

**GENERAL CHAPTER**

**1988**

**SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART**

**OF JESUS**

# GENERAL CHAPTER

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## OPENING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Mother Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ

Superior General

As I wrote in my letter of the 12th October, 1987, quoting Cardinal Pironio: ".... a chapter is a celebration, an event that is - salvific, ecclesial, familial."

The time has come to begin this celebration, to live this event together, to live it in discernment and openness to the Spirit with Mary, Mother of Jesus, just as the apostles did while awaiting the Spirit. Today the whole Society is united in prayer with us capitulants to whom they have given their trust.

We have just invoked the Spirit to come upon us - Spirit of Love who enkindles within us the fire of love: Spirit of Wisdom who will teach us all things: Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole universe: the Spirit who comes to help us in our weakness (Rom 8: 26). Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Father of the Poor. Come, Light of all Peoples.

This opening contains three parts: a reminder of our responsibility as capitulants, a short reflection on the message of Philippine and a sharing of some intuitions on apostolic religious life.

We might be in awe at the seriousness of this moment and all of us are aware of the importance of our task. As capitulants we are called to be:

- persons of dialogue, capable of listening, trusting, open to learn from others, available and discerning:
- prophetic persons who are sensitive, courageous, prayerful, have a vision for the Society:

- wounded healers who are compassionate, non-judgemental, who “love tenderly”, who rejoice in life (Qualities and Responsibilities of a Chapter Delegate, Morneau).

I thank God that this description is for the totality of the Chapter capitulants and not for each individual for none of us would qualify. We need each other, and I know that as we live this experience, we will grow in our awareness of this need.

The canonization of Philippine, which colours the beginning of this second Society event, has re-awakened in us a missionary dynamism. This missionary spirit is our heritage: it is alive today. So much has been said and written about Philippine recently that I don't dare to add more. However, I do dare to pose some questions for reflection on the theme of our Chapter, **OUR APOSTOLIC VOCATION**.

- Philippine had a clear and dynamic vision for the Society, which gave her direction, enthusiasm, fortitude, which captured her total energy. What is our vision today? Do we bring to it this two-fold dimension of an apostle, a profound life of prayer and joy in mission?

- Though distances were great and communication extremely difficult, Philippine adapted as she could to the new circumstances and was indefatigable in her efforts to keep this mission united to the body of the Society. How do we give concrete expression to our desire for union while assuring a true inculturation?

- Philippine's dream was to be one with the Indians, to live with them. After years of waiting, she went to the Potawatomis whom she loved dearly. Who are our “Potawatomis”?

- Her love for the poor, for the most abandoned was clear and strong. What place do the poor have in our life?

As preparation for this Chapter, I reflected upon apostolic religious life and this gave me some intuitions and evoked questions that I would like to share with you now very

simply, inviting you to add your own, for I am sure you have them also.

I believe that Religious Life is at a crossroads and that these next years are crucial for its development. We have, I think, not yet totally surrendered ourselves to the dynamic forces of transformation initiated by the Spirit at Vatican II. I see the “now” as a potent moment of “re-foundation”, to use the expression of Fr. Gerald Arbuckle, S.M. A moment of “re-foundation” is to experience again - conversion, confirmation, and sending forth.

What are we called to as consecrated women? We are called to be fully women of our day, prepared to face the complexity of our world with its rapidly changing trends, tendencies and movements, women who are critical and energizing. Critical because we feel in the depths of our being that not everything is as it should be “I have heard the cry of my people” (Ex 3: 9-10). Yahweh felt the cry, heard it, said to Moses, “Go, I am sending you.” Energizing because as I said in my last letter for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, “Jesus calls us to a constant hope that is a constant mobilization of our energies in favour of the human dignity of each person”. I see here a real challenge, a strong call: to be authentic in our expression that gives flesh, that incarnates our preferential love for the poor.

We are called to radicality. To be women who speak of God's active presence in our world, women who are willing to love to the end with all the consequences of that, giving our life for our sisters and brothers so that they may have life. We were made for a life of giving and a giving of life.

We are called to be women who know that the source of all energy is to be drawn from prolonged prayer. Our freedom to respond to the Spirit demands a profound contemplation in faith of our reality that sets us on fire to spread the Word of God. Rather than becoming discouraged by our inadequacies, we are called to be women who draw strength from sharing his concerns instead of growing weak with our anxious preoccupations; women who so thirst for his Kingdom of justice and peace that we are not paralyzed by the seemingly overwhelming powers of evil; women who become one with Him as He was one with the Father. But we are also called to be

communities that are counter-witnesses in the world to selfishness and individualism by witnessing to universal love. If we want to have real meaning and true direction in life we need a radical conversion at the basis of which is an unconditional following of Christ who came to make us one.

I pray that this Chapter be a moment when our desire is rekindled, when we are re-captivated by our charism, when our hearts are renewed by the vision the Spirit is revealing to us; I pray for the courage we need to face up to the things that have to change, to what we would have to do if the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Love were really to penetrate our lives. We are painfully aware of the problems of our world and the Church. There are so many needs and they weigh heavily on our consciousness. We cannot respond to all of them - but we are called to discern how to direct our energies, empowered by the strength of our convictions and the union of our hearts in our specific response. We must be open to what is the Lord's will for us as Society loving, serving, and collaborating with the People of God building up his Kingdom.

It is my deep hope that these weeks may be a time of concentrated prayer and discernment so that the Chapter will bring into clear and strong focus our apostolic orientation and the mission to which the Lord is calling us.

St. Madeleine Sophie and her first companions, women of their day, responded generously and energetically to the signs of their times, touched and impelled by the reality of the historical moment in which they were living. They were gifted with the charism, aglow with the Spirit, “full of ardent zeal to obtain for the Sacred Heart of Jesus the honour to which it is so fully entitled” (Const. 1815, 26). We women of the 20th Century are gathered in our desire to read the signs of our times, to be caught up in generous enthusiasm and to surrender our energies without reserve to the creative forces at work in us “...we answer His call to discover and reveal His Love letting ourselves be transformed by His Spirit so as to live united and conformed to Him, and through our love and service to radiate the very love of His Heart” (Const. 1982, 4).

It is using Paul's words, Paul the first missionary, that I wish to conclude: "May the God of hope bring you (us) such joy and peace in your (our) faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope." (Rom 15: 13)

Rome, Villa Lante

11 July 1988

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER REPORT

To welcome and make known to others  
the love of God  
made manifest in Jesus  
is to learn to contemplate reality  
and to experience it with his Heart.  
As General Chapter we have worked  
to read the signs of the times  
to discover there  
what the Spirit is expecting of us as an

### **International Apostolic Community**

At this moment in the Society's history.  
we let the world set our agenda.

The faces we see every day  
have been with us in this Chapter:  
the faces of **young people**,  
the faces of the **poor** and of **migrants**,  
and of **women** everywhere  
who live with inequality and oppression.

Little by little  
the process of **inculturation**  
is changing the face of the Society  
giving us new energy and life.  
This very process is moving us  
- not without divergences and tensions –  
towards a deeper sense  
of our internationality.  
It is the unifying strength of our charism  
That commits us to deepen  
This dialogue among cultures.

The Provincial Chapters

and the international reflection on education  
identified certain pressing world issues.  
As we deepened our understanding of these issues  
by an analysis of concrete case,  
we were struck by the fundamental ambiguity  
of the human situation.  
We realized our need to acknowledge  
the **political dimension** inherent in our lives.  
We felt called to share  
Christ's concern for the dignity of each human person.

Our deliberations have led us  
to formulate more clearly  
some convictions we hold in common  
and some orientations for the whole Society.  
Each province will discern  
concrete ways of implementing them.  
Out of respect for the dynamic process  
and inner unity of each one,  
the six themes of the Chapter are presented here  
as they came from the commissions.

Our Constitutions  
ask of us an attitude of constant conversion  
encourage us in our service of the Church,  
and send us forth  
to be responsive to the God who is life.  
Our celebration together of the missionary courage  
of Philippine commits us, like her,  
to surrender all our energy to the power of the Spirit  
and to take creative steps forward  
within our provinces and across frontiers...

## **THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE**

### **Introduction:**

The political dimension of our lives is a reality that we have been discovering little by little; it has been addressed in General Chapter for the first time. It is clear that we need to continue to explore this dimension. In our insertions to serve the poor, and in our efforts to take their side, we have learned that in order to build the Kingdom we need: to be committed to human life, to work for peace and justice, to foster social change, to undergo conversion of heart and to carry out small projects which speak of Gospel values.

### **I. THE CALL:**

We recognize the call which comes to us from:

#### **The World**

Certain salient characteristics indicate the gravity of the world situation:

- the gap between the so-called developed and developing regions of the world is widening (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 14);
- prevailing political and economic systems have generated the current economic crisis including the debt crisis and, in many places, new forms of poverty and social segregation (cf. SRS 14, 17, 1);
- violence of every kind, arms production and trade, and destruction of the environment are serious disorders which threaten our world (cf. SRS 24, 26, 33, 34);
- the tremendous potential and resources of science, technology, and information, when not orientated toward the true good of human persons, can easily be turned to their oppression (cf. SRS 28);

- the decisions which contribute to or impede the development of peoples, and even their possibilities for survival, are really political in character (cf. SRS 35).

### **The Gospel**

The call to live the Beatitudes and the values of the Kingdom impels us to work for justice in the world, as one aspect of evangelization.

### **The Church**

In its social teaching since Vatican II, and notably in the recent encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Church calls us to engage in a theological reading of modern problems and to reflect on the following moral consequences of our present situation (cf. SRS 35):

- the social question has acquired a world-wide dimension because the demand for justice can now only be satisfied at that level (cf. SRS 10);
- there is so close an interdependence among various parts of the world that, when this interdependence is separated from its ethical requirements, there are disastrous consequences for the weakest (cf. SRS 17);
- a world divided into blocs, sustained by rigid ideologies, in which, instead of interdependence and solidarity, different forms of imperialism hold sway, can only be a world subject to “structures of sin” in which we all participate (cf. SRS 36-37);
- in such a world, every human being is called to practice solidarity (cf. SRS 32, 38-39).

### **The Society of the Sacred Heart**

In our Constitutions we have recognized that:

- our charism calls us to solidarity with the poor and rejected (cf. Const. 7);

- the Eucharist draws us to be women who create communion in a divided and unjust world (cf. Const. 6, 37);
- wherever we are sent, we express a concern for the growth of the whole person, a thirst for working towards justice and peace in a world in response to the cry of the poor, and a passion to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Const. 13).

## **II. OUR EXPERIENCE**

During the past twenty years, we have been trying to respond to these appeals of the Church and the world and to take the side of the poor. Today, we want to probe what this experience has been teaching us, believing this may help us find a path for the future.

- As we have learned to recognize the inequalities of our world and its injustice on the one hand, and the signs and practice of solidarity on the other, we have come to understand that our call to be women of communion has a political dimension: politics organize human relationships and social structures. We can collaborate in changing the quality of human relationships if we accept our need for conversion and our responsibility to bring our creative contribution, however modest.
- We have come to understand that our lives and the historical processes of our people are interwoven:
  - ° the context in which we live conditions our manner of living, feeling, thinking, and relating
  - ° whether we recognize it or not, our actions and omissions have a political dimension.

Therefore, we recognize our need to become increasingly aware of our preconceptions and assumptions if we want to be free to discern.

- Because the Gospel calls us to live out in the political dimension the attitudes of Jesus, we need to deepen our incarnational spirituality.
- We have learned that we cannot separate proclamation of the Kingdom from ethical evaluation of the socio-economic and political structures of our world.
- We have realized:
  - ° that our political and socio-economic formation is inadequate, and that lack of knowledge in these areas hinders our work for justice and can lead us to be  
 Manipulated by others or act in ways that are naïve and even counter-productive;
  - ° that we need to reflect and discern together, as RSCJ, in our communities, at appropriate levels, in response to the situations in which we live, learning to accept differences of conviction, respecting the liberty of each one, and avoiding impositions of opinion whether by the majority or the minority.

### **III. LINES OF ACTION**

Reflection on these calls and on the implications of our experience suggests the following lines of action; if we are to recognize more fully the political dimension of our apostolic life and to live the consequences with thoughtful integrity, we need:

- to deepen our understanding of the political and socio-economic factors in our complex world and, in that perspective, to strengthen our theological preparation and learn methods of social analysis;
- to study and evaluate our educational commitments (cf. IEC 15-17, 31-35, 66-69) and to ensure that our educational service helps form persons who can discern values;

- to accept that certain ambiguities and tensions are part and parcel both of our situations and of our effort to make decisions congruent with our fundamental choices;
  
- to discern in community the consequences of this political dimension for us as Religious of the Sacred Heart; to recognize that there are many and different ways each of us can respond in our local settings and according to our gifts and possibilities, and to give corporate support to those who, in the light of this discernment, make political commitments – sometimes involving real risk;
  
- to live this political dimension with the attitudes of active non-violence, in collaboration with others working for justice, human rights, peace and the stewardship of creation.

## THE WORLD OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As we face **the world of young people** we appreciate their freshness and their vitality which direct us towards the future. We appreciate the values most important to them: solidarity, friendship and peace, their creativity and their ability to foster change. We also acknowledge that today perhaps the most vulnerable in our society are the young.

We are aware that while young people have their own culture, their situations differ from country to country. Most of them lack the basic necessities of life and are forced to enter early into the world of adulthood without having had a real childhood, while others have plenty of opportunities.

Some political systems provide little or no place for them and governments often use education more for their own purposes than for the real growth of persons.

Science, technology and mass media, which should be at the service of human development, frequently become a threat for young people. The communications media inform but also exploit them. Another manner of understanding and expressing sexuality is evolving. The ability to relate humanly is diminished.

The struggle to find work causes anguish. Families are in crisis. Violence is increasing. Drugs have become a social phenomenon providing escape for young people; they are at the same time a form of economic exploitation. Many young people suffer serious psychological damage and lack a coherent ethical framework.

In all this reality, there are seeds of hope: young people are searching for meaning in life and for authentic human relationships; many are taking part in the struggle to promote human dignity. On the religious level their hopes and attitudes vary: often relativism or indifference towards established religions, sometimes a search for security in sects, but also an attraction for mysticism. Some young people experience

God, others live the Gospel in a new way in communities; these communities are a new way of being Church.

The urgency of the plight of youth today is as much a priority for us in countries where they constitute a majority of the population as in countries where they are a minority. We are invited to be present to young people in this critical stage of their growth, to listen to what they have to tell us, and to help them during their period of transition.

“Youth culture” impels us to devise new and creative educational spaces in our provinces, our communities, our institutions and our diverse apostolic activities.

We respect their authority and their values, and emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships; we want our relationships with them to be truly reciprocal.

We are moved by their woundedness and feel called to love them with a love which is freeing and strong.

God’s love, in Jesus, is the most radical transforming power for us, for them, for the world; a world with more justice and sharing, which we wish to build together.

Our contemplative outlook on the situation of young people today calls us to conversion. The concrete commitments we make towards them differ according to the stages of our lives but will follow these **educational guidelines**.

1. Trust young people and help them to further their own growth. Help them to become capable of making decisions and to take the consequences so that they can become integrated and independent.
2. Be open to their spirit of solidarity and encourage their commitment to social change. Offer participative structures which invite young people to create projects to foster solidarity and service to promote justice and peace through social change.

3. Give priority to certain aspects of human development in young people:
  - help them develop humanizing relationships which respect differences among people;
  - help them develop their critical skills and the awareness of their social and moral responsibility: their attitudes, actions and omissions;
  - make them aware of the political dimension of reality;
  - help them share who they are and what they have in solidarity with others;
  - motivate them to use their free time creatively and in the spirit of “giving freely what has been freely given”.
  
4. Be particularly attentive to those young people most seriously wounded. Among the most wounded are those who suffer from problems caused by poverty, violence, pressure from competition, drug addiction, AIDS, emigration, family break-up, etc...:
  - participate in preventive programs or actions,
  - welcome them, seek with them ways of resolving their situation, propose professional help,

so that they can discover their own dignity and find their place in life.
  
5. Show young people the Gospel as life-giving for us:
  - welcome their forms of expression and commitment,
  - let ourselves be challenged by them,
  - live our community life as Religious of the Sacred Heart so that it can be a place where people gather and share faith,
  - discover with them how to bring Gospel values into all areas of life,

so that young people will be filled with a new sense of life. Transformed by the experience of God and the discovery of Christian community, they can be witnesses to other young people of the values of the Gospel.

  - Dare to present our religious vocation as a way of life among other ecclesial commitments.

It is important that we appreciate the characteristics of this new generation of young people and that we adapt our initial formation and on-going formation so that they are consistent with these educative guidelines which we wish to live in our ministry with them.

## SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

Starting from our own experiences, we have been touched by the stark reality of the poverty of our peoples. The cry of the poor – hungry, homeless, unemployed – women, men and children struggling for life, or whose dignity is demeaned – speaks to us of the seriousness of injustice and makes us realize how we are caught up in it. In their faces, we contemplate the suffering Christ and at the same time glimpse signs of resurrection.

We see that injustice increases, creating new forms of exploitation and marginalization, that the causes of poverty grow more and more complex and that its consequences are more and more destructive.<sup>1</sup>

Faced with this growing challenge at this moment of the Society's history and in line with the orientations of the last Chapters, we are convinced that **solidarity with the poor** remains our response to injustice in the world. This solidarity asks of us not only interest and presence, but above all commitment and action.

**Solidarity** is at the heart of our charism.

Living this **solidarity** with all the strength and potential of our international multicultural character impels us:

- a) to continue and to encourage “insertions” among the poor;
- b) to acknowledge joyfully that living among the poor, giving and receiving welcome and friendship, changes us;

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<sup>1</sup> ) The encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, chapter 3, presents well the worldwide view of injustice, and the International Education Commission document, page 21, presents a picture of the poor whom we know.

- c) to open ourselves to the insights of the poor in order that mutuality will be the hallmark of our educational service;
- d) to encourage sharing with the neediest;
- e) to make our choices consistent with our values and to assume the financial consequences;
- f) to collaborate more at all levels, participating in groups with the same aims and promoting solidarity among such groups;
- g) to use whatever “institutional power” we have in favour of the poor (educational networks, resources: personnel, skills, influence, funds and properties...);
- h) to participate in initiatives which enable poor people to determine their own forms of educational growth;
- i) to keep looking for significant steps – small though they be – to align ourselves with the Church of the poor.

Living this **solidarity** requires working **for justice and peace**. This work, with the aim of transforming unjust structures, encourages us:

- a) to help each other move beyond attitudes towards injustice which are simplistic, defensive or fearful;
- b) to foster in young people a sense of responsibility for building a more just world’
- c) to communicate significant actions taken in various countries which will strengthen solidarity, justice and peace;

d) to face the fact that in work with the poor every act and every failure to act has political significance and consequences;

e) to base our responses on serious and sustained reflection and analyses, not only among ourselves, but especially with the poor themselves.

This **solidarity** requires openness, experience, discernment and on-going formation which is congruent with our fundamental choices.

This commitment will lead us to take different steps at the local, provincial and international levels. Humbly and with courage, together, we walk the same **way**.

## THE WORLD OF MIGRANT PEOPLES

Mass migration is a sign of the times: all over the world people are on the move, driven by economic and political forces, drawn by hope of a better future.

### **By migrants we mean:**

1. Internal migrants of our countries.
2. Immigrants and refugees from other countries.
3. Emigrants leaving their homeland or returning.

It is the poor among them who call us in a special way: they are often undocumented, without work, isolated, vulnerable and denied civil rights. Immigration policies are becoming more and more restrictive and discriminatory. Often women and children are the prime victims of these situations.

As **international apostolic community** we are called to be sensitive to the hopes and sufferings of migrant peoples. Our charism urges us to open our hearts to them, to welcome them, to be in **solidarity** with them, helping to bring the people of the world together.

In reflecting on our experiences:

- we have been struck by the importance of **relationships**: love and friendship are a universal language;
- we believe in the importance of **reciprocity** and in mutual enrichment; contact with those who suffer makes us more human;
- we know that our relationships have an **educative dimension**: we are convinced of the value and dignity of each person and that it is the poor themselves who are the agents of their own transformation.

To be in **solidarity** means:

### **I. To be close to them, with them,**

attentive to their needs, to be a bridge between cultures:

- a. by getting to know them and their culture; listening to their “voice”, being in direct contact with them;
- b. by helping those who have recently arrived to settle, to learn the language and gain access to services, where these exist;
- c. by discovering and sharing **together** the values of our respective cultures and religions;
- d. by helping young immigrants and their parents caught between two cultures, to appreciate the riches of their own culture and those of their new country;
- e. by providing pastoral care and offering the support of our Christian communities to those migrants who have been uprooted;
- f. by being attentive to those who emigrate and those who return, seeing to ease their way (preparation, contacts);
- g. by exploring the possibility of RSCJ giving temporary service in another province and encouraging inter-provincial collaboration at the service of migrants.

## **II. To work for justice for migrant peoples:**

### **a. working for change in our outlooks and attitudes:**

- 1. by being attentive to any element of racism, lack of openness to differences, domineering attitudes expressed through our language and unguarded behaviour;
- 2. by learning to look at society, history and theology from points of view other than our own;
- 3. by trying to realize more in our lives that we are pilgrim people, and to deepen the attitudes that stem from this reality: willingness to be uprooted and available, striving to overcome our rationalistic tendencies;

### **b. working to change racist attitudes, structures and unjust laws:**

- 1. by adapting our educational methods and structures to make them more responsive to the needs of the immigrants;

2. by taking part in action for the promotion of the rights of migrants in our countries;

3. by putting the institutional power which is ours at the service of migrant peoples, especially of refugees, in order to influence public opinion, government policies and legislation.

Wherever we are engaged with migrant people we think that collaboration with other organizations (public, private or Church) is indispensable.

## **WOMEN**

When we shared our experiences and reflection on the situation of women in our different cultures, the injustice experienced by one half of the human race struck us forcibly. As women, religious and educators, we are involved in this and we feel it is urgent to take action.

### **I. We make the following observations:**

- wherever there is poverty, women suffer more and bear more of the consequences;
- the dignity of women, created in the image of God, is frequently denied and, therefore, their basic equality with men is not accepted. But, in fact, women are also called to use their gifts for the development of the world;
- often they are oppressed or in an inferior position:
  - in the family,
  - at work (discrimination, salary)
  - in the social, economic and juridical structures, where the law does not respect their rights,
  - in the Church, where their place is minimized;
- the image of woman is often distorted by their own culture and by advertising which exploits their bodies;
- as a result, they often have difficulty in valuing their true worth and so they contribute unconsciously to their own oppression.

### **At the same time:**

- in Salvation history, as in all history, women play an important role. Mary, who shared the situation of the women of her time, was chosen to bring forth God's Word to the world;
- in certain regions, the Church is a meeting place where women can express themselves and take up responsibilities;
- in a world which has need of peace, love and hope, women have the capacity to give life and to protect and foster it. With tenderness, courage, inwardness and

creativity, they can contribute to the building of a more human world. An indication of this lies in the inter-connectedness between initiatives for the promotion of women, and those which promote peace and the protection of the environment.

## **II. And, so we are called:**

- to work with other women so that together we may become aware of our dignity, of our potential and of our responsibility;
- to promote the acceptance of the fundamental equality and complementarity of women and men;
- to assume our responsibility in the Church, aware that Jesus not only confirmed the dignity of women but also involved them in the building of the Kingdom;
- to be challenged by all these calls, especially in areas where women are particularly deprived;
- to be open to conversion, so that as RSCJ we may be fully ourselves in a way that is happy and life-giving.

## **III. Lines of action:**

- **To reflect** on our own **formation**, initial and on-going, so as to:
  - be attentive to personal integration, at every level (body, mind, activity) and throughout the different stages of our life as women. We also need to become conscious of the negative images of women that we may harbour and even communicate as positive values;
  - develop our capacity for relationships of complementarity and mutual respect with both sexes;
  - discover that formation takes place within a context of inculturation and solidarity and should prepare us for it;
  - equip ourselves to grasp the socio-political implications of our commitments and their ambiguity;

- keep in touch with developments in reproductive technology so as to appreciate the service it can render and be aware of the consequences for beings;
  - encourage theological study and reflection which will enable us better to share the strength of our charism within the Church. Experience tells us that we need to include study of the role of Mary.
- 
- **To be alert** to the place of women in their country (Social analysis, IEC pp. 39,46) as well as to the forms of education that are available to women.
- 
- **To ensure** that, true to our charism, all our **educative work enables** women to take their rightful place.

# INCULTURATION

## **I. Introduction**

Since Vatican II, the Society has tried to enter more deeply into the hearts of the people among whom it lives. This happens in different ways according to the reality of our countries and cultures.

We have shared the experiences of our people and have recognized how doing this has changed us. This growing identification with them has accentuated our cultural differences and has affected our dialogue as an international Society.

Many of us brought to the Chapter a conviction that inculturation is an important issue for our inter-national apostolic community. Our reflection on the interaction between culture and faith in this context has been a significant one which has made us realize how much more we need to deepen our understanding of this theme.

The call today is to move beyond the tensions this dialogue may create, to let go of our prejudices and become more receptive to others, to accept our differences and the contributions of each culture. In this way we will live our communion in faith, as a vital aspect of our charism.

A long history of transculturation in many countries of the world speaks to us of the importance of inculturation in the liberation of peoples and the search for justice.

In this moment of our history, we hear a call for each one to enter more profoundly into her own culture and live our charism and mission with more intensity.

## **II. Conviction/Insights**

1. Inculturation is an exigency of the Incarnation which is at the heart of our charism.

2. To live inculturation means to live in solidarity with our people, and to enter into their history.

3. We believe that the Spirit is at work and that we can perceive this presence in the truly human and spiritual values of each culture. We believe, too, that each culture has its specific contribution to offer.

4. We recognize that no society or culture totally reflects the Gospel message; therefore, we want to have a critical mind, capable of analysis, enlightened by faith.

5. Technology is modifying all our cultures. It both benefits and threatens humanity and challenges us to assume a creative responsibility for our world.

6. Through our choices to be with people who are suffering or marginalized, our insertion among the poor, our dialogue with people of non-Christian religions, our efforts to be open to young people, and to enter into a culture different from our own, we experience a profound self-emptying that transforms us.

### **III. Challenges**

Inculturation asks of us an attitude and a continual process of **discernment**:

- to understand and value the changing cultures in which we live;
- to be ready to live with ambiguity and to accept tensions with creativity;
- to recognize and appreciate the minority cultures within our countries;
- to discover and acknowledge the values present in the theologies of different cultures;
- to be challenged by the life of the poor in each of our cultures.

### **IV. Some Lines of Action We Encourage Provinces To Take**

1. To continue to study and deepen the relationship of faith and culture in our realities (cf. IEC, Inculturation, pp. 26-29), giving attention to:

- the world of youth,
- solidarity with the poor,
- the role of women,
- impact of migrant people,
- the political implications of our choices.

2. To encourage learning the language and symbolic expressions of the people among whom we live.

3. To assure that our initial and on-going formation is congruent with the culture of our countries and with our internationality.

## **V. Conclusion**

During the General Chapter we began to understand in a new way that inculturation is shaping our way of being, our way of serving the people of God and our understanding of internationality. As we engage in a dialogue of cultures within the Society, we will, no doubt, encounter difficulties and suffering as we try to remain true to ourselves and open to others.

In the measure that each province/district lives in solidarity with its people in faith and remains open to the gifts of other cultures, a communion of cultures becomes possible, a communion whose foundation is the Heart of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The orientations established  
by this Chapter  
began in the life of our communities  
and the reflection of our provincial chapters.  
Now it is the task of the provinces  
to enter into a new discernment  
and to find creative ways  
of making them concrete.  
The Spirit, at work in the world,  
goes ahead of us.

We are challenged  
to a more active collaboration  
between provinces  
in the next six years  
and to be mutually responsible  
to share with each other  
what God impels us to do.

Each one's commitment  
to contribute to the progress of the whole  
is an expression of our communion. (Const. 140)

## CLOSING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Mother Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ  
Superior General

In voting the documents of this Chapter, we have committed ourselves to live the orientations they give and to communicate them to everyone in the Society.

These pages call to mind so many faces; faces mirroring suffering and poverty, faces mirroring beauty and greatness. By entering into our history, Jesus, the human face of God, has illuminated the faces of men and of women, and he has become for us the “key to read” every other face. Jesus, the “key to read” is the Way, the Truth, the Life.

We have frequently pondered these very words. Christ, in his self-revelation, desiring that we should grasp his nature and his mission, was not afraid to compare himself to a way, a path, which we follow often without even being aware of it, and which always offers us a meaning, a direction. Christ called himself the Way, and also the Truth and the Life; he linked these three concepts together in the mind of his disciples forever.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life: these three are one because all three are Christ.

**Christ is our Way.** He is the one we must follow, it is through him that we must go, it is with him that we must journey.

Risks, the unexpected, walking without stopping - these are some of the characteristics of every way.

This Chapter has opened a way before us. It is up to each one to follow it with a steadfast purpose; now is the moment to set off and walk. Our Constitutions will guide us in the way that we must take together as an International Apostolic Community, our feet firmly on the ground, “standing still before God while walking with our brothers and sisters” (Dougherty)

The six themes helped us to live these weeks with our ears attuned to welcome the calls from different lands and thus take more deeply to heart the importance for our world today of our mission as educators.

The pages we have written contain challenges which question and probe, and they call for creative and audacious responses on our part.

As we walk this way, **Christ is our Truth**. He invites us to incarnate this truth in our whole life, in our relationships, our commitments, our choices.

During the course of our deliberations we have taken steps in the way of truth and we have done this through our acceptance of ourselves, just as we are. We have experienced our differences, our limitations, felt the need to open ourselves to the truth of the other and to welcome it so as to make it our own and thus to grow in our *Cor Unum*.

In order to continue taking steps on this way and so that these pages may become more and more alive for us, I feel that communication between communities and between provinces is essential. This will be all the more fruitful because it will serve as a continuation of the sharing, in the simplicity of our truth, that we have lived here during the Chapter. To communicate, as we know, is inseparable from “how”, and it is always for us in view of communion. It is up to each province to find its own “how” and it is up to all of us to share our experiences during these coming six years as we try to live these orientations.

**Christ is our Life**. During these weeks, the Word addressed Itself to us, not to isolated individuals or to independent commissions, but to us as an International

Apostolic Community. It is this Word, source of Life, who has shaped us and leads us to live as People of God.

This Life needs to be nourished:

- by continuing to read the signs of the times, perceiving new needs, and sensing how the world is moving;
- by taking our charism to heart in a new way so as to put it at the service of what we are doing or of new needs that arise, while deepening the Constitutions so that they become Life in us;
- by mutually encouraging one another to a deep personal renewal.

This is another way to express, I believe, the idea of “re-foundation”, that is to say the experience of conversion, confirmation and sending.

We have a service in the Church, a mission to accomplish in our world of today. It is not triumphalism on our part to say this; it is the conviction which comes from having welcomed God's initiative in our lives. Our mission as International Apostolic Community is and always will be to build the Kingdom through manifesting the love of Christ wherever we are sent.

At the end of the liturgy this evening, each person will be sent to her province. I suggest that we take a few moments to reflect on the attitude we desire to have in order to receive the grace of this sending.

A way is open before us. The fate of the Society is in our lives, in our hands. May Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life help us continue to live His mission courageously.

Rome, Villa Lante

19 August 1988