may remedy the needs of others (2833).

- **Encyclical *Laudato si***

Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with

nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer (223).

- **Apostolic exhortation** *Querida Amazonia*

The Lord, who is the first to care for us, teaches us to care for our brothers and sisters and the environment which he daily gives us. This is the first ecology that we need (41).

- **Guidelines** *Economy at the service of the charism and mission* (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2018)

In any case, respect for civil laws is necessary. Particular attention should be paid to the treatment of workers. It is important to make sure to observe carefully the laws relating to work and social life, according to the principles of the social doctrine of the Church (92).

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts on the use and disposition of the goods of the Company and of personal goods: pages 71-78

Texts of the Founders: pages 177-183

Chapter 6 – Obedience

“So today we’re going to deal with the virtue of holy obedience, which is the virtue of Our Lord – His special virtue because He practiced it all His life until His death” (Saint Vincent, May 23, 1655, CCD X, 62).

Obedience is part of the condition shared by all baptized Christians because it is obedience to God’s will.

It is the obedience of all believers, Abraham, Moses, Samuel... It is that of Mary: *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38)*. It is that of Jesus to His Father: *“My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish His work” (Jn 4:34)*.

However, in most of the countries of the world, obedience is deprecated and often considered a deprivation of personal responsibility or at best a form of indifference. Obedience is clearly in contradiction with current trends of thought that insist on an individual’s right to decide everything independently without any reference to an institution, for example, the Church, or to a norm outside the individual.

From the beginning of the Company, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise asked unconditional availability, inseparable from obedience, of the first Sisters.

In order to live obedience, the Daughters of Charity freely choose to be available to fulfill God’s will **following Christ**, to commit **by the vow of obedience** and to take means to persevere in **an ever-renewed fidelity**.

A. Following Christ

“All obedience in faith is patterned on the attitude of the Son of God who, to carry out the Father’s loving plan, became obedient unto death and the death of the Cross” (C. 31a).

1. Jesus’ obedience

The vow of obedience can only be understood by looking in faith to Jesus, who was obedient His entire life.

The Gospel reveals how He lived obedience: seeking the Father’s will and desiring to carry out His loving plan.

- Seeking the Father’s will

Jesus always wanted to know and carry out the Father’s will. It was a priority in His life and something that He learned: *“Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered”* (Heb 5:8).

To do this, He turned to Scripture. In the synagogue, He read the broad outlines of His mission in the text from Isaiah (Cf. Lk 4:17-20).

He sought to be in accordance with His Father’s will; therefore, before all the decisive choices related to His mission, He prayed in trust: *“In those days He departed to the mountain to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God”* (Lk 6:12).

He sometimes wavered but recovered: *“Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will!”* (Mk 14:36).

Scripture, prayer and attentiveness to people and events traced out Jesus’ path of discovery of the Father’s will.

- Carrying out His loving plan

Jesus' obedience derives above all from filial love. Because He nurtured this relationship, He discovered little by little the Father's plan to which He was called and which He wholeheartedly embraced.

"... the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me" (Jn 14:31).

His obedience was in no way a submission. Love and faith were what made Him obey with total availability.

"His entire life... was simply a sequence of obedience" (Saint Vincent, December 19, 1659, CCD XII, 346).

2. Taking on Christ's obedience

The Daughters of Charity are invited to follow this same path. The first step on it is listening. Moreover, the word "obedience" comes from the Latin *ob-audire*, which means "to lend an ear."

As Jesus' life teaches, it is in Scripture, prayer, discernment, *"the cries of those who are poor, the calls of the Church, the signs of the times" (C. 31b)* that the Daughters of Charity, guided by the Spirit, gradually discover the Lord's will.

Taking on Christ's obedience leads to freely embracing God's will and participating in the Paschal Mystery, mystery of death and life. Sometimes this requires leaving behind one's own will and one's desire for a more personal plan: *"The obedience the Daughters of Charity have freely chosen entails sacrifices. Far from diminishing the dignity of the person, however, it enhances it by increasing the freedom of the children of God" (C. 31d).*

Obedience is not blind acceptance but discovery and then embrace of God's plan. Indeed, it implies taking on this plan and believing in it.

Advancing on the path of Christ's obedience involves accepting to be configured to the mystery of Christ: *"Christ became obedient to death, even death on a cross"* (Phil 2:8).

The obedience of the Daughters of Charity is above all an obedience inspired by the model of Jesus' obedience to His Father. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (Jn 14:15).

The priority is learning a love that grows constantly.

B. The vow of obedience

"The Daughters of Charity, ... by their vow of obedience, commit themselves to obey their Superiors, in accordance with the Constitutions and Statutes" (C. 31a).

1. The vow

In faith, the Daughters of Charity obey Superiors who have the mission of guiding them according to their vocation as servants of those who are poor. Guiding means accompanying by showing the way.

The Superiors whom the Daughters of Charity commit to obey are indicated in Constitution 31a.

In seeking the will of God together, the Daughters of Charity accept the final decision of Superiors in an attitude of freeing inner availability.

It involves placing, in faith, one's confidence in God, present in all common processes for discerning His will.

Obedying, however, in no way removes the ability to reflect, seek to understand, dialogue and make suggestions. In a constructive and open discussion, each Sister prepares to find and welcome the means for her own growth and that of the local community.

Obedience takes place through human mediations that make carrying out God's will possible.

“Authority and obedience are lived as a service that unites all Daughters of Charity in an atmosphere of trust and dialogue. In faith, the Sisters obey their Superiors, who accept the duty of guiding them, accompanying them, and making final decisions” (C. 31b).

2. A life of obedience in order to serve together

Obedience is a path of personal growth towards greater freedom, but it is also a means for building the Company together in communion and unity.

“Authority and obedience, lived in co-responsibility and subsidiarity, commit them to a common seeking and humble, loyal acceptance of God's will, made known through the cries of those who are poor, the calls of the Church, the signs of the times, and the Constitutions and Statutes” (C. 31b).

- Obedience in community

The local community is the privileged place for discerning, welcoming God's plan and advancing together towards an ever-greater fraternity. The whole community seeks to place itself in God's hands, which creates more sisterly and authentic community relationships. In this way, obedience becomes communion.

“True Daughters of Charity must be united in order to fulfill God’s expectations... Following the example of the Blessed Trinity, we must have but one heart and act with one mind as do the three divine Persons” (Saint Louise, A. 85, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 771).

Communications with the Sister Servant are occasions to review one’s way of living obedience in everyday life and, as necessary, to clarify misunderstandings, even difficulties, to accept guidance, suggestions, etc.

During community gatherings, it is the responsibility of each Sister to speak up, to listen to others and to strive to be always open to others’ thinking. No one has the whole truth, and it is good to believe that God is also at work in others.

Humility is a virtue that is inseparable from obedience because it is a matter of accepting in faith, interiorly and in practice, positions other than one’s own.

“Obedience is the daughter of humility” (Saint Louise, May 23, 1655, *CCD X*, 74).

- Obedience for the mission

Obedience has a personal, communal and missionary dimension that commits the Company in the service of Christ in the person of the poor.

“The Sisters are conscious of acting as members of the Company and of being sent forth by the Company” (C. 5c).

No Daughter of Charity can send herself on mission. Each *sending on mission* is a grace to receive, which makes everything possible, because it is an acceptance rooted in faith.

“Those in authority are responsible for making decisions, after dialogue and discernment in order to know the will of God” (C. 62b).

Obedience for the mission sometimes requires an effort to accept a decision when it does not correspond to one’s own ideas.

This is an opportunity to realize that obedience often opens doors to unexpected missionary ventures that a mere personal discernment would not have permitted.

“... from all eternity, God had His thoughts and designs on you and for you” (Saint Vincent, February 13, 1646, CCD IX, 191).

The Local Community Plan indicates the involvement of each Sister in the common mission. Each Sister contributes to the drafting of this plan, takes it on and makes it her own.

- Obedience to the Church

The Daughters of Charity, like all the faithful, obey the Sovereign Pontiff because he is the supreme authority of the Church (Cf. CIC c. 332 and C. 60).

In what concerns apostolic and pastoral activity, the Daughters of Charity remain under the jurisdiction of the Bishop (Cf. C. 1d).

In the Company, there is also an instance of supreme authority, the General Assembly (Cf. C. 87d and CIC c. 631).

Living obedience in the Church and in the Company is a sign of communion that makes visible and credible the participation in the construction of a world in accordance with the Gospel and our charism.

- Obedience and availability

Obedience, as simple and joyful obedience to the Spirit, is an attitude that comes before specific guidance from those who exercise authority.

It is a way of expressing one's love for the Company and strengthening one's sense of belonging.

This availability requires a good understanding of the sense of authority in order to have an attitude towards it that is neither infantile nor systematically rebellious. A mature attitude leads to daring to express one's thoughts while being ready to welcome other opinions.

Maturity in obedience is decisive. It is acquired progressively through events, accompaniment for reflection on them and a deep prayer life.

Maturity is expressed in increasing inner freedom, a better understanding of the sense of dialogue and a more peaceful acceptance of unexpected events.

Co-responsibility is a dimension to incorporate in the way relationships are lived. It is based on the awareness of belonging to a body that needs the generous energy of each of its members. It is expressed in a real availability based on faith, love of vocation and love of those who are poor.

Saint Vincent expressed this with the words of his time: *"You must obey willingly, punctually, cheerfully, promptly, with discernment, and, above all, for the good pleasure of God"* (June 1642, CCD IX, 57).

C. For an ever-renewed fidelity

To live obedience faithfully and in an ever-renewed way, it is essential to form oneself in an accurate understanding of this vow, nourish one's interior life, accept to live the Paschal Mystery and give of oneself with more and more joy.

1. Form oneself continually

The Daughters of Charity obey in an active, free and deliberate way. This is a life choice, a choice that makes them grow humanly and spiritually with a view to the mission.

It takes time and entering into a process of ongoing formation in order to understand this.

Therefore, beginning with initial formation and throughout her journey, a Daughter of Charity accepts accompaniment, meditates on Scripture, deepens her understanding of the Constitutions and Statutes, especially concerning the vows, and knows how to take the time for renewal.

Each Sister is personally responsible for her formation, but it is also necessary to take advantage of all that the Company may offer, whether as part of initial formation on mission or ongoing formation.

Regular dialogue with the Sister Servant is one of the means to review events and to discern what is of God and what God wants. This is an important point for living an authentic and responsible obedience.

2. Nourish one's interior life

Accepting the Spirit's guidance and living obedience in faith are only possible with a solid, enlightened interior life that is sustained by a personal relationship with Christ.

The sacramental life, meditation on the Word of God and contemplation of Christ's obedience in His relationship with the Father gradually strengthen faith in a readiness to express that faith through charity in accordance with the Gospel.

Discussions with the Sister Servant as well as with a spiritual director contribute to a Daughter of Charity's human and spiritual growth.

3. Live the Paschal Mystery

Free and informed espousal of a will other than one's own sometimes causes inner "storms," rebellions and misunderstandings. This can come, for example, from changes in local community, in ministry, suggestions for formation or accompaniment, permissions refused, etc. These are times when obeying may seem more difficult.

"... I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me" (Jn 5:30).

Undeniably, these tensions arise in obedience. What is at stake is accepting this as a participation in the Paschal Mystery, convinced that resurrection is inconceivable without death, without all those little deaths that inevitably punctuate one's life.

"In following Him and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Daughters of Charity make to God the offering of their freedom" (C. 31a).

4. Give of oneself with more and more joy

*"The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 1).*

All of life is a journey of conversion, a step-by-step process to live out in patience, the patience that God extends to each person, motivated by love.

Saint Paul said that faith does not consist so much in the accomplishment of the law understood as a system of obligations and rules but in an encounter with the living God and in the exercise of charity.

“Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10). This is where joy is found.

Obedience does not shrink the heart nor narrow horizons. On the contrary, a Daughter of Charity finds joy in giving herself totally in a generous obedience.

Joy is also *“... the driving force of perseverance... [It] does not lead to closing oneself in but to opening oneself up; it leads to service in the Church”* (CIVCSVA, *The gift of fidelity, the joy of perseverance*, 44).

To go further

1. How did Jesus live obedience?
2. Obedience in faith
How do I understand the vow of obedience?
How do I seek God's will in everyday life?
3. How are the vow of obedience and my identity as a servant connected?
4. Obedience - availability for the mission
How much am I ready to give myself in mission?
Am I ready to leave everything for another service?
How do I prepare my heart to be free enough to accept coming changes?
5. Obedience - communion
What is the connection between obedience and communion?
How can co-responsibility and responsible obedience be lived in community life?
How can I transcend my own opinions and interests for the common good?
6. Authority - obedience
What are my experiences of obedience to authority, and how have they helped me to mature?
The Daughters of Charity are called to live authority and obedience responsibly, that is, in mutual acceptance, common seeking of the Lord's will, dialogue, listening to the needs of those who are poor, sharing of gifts, co-responsibility, subsidiarity...
How does obedience cause growth in freedom and humanity?
Which inner dispositions and attitudes are necessary?
How do I situate myself in relation to human mediations?

To go deeper

- **Code of Canon Law**

The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to lawful Superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitutions (c. 601).

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to Him who died and rose for us. From now on, he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to "obey and submit" to the Church's leaders, holding them in respect and affection (1269).

- **Apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata***

The obedience which marks the consecrated life... proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and, taking this mystery as its point of departure, testifies that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. Indeed, the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will, and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom (91).

- **Instruction** *The service of authority and obedience* (CIVCSVA)

Obedience to God is the path of growth and, therefore, of freedom for the person because this obedience allows for the acceptance of a plan or a will different from one's own that not only does not deaden or lessen human dignity but is its basis. At the same time, freedom is also in itself a path of obedience, because it is in obeying the plan of the Father, in a childlike way, that the believer fulfils his or her freedom (5).

One remains devoted to the Lord when sensing in some way his presence in human intermediaries, such as in the Rule, the superiors, the community, the signs of the times, the expectations of others and, above all, the poor; when one has the courage to cast the nets on the "strength of his word" (cf. Lk 5:5) and not only from solely human motivations (11).

- **Instructions on the Vows**

Texts of the Founders: pages 183-191

Chapter 7 – Under the protection of Mary

“Whoever seeks to follow Jesus Christ encounters Mary who received Him from the Father. She was the first Christian and the consecrated Virgin par excellence, present in the life of the Company from the beginning” (C. 15a).

From the beginning, the Founders found the model for spiritual and missionary growth in Mary’s attitudes. For this reason, they invited the Daughters of Charity to contemplate and have recourse to her.

“Let’s place ourselves under her guidance, Sisters, let’s promise to give ourselves to her Son and to her without reserve so that she may be the guide of the Company in general and of each Sister in particular” (Saint Vincent, December 8, 1658, CCD X, 500).

In 1644, when the Founders were thinking of seeking recognition of the infant Company by the Church, Saint Louise made a pilgrimage to Chartres in order to offer “... to God the designs of His Providence on the Company of the Daughters of Charity. I offered the said Company entirely to Him, asking Him to destroy it rather than let it be established contrary to His holy will. I asked for it, through the prayers of the Holy Virgin, Mother and Guardian of the said Company, the purity of which it stands in need” (Saint Louise, L. 111, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 122).

The Act of Consecration that all the Daughters of Charity make on December 8 has perpetuated this offering of the Company to Mary over the centuries.

Marian devotion holds a major place in the life of the Company. Moreover, Saint Louise insisted in her *Spiritual Testament*, **“Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother”** (*Spiritual Writings*, p. 835).

The Constitutions present Mary as **model and teacher of the spiritual life** (Cf. C. 23), **servant** (Cf. C. 15b) and **model of fidelity** (Cf. C. 15b). These are the specific traits especially valued by the Daughters of Charity in order to live the spiritual, apostolic and community dimensions of their vocation.

A. Mary, model and teacher of the spiritual life

“The Daughters of Charity consider Mary the model and teacher of the spiritual life: ‘the Virgin who heeds and welcomes the Word of God, the Virgin who prays, the Virgin who offers’” (C. 23).

Mary accompanied Jesus throughout His earthly life, from His birth to His death on the cross, and she was a witness to His resurrection and then, with the disciples, of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. She was the first to believe. Through her faith, her welcoming of the Word and her open, simple and humble attitude, she shows how to enter into relationship with God.

The Daughters of Charity learn from Mary how to remain in God’s presence in everyday life through a constant prayer of praise, thanksgiving and intercession. This prayer translates into action because Mary is always attentive to others, to the needs of those who are poor and of all those who are in distress or difficulty.

Mary always leads to Jesus and teaches putting Him at the center of everything and remaining totally at His service: *“Do whatever He tells you”* (Jn 2:5).

In this sense, Mary is the model and teacher of the spiritual life.

“I am entirely yours, most Holy Virgin, that I may more perfectly belong to God” (Saint Louise, A. 4, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 695).

1. Mary, open to the Spirit

Mary is *“the Immaculate One, totally open to the Spirit”* (C. 15b). On the day of the Annunciation, she opened herself to the action of the Spirit in total confidence. She did not oppose the Lord’s desire. She made herself available and placed her being at His service: *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word”* (Lk 1:38).

Saint Louise advised the Sisters to honor Mary, to pray to her and to imitate her openness to the Spirit because *“the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin... completely enlightened her mind and strengthened her will so that she continually acted in such a way that she never omitted anything that God asked of her”* (A. 31b, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 831).

Welcoming the Spirit like Mary leads the Daughters of Charity to an experience of faith and surrender to God in order to be available for His plan in freedom and inner joy.

Mary’s free and unconditional yes inspired Pope Francis to say that she is *“the ‘all beautiful,’ the ‘all holy,’ but without the slightest shadow of complacency. She is humble. She is a masterpiece, whilst remaining humble, small, poor. In her is reflected the beauty of God which is all love, grace, gift of self”* (Pope Francis, Angelus, December 8, 2019).

Mary listened to God’s call and accepted the mission of becoming the Mother of God. The Daughters of Charity are called to this same attitude: to open themselves to the Spirit in order to respond to missionary calls.

2. Mary, totally given

Consecrated Virgin par excellence, Mary shows the way of the total gift of self. Accompanied by Mary, the Daughters of Charity give themselves fully to God for the service of those who are poor through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The prayer attributed to Saint Louise that the Daughters of Charity add to the rosary recalls that chastity is a gift for which to ask and to embrace: *“... O most pure Virgin, through your virginal purity, your Immaculate Conception, your glorious prerogative of Mother of God, obtain for me from your Divine Son, humility, charity, great purity of heart, mind and body...”*

The Magnificat inspires the Daughters of Charity to place their trust in God with a free heart and to be close and in solidarity with the *“lowly and the hungry”* (Cf. Lk 1:52-53) because Mary herself experienced poverty.

Mary teaches obedience by her *Fiat*, by her life and by her presence at the foot of the cross where she receives a new mission to become Mother of the Church. When Jesus tells her, *“Woman, behold your son”* (Jn 19:26), she gives birth anew; she gives birth to the people of believers. Her entire life was obedience.

3. Mary, model of maternal love

With all its symbolism, the message that the Virgin Mary entrusted to Saint Catherine confirms and enriches the doctrinal content of the Founders’ Marian devotion.

“The Daughters of Charity... look to ‘her who brought forth Christ... the Virgin Mary... In her own life, she gives the example of that maternal love by which all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church on behalf of the rebirth of mankind’” (C. 26).

Indeed, Mary leads to Christ: *“Come to the foot of this altar.”* He is the source of the missionary momentum that characterizes a life totally given to God for the service of those who are poor.

As Saint Catherine stresses, the globe surmounted by a cross that Mary holds in her hands represents the world, this world saved by her Son. On the one hand, there is humanity and *“each person in*

particular” and on the other hand, Christ. The globe that Mary lifts up in offering reveals her intercessory mission. Mary is Mother and mediatrix.

The Medal presents a genuine summary of the Christian faith in which Mary is closely united to the mystery of Christ’s passion and resurrection.

B. Mary, Servant

“The Founders inculcated in the Daughters of Charity the love and imitation of the Virgin Mary, inviting them to contemplate her as: ...the humble, faithful Servant of the Father’s plan, and model of the poor in spirit; the Mother of God, Mother of mercy and hope of the lowly...” (C. 15b).

1. Mary, available for God’s plan

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

This short response from Mary expresses her availability and her sense of service. *“Mary does not exalt herself before the prospect of becoming the mother of the Messiah, but rather remains modest and expresses her acceptance of the Lord’s plan. Mary does not boast... She recognizes that she is small before God and she is happy to be so. At the same time, she is aware that the fulfilment of God’s plan depends on her response, and that therefore she is called to accept it with her whole being” (Pope Francis, Angelus, December 24, 2017).* Mary is ready to collaborate in a humble and generous way.

Contemplating Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, is a way for the Daughters of Charity to learn to welcome the Lord’s will in order to serve joyfully and simply.

2. Mary, model of the poor in spirit

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah” (Lk 1:39).

At the Visitation, Mary demonstrated her readiness to go promptly to her cousin Elizabeth, to serve her, to take the time to be present alongside her in an unconditional way, to pray with her and to set off back home.

Mary is the model of the poor in spirit; she is loving, other-focused and ready to serve.

Saint Vincent invited the Daughters of Charity to have this attitude and prayed to Mary in this way:

“O Holy Virgin, who told the whole world in your Canticle that humility is the cause of your blessedness, obtain for these Sisters that they may be what God is asking of them; adorn them with your own virtues” (July 14, 1658, CCD X, 432).

The Daughters of Charity draw from Mary the desire and will to advance with a poor and free spirit along a path of humility, simplicity and service. This is the spirit of the Beatitudes: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit!” (Mt 5:3)*

3. Mary, Mother of Mercy

Our Founders liked to pray to Mary with the title of Mother of Mercy. Saint Louise explained the motivation: *“With good reason the Church addresses her as the Mother of Mercy because she is also the Mother of Grace” (A. 14b, Spiritual Writings, p. 775).*

Mary is called Mother of grace because she received through Jesus the fullness of grace for herself and for us. As Mother of God, she is the first beneficiary of divine mercy, and she intercedes with Him to obtain mercy for the world.

“Mary is also Mother of Mercy because it is to her that Jesus entrusts his Church and all humanity... Thus Mary becomes Mother of each and every one of us, the Mother who obtains for us divine mercy” (John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 120).

Saint Vincent encouraged the Daughters of Charity to invoke her: *“Let’s have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy and your great patroness”* (December 8, 1658, *CCD X*, 500).

Mary reveals God’s mercy as a grace received in order to be able to extend it to others.

Mercy is expressed by respect, fraternity, forgiveness, patience and kindness. All the characteristics of merciful love, Gospel love, contribute to making the world more human (Cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13).

C. Mary, model of fidelity

The *Fiat* of the Annunciation *“is the culminating moment of Mary’s faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole ‘journey towards God’ begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith”* (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 14).

God counted on Mary’s fidelity, and the “yes” pronounced at the Annunciation was the first of many “yeses.” Her faith did not keep her from questioning the angel: *“How can this be?”* (Lk 1:34)

Sometimes in the obscurity of faith but perseveringly, she then subscribed to God’s plan that progressively came to light.

“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

Indeed, Mary drew from prayer the strength to pursue her mission all the way to a total surrender in faith when she was still present, faithful, before the pain of her Son on Calvary.

The Daughters of Charity sustain their fidelity day after day in meditation on the Word of God and in a personal encounter with Christ. Indeed, fidelity must experience the test of time. It is necessary to be aware of this and to tend to fidelity.

It is expressed in the desire to build a sisterly community and to serve generously and joyfully.

Mary supports the fidelity of the Company and of each Sister in particular. The Daughters of Charity ask daily for the grace of fidelity: *“Obtain for me from your Divine Son... holy perseverance in my dear vocation...”*

Let us pray to Mary

“Mary, faithful woman, you were docile in welcoming the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, through your Son Jesus, teach us to preserve the gift of a vocation and to rediscover its vitality day by day.

We look to you to contemplate God’s work which renews our ability to love and heals our wounded fidelity. We look to you, persevering in following, watchful guardian and lover of the Word (cf. Lk 2:19; 2:51b), to contemplate the blessedness of those who through fidelity bear much fruit.

We look to you, persevering at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn 19:25) to stand beside the infinite crosses of the world, where Christ is still crucified in the poor and the abandoned, to bring comfort and support.

We look to you persevering with the Apostles in prayer (cf. Acts 1:12-14), to burn with the Love that never goes out, to walk in joy and to face defeats and disappointments without anxiety.

Mary, faithful woman, pray for us. obtain for us from your Son and our Redeemer a living and loving faith, a humble and industrious charity, to live the gift of fidelity in perseverance, humble and joyful seal of hope.”