

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

GENERAL CHAPTER 2000

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Casa Generalizia - Società del Sacro Cuore
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OPENING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Patricia García de Quevedo, RSCJ
Superior General

Welcome to Amiens, the birthplace of the Society! The Province of France is welcoming us to hold the General Chapter here, and we thank all those who have helped to prepare this great event in the Society. “*Amiens, berceau chéri,*” as Madeleine Sophie called it in her conference of July 30th, 1841, when she said:

I have always liked to call it thus. It is a name that brings back sweet memories of so many gifts received from Our Lord, so many special graces that I have received.

We remember Madeleine Sophie’s presence in this place, which was for her a place of suffering and of grace, and we ask her to accompany us.

It was here in Amiens, at the beginning of 1801, that the apostolic life that marked the Society of the Sacred Heart began. Today, we begin the Chapter with the theme “**Our educational mission: a pathway to discover, a space to announce the love of the Heart of Jesus**”. We open ourselves to Madeleine Sophie’s intuition and to the call to which she listened and the risks that those beginnings implied. We can say that we are in a similar situation, the beginning of a new stage in our history.

It was here in Amiens that she was elected superior general in 1806; it was here that she shouldered her destiny, that she learnt what it meant to live in union and conformity with the attitudes and feelings of Jesus. It was here that she forged her own style of government: communicating the centrality of God’s love through relationships; and it was here that, from the beginning, she learnt that

the cross is an inseparable part of following Jesus Christ.

The Spirit has been leading us throughout our long history. We need God's Spirit united to the wisdom of Madeleine Sophie, convinced that we are her second life, called to listen to her and to be faithful to her. Now at the beginning of the Chapter, let us listen to her once more:

Ah if only it were possible, if I were not unworthy, if God would give me the grace, to speak to you of the happiness of the soul who gives herself over to the Holy Spirit...whole and entire...with no reservations! If only I could tell you what takes place in her...if I could describe her happiness, it is no longer herself who acts, it is God...every step she takes is by the inspiration of the Spirit...everything becomes easy...she no longer knows difficulty, she meets no more obstacles... If the happiness of one soul open to the Spirit is so great, what would be the happiness of a gathering of souls, of a whole Society that would allow itself to be guided unreservedly by the Holy Spirit!

(Conference, June 2nd, 1827)

Today, with her, we are this “gathering of souls”, of women, of a whole Society that wants to let itself be guided by the Spirit. We are aware of our beginnings, of our history; and we are here to take the life of the Society into our own hands with love and with responsibility, as we set out together on the path that is opening up before us.

Today too, we experience in a very special way the prayer of the whole Society united with us, capitulants who represent all the provinces, districts and areas. I want to address this opening to each one of our sisters in the Society with gratitude, because we can say that we have all been living the Chapter ever since we began the preparations, in which all have participated.

We come from all the continents, and that helps us to situate

ourselves in the heart of a complex world at the beginning of this new century. We have completed a cycle of history, and now the call to religious life is to open a new one.

The General Chapter of 1994 led us to recognize the changes that are occurring in a world in profound transition and called the Society to “participate in this process as a crucial element of our commitment to defend life where it is threatened and to foster life where it is appearing in...new forms.” In its orientations, it defined us as women of communion, women of compassion and of reconciliation. Our life today is unfolding in a scenario in which we have to recognize new signs, which challenge us and mobilize us.

- Globalization is a reality that affects our life in a positive sense through the strength of our internationality, lived as resource and challenge, facilitating better communication and deepening the experience of solidarity among us and with others. But we are also aware of the negative consequences of globalization: increased poverty, exclusion, violence and war.
- The change that is coming from the emergence of a new sense of church affects our life and apostolic service in many countries. On the one hand, we are living a certain “displacement” in the heart of the Church. On the other, we are coming to a new awareness of the corporate dimension of our identity and of our responsibility with regard to education and evangelization. We continue to ask ourselves what the Society has to offer, what we have to let go of, how we can do it.
- Sharing our mission with others pushes us beyond ourselves and impels us to the recognition that our charism and mission do not belong to us, but are gifts to be shared. We want to learn how to be alongside those with whom we are in mission and to rediscover what our own contribution is: to be a prophetic sign of Gospel values.

We have lived through a whole process that has put us in touch

with our roots; we have drunk from our own wells and have understood the meaning of the changes we have lived through. On this journey the only thing that is asked of us is that we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. We want to live the Chapter in an attitude of discernment, in a spirit of faith.

A Chapter lived thus makes us attentive as a body to God's voice, takes us beyond ourselves and opens us to the unexpected so that the original dynamism of our charism may be a reality for today. We want our Chapter to be an educative experience, in which each one can give, receive and learn from others.

We are aware of our responsibility in this act of government and we are ready to take risks. In my letter of convocation I indicated the objectives that would orient us:

- to draw our inspiration and vision for the future from the sources of our tradition,
- to arrive at greater clarity as to the main characteristics of our educational mission as an international apostolic community,
- to articulate our educational *projet*, its aim, its spirit and inspiration, its strategic orientations, values and practices.

The General Chapter is an important event in the life of the Society. I would like to recall how the Constitutions describe its functions: "The General Chapter ensures and promotes both communion and vitality in the Society of the Sacred Heart in view of its mission" (Const. §157). Its responsibilities include the following:

- to protect the spiritual heritage, to give orientation to the Society, being aware of the appeals and needs of the Church and the world,
- to elect the superior general and to propose to the superior general names of those from whom she chooses her general council,
- to propose modifications to the Constitutions if it is necessary,

- to review the financial state of the Congregation,
- to establish the criteria to be followed for determining the number of delegates to the next chapter,
- to ratify the superior general's choice of secretary general and treasurer general.

I hope that the Chapter will be for us a time of growth in reciprocal relationships. This is going to be especially important during the week when the lay participants join us. The attitude of welcome and of common search as to how to respond to the needs of the world will mark a new stage in the life of the Society.

With regard to the theme of the Chapter: it was at the Assembly of Provincials in Chile that we were unanimous in expressing the desire that this bicentennial Chapter give greater definition and orientation to our educational mission. We could ask ourselves, "Why?" Now at this moment of our history, to name our apostolic priorities is to come to a greater awareness of our identity. We feel a new energy in recognizing ourselves as RSCJ educators and in knowing that it is thus that we are identified as a body.

We started this search back in 1967. Our common mission used to be identified with the academic institution. At that moment we were seeing the end of a certain type of institution and of an education that touched only one stage of life. Vatican II moved us to contemplate the Heart of Jesus in the wounded heart of humanity. Looking at the world from the perspective of the Reign of God led us to recognize how Jesus reveals Himself in the poor and marginalized of history. The theological renewal, particularly in Christology, has shaped our understanding of the theology of the Sacred Heart. In its light, education is seen as a work of transformation; and at this moment of history, the theological contribution of Latin America has made us more sensitive and ready to learn hope from the poor, a hope that encourages us on the way to the realization of the Reign of God.

During the last thirty years, with a new understanding of apostolic religious life, we have broken out of the almost exclusive model of the school, and we have moved into a wide diversity of fields open to all ages, in response to new needs. In part, our response has been a reaction to an excessive institutionalization, but also it has led us to grow in our understanding of education, even if at times this gave an impression of a certain loss of direction.

Experience has taught us that education is a life long process, which takes place within and beyond institutions: in the family, in the neighborhood, in the community, through the mass media. We know that, although teaching has its contribution to make to the process of growth, it is only one element. At times we have felt a certain dispersion and an absence of common objectives. Now is the moment to re-read this experience and to arrive at greater clarity in our common orientation; it is the moment to rediscover our institutional voice and to reinforce our visibility.

It is a fact that today, even if there are still some lingering resistances, we can affirm that we feel ourselves to be educators, that we are recognized as such in our service. We are at a new moment in which we can and we need to search for what throws light on and completes our ways of being present, our style, our different educational fields, such as formal education, popular education, work with children, with young people, with adults, especially women, with Christian communities, in human development, health, etc.

We need to go to the depths of our lived experience as religious of the Sacred Heart so as to strengthen the dynamism of our educational spirit and our priorities. We have excellent materials, the fruit of provincial chapters, from which we can draw.

Returning to the experience of Madeleine Sophie, when we talk of her educational project we tend to think it was clear to her from the beginning. Perhaps we do not sufficiently take into account her own personal process, which led her continually to search, along with

others. She was inhabited by a rich spirituality: she was a mystic and a woman of action. She translated the glory of the Sacred Heart into a concrete educational project. From her own experience, she believed in the transforming power of women.

Whereas most congregations of Madeleine Sophie's time worked in rural areas with the sick, with the young in schools and with old people, Madeleine Sophie was different. She founded schools in cities; she insisted on a high level of studies and offered a holistic education. From the beginning she wanted to offer education to the poor. She risked sending Philippine to America just eighteen years after the foundation of the Society. Our fidelity to her spirit today requires that we do things differently. It calls us to be open so that, recognizing the values of her rich legacy, we may know how to fashion an educational project adapted to the needs of today. It will not be a finished project. It will have its limitations, but it will be the expression of our creative fidelity.

We need to open ourselves so as to receive the contributions of different cultures – of Asia and Africa, of other faith traditions, of other currents of thought and action like eco-feminism. All of these will give us a vision of education as a work of co-creation. Thus, we will recognize the Spirit who cries out and who pours out her wisdom on us in the act of giving birth.

What are the challenges that we need to discern, so as to define our priorities for the coming years? The *projets* of the provinces suggest some:

- offering an alternative education in a globalized world, which builds on the positive aspects of globalization,
- offering an education in our institutions that develops the capacity to discern values and to evaluate our practice with a view to accept or reject what the situation and circumstances impose,
- collaborating with other groups so as to come to a more open and deeper relationship with lay people,

- forming leaders and multipliers, a characteristic of the Society since its beginnings,
- creating new educational spaces, like popular education, health care,
- proclaiming faith in a world in which God is “the absent one”.

We need to strengthen our understanding and living of apostolic community as an educational space in which we are always learning how to be educators with one another, nourishing the sense and dynamism of being sent to mission and accompanied in mission. We need also to reaffirm our option for the poor and to make formation for justice and peace integral to our educational mission.

I want to end with this desire: that we find new ways to revitalize our sense of belonging to a body with a common mission. May this Chapter confirm us in the full potential of our charism and in the wealth of our educational experience and tradition so as to give a significant response to the world and the Church.

Counting on each one of you, I declare the General Chapter of 2000 open.

Amiens, France
12 July 2000

INTRODUCTION

The General Chapter 2000 of the Society of the Sacred Heart took place at the beginning of the new millennium, in the year of Jubilee. This is a year in which the Church calls us to participate in God's gift of forgiveness, reconciliation and liberation from all that holds us captive, to give back to the poor what is rightfully theirs.

The convergence of the General Chapter, the Society's bicentennial celebration and this Jubilee Year offers us a unique opportunity to profess again our commitment to participate in the action of God through our service of education, **a pathway to discover, a space to announce the love of the Heart of Jesus.**

We chose Amiens as the place of our bicentennial Chapter. Amiens is the cradle of the Society, the birthplace of our apostolic mission. Here, where Saint Madeleine Sophie was elected the first Superior General of the Society, we have experienced renewal and recommitment.

In the Society's 200th year, the General Chapter is marked by new moments in the Society's history:

- For the first time our sisters from China, Moscow, Paraguay and Indonesia were present at a General Chapter. We also heard the founding story of Haiti, the Society's newest project. Listening to the reality of our mission with all these people, we opened our hearts to their joys and sufferings.

- For the first time our friends and collaborators joined us to share our life, to reflect on our mission. They challenged us to own our place in the Church; they expressed their renewed confidence in our spirituality and our service of education and they gave us energy and hope to go forward.
- For the first time we were able to communicate with the majority of our sisters around the world by Internet. We lived the paradox of using new technological means for the benefit of the mission, while millions of men and women live in war torn countries where survival is critical.

The experience of each of our sisters has shaped the work of the General Chapter. Through their eyes and their experiences we have welcomed into our hearts and into our deliberations the faces of peoples across the globe. We have had before us the faces of hope and promise, the young in their generosity, those who are restless for God, women and men who create and reverence life. We have seen the suffering of children without education, of young people searching for meaning, of those suffering from HIV/AIDS, of women abused and discriminated against, of refugees displaced by war, violence and poverty. These faces of people reveal the Heart of God.

Globalization has permeated much of our conversation and reflection. We are more than ever aware that it offers almost unlimited opportunities for many people, but for the majority it creates even greater marginalization, more devastating poverty. We are saddened to live on this divide, in a world in which

political, economic and social systems exclude peoples, cultures, even entire continents. Africa's suffering and the experience of war throughout the continent continue to touch our hearts. We are challenged to join our African sisters in a corporate action, especially against those who are supporting these wars through the arms trade.

The General Chapter has been a moment to learn what the Spirit longs to reveal of God's heart at this threshold of history. More than ever, the cries and hopes of this world call us as Society to participate in God's work of transformation. We are convinced that only by contemplating Christ's presence and action in the world will we find the strength and generosity to claim these calls and to live them with integrity.

CALLS

An Education That Transforms

We are called

- to participate in God's work of transformation of persons and societies; we renew our commitment to the service of education which is confided to us by the Church
- to live our service of education with a strong corporate sense.

From Collaboration to Reciprocity

We are called

to collaborate in reciprocity with all the people with whom we share life and mission.

From Meeting to Dialogue of Cultures

We are called

- to respond to God present in the heart of the world
- to expand our understanding of what it means to belong to a multicultural community
- to learn to live interculturality among ourselves, with others and in all that we do.

AN EDUCATION
THAT TRANSFORMS

We are called

- to participate in God's work of transformation of persons and societies; we renew our commitment to the service of education which is confided to us by the Church
- to live our service of education with a strong corporate sense.

We contemplate the Heart of Jesus in the joys, hopes and sufferings of humanity. Looking at the world from the perspective of the reign of God leads us to recognize how Jesus reveals himself in the poor and marginalized. The experience of an incarnated spirituality impels us to live education as a process of transformation.

In response to new needs of the world and with a new understanding of apostolic religious life, our service of education has opened out into diverse fields of ministry, which embrace persons of all ages in contrasting social situations. We feel particularly challenged by the plight of children, young people and women, especially those who are excluded. We are convinced that education is a lifelong process.

We live in a globalized and complex world that presents great challenges to our task of transformative education:

- the longing of millions of people to have access to the benefits of education,
- the desire of peoples and cultures that their identity and their right to belong to the global community be recognized,
- the astounding speed of technological change, which impacts on educational change in an uneven way,
- the relativizing of human and spiritual values and of what is permanent,
- the overwhelming amount of propaganda we receive through the mass media, which influences all of us, especially the young,
- the constant dialogue between the local and the global,
- the urgency for life, justice, peace and integrity of creation,
- the struggle of women for equality in relationships in society and in the Church,
- the role of organized civil society and NGOs.

We see hope in our apostolic mission that is energized by the commitment of religious, the collaboration of thousands of lay people and the contribution of civil society and of the Church. We recognize the possibility and responsibility we have, by reason of our presence in five continents, in different social realities, to join forces and to act together in order to contribute to a reconciled world, one where justice, peace, love and solidarity are made a reality. Thus, our presence will be visible and significant.

We have heard in our provinces and in the Chapter a profound desire to live our service of education with a strong sense of corporateness, in fidelity to the intuitions of Madeleine Sophie. To live this sense of corporateness, we need:

- to be sent by our provinces or the international Society
- to commit ourselves to building community, sharing faith and life
- to integrate our diverse commitments in community and provincial plans and orientations for mission (*projet*)
- to make links and networks among people working in similar ministries.

We are committed in diverse fields of ministry: in faith accompaniment, in educational institutions, in educational and health projects in marginalized areas and in collaboration with church organizations and those of civil society.

Our common vision has its source in our spirituality, orients our commitment to education from the perspective of those who suffer inequality and injustice, and is always lived in the light of the Gospel.

We value our educational philosophy, and we feel the need to re-articulate it, integrating elements of popular education methodology and of current trends in education. Our practice

continues to be enriched by the contribution of many collaborators and by our participation in civil society and in the Church.

In order that education be transformative, it is necessary:

- to assure that the person, in his or her individual, social and spiritual dimension is at the center of the educational process
- to form to critical thinking
- to accompany persons and groups in the process of faith, which commits them to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- to create educational processes that enable persons and groups to become aware of their reality, recognize their dignity, discover their potential, take decisions and be guided by the values of the reign of God
- to learn to read the Word of God from the perspective of those who are excluded
- to analyze social reality, to draw up objectives and plan actions that respond to the needs of the social context
- to work for a change of ideas and attitudes with respect to unequal relationships between men and women, among ethnic groups, religions, cultures, social classes, generations and with the environment
- to form leaders, persons and groups to ethical criteria, with the capacity for independence, solidarity and responsibility.

Grateful for the gift received from Madeleine Sophie and celebrated in a special way in this bicentenary year, we want to go forward together and live this service as **“a pathway to discover, a space to announce the love of the Heart of Jesus.”**

Strategies

1. To be close to situations where people suffer injustice, so as to become more aware of and sensitive to the suffering of others and to commit ourselves to the work of transformation.
2. To maximize the potential that working in different social realities offers us, we will unite our efforts and plan action in favor of justice and peace, using our JPIC networks, and networking with NGOs in civil society at local, national and global levels.
3. To keep up to date with trends in education, social sciences, technology and human development studies.
4. To develop educational projects with the following elements:
 - coordination of inter-disciplinary teams with grass roots involvement
 - analysis of the situation to which the project is a response
 - methodology that involves setting objectives and strategies that can be evaluated
 - collaboration with others
 - participation in networks
5. To re-articulate the philosophy of our education integrating the new elements of Chapter 2000.

FROM COLLABORATION
TO RECIPROCITY

We are called

to collaborate in reciprocity with all the people with whom we share life and mission.

Collaboration lived in reciprocity is for us a conviction, a challenge and a choice.

We discover, live and announce God's love, which is at the heart of our charism. This impels us to work together and with others in partnership, to foster life and to contribute to the building of an alternative society. The globalized world challenges us constantly and calls us anew to recognize our responsibility for and interdependence with all of creation.

Collaboration opens us to a new experience of Church, of religious life and of commitment in civil society. Collaboration is a desire of the lay persons who are close to us and with whom we work. It was also a specific request of those who participated in the Chapter and in the sessions at Joigny.

A way of being, a way of doing

Collaboration occurs at the level of our being and our doing, and it implies reciprocity. Collaboration is recognition of the dignity of persons and of peoples; it implies welcoming and sharing what each one is and offers. It requires attitudes of trust and mutual support, vulnerability and openness. It recognizes the need to learn from others and requires flexibility and imagination in discovering new possibilities together.

Collaboration implies team building, delegating and assuming our co-responsibility for the common good, working on common projects and developing together new processes in our service of education.

In order to have reciprocal relationships with our co-workers, whether we are in a position of authority or not, whether in a work sponsored by the Society or not, we need to allow our perspectives to be transformed by the outlook of others while remaining true to our own values. We are called to

express our convictions and values, especially in the face of injustice.

This new way of understanding and living collaboratively requires of us a personal conversion, necessitates ongoing formation and questions the quality of our relationships.

We are called to be profoundly collaborative at different levels: in daily life, with our neighbors, in our work place, in our local, provincial and interprovincial communities.

We walk with our lay sisters and brothers as baptized members of the Church and as citizens in society, conscious at the same time of our specific gift and responsibilities.

Strategies

1. To widen our vision of religious life and open our communities so that we can share our life and our mission with lay people and other religious congregations.
2. To form ourselves and others so that collaboration is carried out in reciprocal relationships characterized by:
 - self-knowledge and acceptance of self and others,
 - work on common projects,
 - reflection, interchange and celebration.
3. To intensify our active participation as women in the Church and in civil society.
4. To create a communication network among those working with Associates, partners in mission and similar groups.
5. To encourage solidarity and exchanges among different ministries and projects, making use of networks that already exist.

6. To strive for a better interaction among our school networks, projects for the excluded and popular education networks.
7. To join forces, make proposals and take action with alumnae/i, parents, friends, in common projects for the benefit of persons and groups who are the victims of marginalization or injustice.

FROM MEETING
TO DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

We are called:

- to respond to God present in the heart of the world
- to expand our understanding of what it means to belong to a multicultural community
- to learn to live interculturality among ourselves, with others and in all that we do.

We, as an international community made up of diverse cultures: social, economic, linguistic, generational, ethnic and national, recognize that we have not always acknowledged and appreciated the richness of this diversity, either in our world or in our communities.

We are ready to take a step forward as we realize with greater conviction that we must expand our understanding of what it means to belong to a multicultural community, for this is a reality that confronts us in the Society and in the world today.

Called to be “women of communion, compassion and reconciliation”, it is not enough to appreciate our multiculturality. We are impelled to enter into the reality of the other, to allow our boundaries to be expanded in truly reciprocal and hospitable relationships.

To participate in the process of transformation, we must learn to live interculturality among ourselves, with others and in all that we do. The process of interculturality will allow us to open ourselves to the Spirit present in each culture and to engage in a dialogue that will enable us, together, to celebrate the banquet of God, where each one has a place, sons and daughters of God.

Today globalization dominates our world vision. We believe that living interculturality could help us participate in a process of transformation which breaks through some of the negative dynamics of globalization that create particular burdens for poor, marginalized and excluded people.

Since Vatican Council II, we have been learning as a congregation to value our own local cultures and to live out our mission in response to the needs of these realities. Recent Chapter documents have called us to greater sensitivity to the movements of migrant people, to the need for inculturation of

the gospel in our respective realities and to make our internationality “good news for the poor”.

Today we hear a further call to justice and conversion. We commit ourselves to recognize, value and open ourselves to the diversity of cultures in our world and particularly among ourselves. We are challenged to live in an attitude of reconciliation. At the heart of all of our relationships we are called to be transformed and to transform.

In our desire to know deeply the richness of our diversity, to accept our differences, and strive towards reconciliation, we need to address the relationship between interculturality and language. To be called to live interculturality is to sensitize ourselves to the significance of language in the life of each person and each culture. Language is more than words. It is a complex of signs, of which words are only one kind, that shape our identities.

A person for whom there is no space to speak is not merely silenced, but is disempowered, is in some sense effaced. We are called to work to collaborate in creating this space. Cultures that overvalue words are called to learn from cultures that balance speech and non-verbal communication in different ways. We are challenged to make this a reality within the Society as well as within the world in which we work.

Interculturality must be rooted in our daily lives. It begins “at home”, by accepting oneself and others, by becoming more open, more loving and more caring in one’s own community. We wish to move towards greater interculturality in our communities and provinces, and in the way we live our mission.

Strategies

1. To work individually, in communities and in our provinces so as to know and appreciate better our own cultures and to become more aware of the many cultures to which each one belongs.
2. To analyze our cultures, opening ourselves to the challenge of the gospel.
 - To be open to new insights about our values and prejudices, including those that are entrenched in the language we use.
 - To initiate or collaborate in processes at community, provincial and inter-provincial level to help us open up our histories to reconciliation.
3. To welcome and celebrate the diverse cultures in our communities, workplaces, provinces and countries.
4. To be with and support persons from other cultures who come to live and work with us and help them to enter into the new reality without losing their own identity.
5. To collaborate with groups and organizations that work with refugees and migrants.
6. To open ourselves to faiths and traditions that we encounter and to educate ourselves to live in dialogue with them.
7. To give priority to the study of languages and commit ourselves to learn the languages of the country and culture where we are sent.

SPIRITUALITY

We are convinced...
that our lives, given in love,
are the strongest expression of our spirituality.

The spiritual journey that bound Religious of the Sacred Heart together across the world during this bicentennial year has engaged us in a single movement of sharing, deepening and communicating our experience of the Heart of Christ among ourselves and with others. During the days of this Chapter the journey continued. The Spirit moved among us and made us recognize that our spirituality is an urgent answer to today's world. We became deeply convinced that only by contemplating Christ's presence and action in the world would we find the strength and generosity to claim these calls and to live them with integrity. Thus will we respond to the needs of our world today: the thirst for God, the hunger for justice, the desire for equality, the longing for meaning and the ache to belong, the very needs we ourselves experience.

We have also found that the calls of this Chapter have challenged us profoundly to rethink and re-express our spirituality in the years ahead. We ask ourselves:

What will participation in God's work of transformation demand of us?

How will we be challenged and changed by our collaboration with others?

How will the richness of our many cultures and spiritual traditions enlarge our experience of God and the ways of God's actions in ourselves and our world?

How will a deeper commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation transform our hearts?

How will we explore and dialogue about the different theologies among us?

And what new language will be adequate to capture and communicate these new intuitions?

We are convinced as a Chapter that our lives, given in love, are the strongest expression of our spirituality. Living these Chapter calls day by day will yield a new language, whether in words, art or symbol, to express our spirituality of the Open Heart of Christ in the Church and for the world.

The journey continues.

IMPLICATIONS OF THESE CALLS FOR FORMATION

Living the calls of the General Chapter demands a **process of ongoing formation**, which begins in the first stages of religious life and continues until death. It recognizes that human growth and transformation develop throughout our lives and need support and accompaniment at each stage. This process, with clear goals, stages, and means, presupposes a plan of ongoing formation from which flow the plans for initial formation and vocation ministry. To accomplish this, each province determines the elements it needs to accentuate for each of the calls of the Chapter, taking into account the experience and knowledge that must be integrated through continual reflection. Living formation in this way will be a source of dynamism for each RSCJ and for our communities, along the lines of the General Chapter.

Each province:

- develops or revises a plan of ongoing formation in the light of the calls of the Chapter,
- reviews the Initial Formation Plan in relation to the Ongoing Formation Plan,
- clarifies and plans the objectives and duration of, the preparation for, and the reflection on the international experience,
- assures the preparation of persons responsible for this process of formation,
- takes into consideration that those who work with us in our mission of transformative education are called to ongoing development in these areas,
- is accountable to the provincial assembly and the General Council for the development of this process of ongoing

formation.

In our lives and mission today, at all stages of life, there is a particular need for formation for living our commitment to consecrated celibacy with maturity. This formation requires understanding of human development, accompaniment and mutual confidence, especially in the question of sexual orientation where silence and ignorance often cause suffering and confusion.

VOCATION MINISTRY

In the Provincial Plan recognize vocation ministry as an integral part of our commitment to education that transforms. This supposes:

- being present among young people
 - finding ways of talking about how every person is called by God
 - offering opportunities for people to search together, inviting them without reticence
 - accompanying young people in different ways: individually, in groups, spiritual exercises, etc.
 - collaborating with others who work with young people
- opening our communities
 - sharing life and work
 - finding a language adapted to communicate our spirituality
 - offering opportunities for commitment to the marginalized
- involving the whole of the province according to what each one can offer: prayer, welcome, specific activities
- entrusting the coordination of vocation ministry to a named person or commission.

ASSOCIATES

“We have the deep conviction that our spirituality does not belong only to us. It is a gift to be shared, a treasure others help us to discover.”

(General Chapter 1994, p. 28)

There are different ways of sharing our spirituality. At this time, we see the Associates as one of the means of responding in a particular way to the spirit of the Chapter. It is an expression for today of the fourth means given to us by Madeleine Sophie in the 1815 Constitutions.

Who are the Associates?

Associates of the Society of the Sacred Heart are women and men who desire to deepen their baptismal consecration and are attracted to the charism and spirituality of the Society. It is a response to the needs of lay people and sisters and offers mutual support for the enrichment of our spirituality and ministry in the world. They are part of the family of the Sacred Heart.

Aims of the Associates

- Through personal reading and reflection and meetings for mutual support, the Associates explore ways of living the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus according to the spirit of the Society.
- Through a deepening of their sense of Christian ministry in their own life and work, and a familiarity with the Society's ministries, they share a common mission with the Society of making known the love of God.
- Through regular personal prayer and faith sharing among Religious and Associates, they continue to search out a faith that gives meaning and pattern to life.

- Through a commitment to build communion within their personal and work relationships and a growing awareness of the needs of the poor of our society, they stand in solidarity with and service to a suffering world.

Relationships between the Associates and the Religious of Sacred Heart

The Associates commit themselves to:

- regular personal prayer,
- mutual support and attendance at group meetings of Associates,
- exploring ways of living the spirituality of the Heart in their own context,
- maintaining contact with the local community and/or the co-ordinator,
- becoming aware of areas of need, both locally and worldwide and, moved by compassion, responding to the sufferings and hopes of our world.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart commit themselves:

- as disciples, to live the Gospel in a spirit of mutual encouragement and learning with the Associates,
- to pray for Associates and share with them the charism and mission of the Society,
- to welcome Associates for times of prayer, of formation and certain celebrations within the community,
- to share our life of faith and offer accompaniment on their journey of faith.

Each province will see how to organize with flexibility the way to accompany the Associates. For now we want to create links among RSCJ co-ordinators of Associates to share information and experiences and to offer mutual support.

DECREES

The mandate of the Superior General will be 8 years non-renewable, *ad experimentum*.

The mandate of the General Councilors will be 8 years, non-renewable, *ad experimentum*.

The General Chapter is convoked by the Superior General with the consent of her Council every eight years, *ad experimentum*.

The present General Council continues in office until 21st November 2000 when the mandate of the new General Council begins.

DECISIONS

The General Council may authorize a province, district or area to prepare for the General Chapter and revise the Plan of Government in an open Assembly. In such a case, the Assembly has the responsibilities and powers of a Chapter.

The General Council may invite to the General Chapter any RSCJ or any other person in the capacity of invited member. (Chapter Directory 1 C 3)

The General Council will re-submit to CIVCSVA the decision taken by the 1994 General Chapter: The young professed are eligible for the provincial chapters as capitulants according to

the provisions of the provincial plan of government. Decision *ad experimentum*.

The General Council will adopt the orientations of the Chapter concerning Vocation Ministry and encourage provinces/districts/areas in their implementation.

The General Council will adopt the orientations of the Chapter concerning Associates and encourage those provinces/districts/areas that want to communicate our spirituality through such a structure.

The General Council will establish an international commission for Education, which will work in co-ordination with the existing international commissions of Justice and Peace and of Finances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the General Council give special attention to processes, networks, meetings, groupings and to the inter-action between provinces and seek ways to accompany such processes and to encourage them to go forward.

That the General Council study the duration of the mandate of the provincial superior so that a decision may be taken at the next Chapter.

That there be two Assemblies of Provincials before the next General Chapter.

That the criteria for the number of delegates for the General Chapter of 2008 be established at the second Assembly of Provincials after consultation in the provinces, *ad experimentum*. (Const. §162)

That the General Council continue to study the possibility of NGO status for the Society of the Sacred Heart at the United Nations in the light of the General Council's report to the General Chapter 2000. That they participate in the research on this topic being undertaken by a group of international congregations in Rome exploring the possibility of doing this together. That the General Council be authorized to initiate an application for NGO status if their discernment leads them to judge that this would be the right step to take as one way of working with civil society for justice at international level.

That the General Council name a committee to study the financial implications of setting up a website, virtual center and home page. The General Chapter recommends that the General Council also consider the ethical dimension of such a project, insisting that current means of communication continue to be used with provinces that have no access to Internet.

That the General Treasurer, helped by the International Commission for Finances, assist provincial treasurers:

- to establish a long term financial plan, taking into account the calls of the General Chapter, and a policy for alternative investments
- to strengthen community of goods in the province and among provinces.

We commit ourselves to integrate these calls into our planning and decisions at personal, community, provincial and general levels.

In order to guide and inspire us on the way forward in response to the calls we heard at this Chapter, we ask the General Council to initiate a review and evaluation process at all levels of the Society in 2004. We ask also that they find ways of facilitating the sharing of this review among provinces, districts and areas.

CLOSING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2000

Clare Pratt, RSCJ
Superior General elect

We have come to the end of a historic Chapter: forty days of journeying, working, praying, laughing and celebrating together, and our hearts are full of a mixture of emotions. As Mickey McKay pointed out several days ago, some of us may be feeling some anxiety about how we will communicate to those at home an experience that has been deeper and more powerful than any text that has tried to capture it. We have created deep bonds, and there is the inevitable pain of saying goodbye, wondering if and when we will see one another again. Although we have experienced moments of feeling a bit like Elias in the first reading of last Sunday's liturgy, sitting under his broom tree in desolation and discouragement, more often we were journeying to Mount Horeb, the mount of God, mutually nourishing and sustaining one another on the way.

We have been challenged, confirmed, comforted and compelled by the Word of God spoken in many languages, communicated through many symbols. We have been nourished by the Bread of Life – the lives of our sisters, of our peoples, whose cherished faces we brought with us, whose names remain written in our hearts, and to whom we will return with joy to speak with our very lives a word of encouragement and hope.

These days have been woven together in song, in color, in dance, with many significant symbols – symbols of hope, of communion, of reconciliation:

- the building of the altar with each one's brick, with spaces within and between – spaces that welcomed candles and flowers, bricks that were deconstructed, rearranged, always with a view to expressing our corporateness;

- the planting of seeds, an echo of so many of the descriptions of education that appeared in the booklet presenting each chapter participant and that greeted us from the back wall as we entered the Chapter room each morning;
- the gift of the figurine of the Peruvian child to our newly-born mission of Haiti;
- the recent dances of reconciliation: England/Wales with Ireland/Scotland, Korea with Japan;
- the vital mosaic of our many cultures, each piece in itself unique and precious, forming an organic whole that is so much more than just the sum of its parts.

We have not walked this road alone, but have been accompanied all along the way:

- by Sophie, whose presence, dreams, sufferings and courage are still palpable here;
- by Philippine, who reminds us that the grain of wheat has to die in order to bear fruit;
- by the diocese of Amiens, in the person of Bishop Noyer and his priests and people, who have given us an encouraging experience of the local Church;
- by all the staff here who went out of their way to provide for our every need;
- by our lay participants who continued to be with us long after their departure, through their warm words of encouragement and their promise of continued collaboration as we go into the future, leaving their distinctive mark on our work;
- by other congregations, who sent us words of support and solidarity, and
- by our sisters all over the world, who remained attentive to our progress; praying for us in their communities, in their places of ministry, in our infirmaries, with associates and others who love us.

I want you to take home with you a special word of thanks to our

elderly sisters who have accompanied us in prayer, in suffering, with great love. This Chapter is the fruit of their long years of fidelity, their willingness to allow the Society to change. Many of them have been our mentors, our memory, our midwives and our grandmothers. My hope is that, as in Elizabeth, something within them will leap for joy when they encounter us upon our return, that they will recognize and rejoice in the new life we bear.

What is this new life that energizes us, that we want to proclaim to the entire world? We do have a sense that something new is coming to birth. During the past several days I have struggled to name it. Then, yesterday morning it began to come clear. I heard it in the heartbeat of the Japanese drums and in the silence between the lines as Hiroko read Psalm 139. Later that day I remembered that, in her opening conference, Patricia had said that we would “recognize the Spirit who cries out and who pours out her wisdom on us in the act of giving birth.” I realized that we came here to discover anew our educational mission, and what we finally discovered anew was the transforming power of God’s love. In the discussion on community the discernment of six weeks reached a height and a depth that left me in awe. We seemed to experience a kind of exchange of hearts, which made possible the experience of having one heart: *Cor Unum et Anima Una in Corde Jesu*. It was the seal of the Spirit on our Chapter.

It is this love that we want to announce in every space and place, in every ministry, in every encounter. We depart from Amiens energized by a document we can all own, the fruit of weeks of prayer and work, knowing that it is only a beginning. It sets the direction. Now we must make our way in each province, district, area and newly-born project, fleshing out how, in each situation, in whatever we do, we can educate in a way that is truly transformative; how as a multicultural community, striving to live an ever deeper interculturality, we can keep “widening the space of our tents,” entering the spaces of others’ tents in genuine collaboration; and how we can express the dynamism of our spirituality of the heart in language we have yet to discover.

And so we come to the end of this privileged time with grateful hearts. There are so many to whom we owe gratitude:

- Michèle Nard and our sisters of France, who, in ways evident and hidden, prepared our arrival and continued to attend to the innumerable practical details that are inherent in a large gathering such as ours;
- the translators: Margaret Phelan, Miyako Namikawa, Toya Castejón, María José Montoya, Geneviève de Thélin, Maryvonne Duclaux, Ysabel Lorthiois and Mary Finalyson, without whom we could not have communicated and who gave themselves unsparingly with great generosity;
- the secretaries: Frances Gimber, Marie-Thérèse Deprecq, Blanca de Sivatte and Marion Charley, hidden away in the “E” building, who often worked while we slept to translate and photocopy draft after draft. They were like the leaven permitting our bread to rise and be shared;
- Sandra McSheaffrey, who with her invisible communications team of Elisabeth le Jariel and Elvira Rabatté, sensitively and efficiently produced the excellent communications that allowed the whole Society to experience the Chapter;
- Núria O’Callaghan, whose generous, expert help with machines of every kind allowed us to make full use of the technology at our disposal;
- Paquita Tamayo, whose careful record-keeping is an archivist’s delight and future researchers’ treasure;
- Lorna Brockett and Kin Tanabe, whose firm but gentle hand on the rudder of our boat made conversation among us possible – no easy task!
- Mickey McKay, Marisa Sacerdote, Dolores Aleixandre and Françoise Greffe, whose facilitation of process and prayer helped us immeasurably to ready our sails so that the Spirit could fill them and move us ahead together. We all acknowledge that the climate of discernment, which has been so palpable throughout

the Chapter, was due in large part to them.

And finally, what a debt of gratitude we owe to Patricia, who, together with Ursula, Mary, Marta, and Maryvonne, has led our journey these six years toward the celebration of our bicentenary. I will not repeat the loving words spoken last Wednesday by the provincials, but only say that each one of us has unforgettable memories in her heart. Our debt is enormous. They have truly been a team. They have worked indefatigably with sensitivity, courage, perseverance, and great love. They have taught us something about being the “Heart of God on earth.”

On Tuesday, when we were in Brussels, I asked Sophie to let them know the depth of our gratitude and to tell them how pleased she is with their stewardship of “this little Society.” I asked her to be with Mariado Górriz, Jane Maltby, Marisa Sacerdote, Son In Sook and me as we begin our service. To lead the Society of the Sacred Heart into a new century, a new millennium in a world that more than ever needs to encounter God’s love, is both exciting and daunting; but we know that the whole Society is walking this road together with us. Let us go forth from here with courage and confidence and renewed passion, for the glory of the Heart of Jesus, for the transformation of our world!

Amiens, France
20 August 2000