

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

GENERAL CHAPTER

7 JULY – 15 AUGUST

1994

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OPENING
OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
JULY 1994

Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ
Superior General

Welcome to Aylmer and to our General Chapter, and many thanks to the members of the Canadian Province for their warm welcome to this beautiful country. I am sure that little by little we are beginning to feel at home in “le Monastère.”

We have come together from different parts of the world to participate in the most important event of the Society, one in which all its members are represented. We do so in order to ensure and promote both communion and vitality in view of our mission in the world of today. I have no doubt that we are conscious of our responsibility in participating in this act of government.

The General Chapter, as our Constitutions tell us (No. 162):

- protects our spiritual heritage
- evaluates the progress of the Society
- gives orientations to the Society, being aware of the appeals and needs...guided by the Gospel and the Constitutions
- elects the superior general
- proposes names for the General Council
- it revises, deals, establishes, ratifies.

As the General Council wrote in our letter of June 26, 1992, the specific objectives of this Chapter are:

- to review the life of the Society during the past years
- to take the pulse of how we have lived the Constitutions...
- to establish the orientations which will help us to live more fully our mission as Religious of the Sacred Heart in the heart of the world today...

As I reflected on the responsibilities outlined in the Constitutions, a very significant phrase drew my attention: “**guided by the Gospel and the Constitutions.**” Whatever we do, decide, vote deliberate, protect or evaluate...we have to do “guided by the spirit of the Gospel and the Constitutions,” that is guided by the Spirit of Jesus, open to His action and to His life.

This is the way the first Christian community acted. We read about it in the Acts of the Apostles, discovering what it means to be open to the action of the Spirit and thus elect, propose, deal, revise, ratify.

There are some verses of Acts that I find not only delightful, but also particularly relevant for us, and on which I would like to comment. The event takes place just after the Pentecost event. Those who knew the disciples before and see them now are “amazed and astonished” (2: 7). “Visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them telling in our own tongues the great things God has done” (2: 11). The text continues, “They were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What can this mean?’ Others said contemptuously, ‘They’ve been drinking!’” (2:12-13).

People cannot understand. These men are not the same; they speak with enthusiasm. They have a passion within them, to announce the Gospel. Before, when they were with Jesus they were so concerned about themselves. Who will be the first? the greatest?

Now they feel urged to leave the “Upper Room”, to go and share with others the hope that inhabits them. And Peter, who, before the death of Jesus, had not the courage to acknowledge that he was “one of them”, is now the first one to confess publicly and without fear his faith in the Risen Lord. So filled are they with the Spirit of Jesus that people say to one another, “They’ve been drinking!”

Apostolic dynamism urges the disciples to seek indefatigably how to preach the Gospel in different cultures and to adapt themselves to different situations, making themselves understood by all.

What experience have they lived that has transformed them? Luke needs images to describe it. He speaks of “a strong, driving wind” (2:2), of “tongues of fire” (2:3).

While the day of Pentecost was running its course they were all together in one place, when suddenly there came from the sky a noise like that of a strong driving wind, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them power of utterance (2:1-4).

A Chapter is a Pentecost event.

Gathered as community we welcome the Spirit who comes to transform us and recreate us.

The Spirit comes to help us discern what orientation to take so as to respond to the needs of the Church and the world.

The Spirit comes to enlighten and question us particularly in two complementary and fundamental realities, community and mission. We look for newness in continuity and union in diversity; both have to be the fruit of the action of the Spirit in us.

Let us now look very briefly at the present situation of religious life.

We all know that religious life is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it exists “at those points of intersection where the Kingdom of God meets the world”. (O’Murchu)

In every age new forms and adaptations of consecrated life have emerged in response to significant historical moments calling religious life to answer in new ways. These changes always demand an understanding of the world with its hopes and longing, its expectations, and a listening to its cries, its needs. It demands that we look for alternatives and respond to its calls

New ideas and alternatives are a sign of life. They can be the seeds out of which the future can be created, but there is a fragility within them. These “seeds” are born of a dynamic interaction with our changing world if we are conscious of its reality, free from existing structure, and deeply faithful to the charism of the Congregation.

The Spirit fructifies these “seeds” and transforms their fragility. They will then grow into a vigorous plant, big or small I do not know, but able to respond to the needs of the Church and the world.

Our era holds a real challenge for us, a challenge filled with seeds of hope. Changing times, though difficult, always bear within them new life because the Spirit who is life acts through history. Let us look courageously at our own reality as a congregation. How we view the shape of the future will depend on the way we read and interpret this reality with its positive aspects, but also with those others what are conflictive, painful and “questioning” for some, like diminishing numbers, few novices, aging communities, institutional decline in many provinces.

Today we are called to stand with courage and with hope at the intersection where the Kingdom of God meets the world and there hear the voice of the Spirit, welcome his/her action and allow her/him to guide our deliberations.

The General Chapter is the place -- at least this is my hope -- where the discernment begun as Society when walking our Road to Emmaus will come to fruition.

I would like to end with the Prophecy of Joel quoted by Peter in his first discourse:

I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:17).

The Spirit awakens in us the “visions”, ideals, utopias, proper to those who want to build the future.

The Spirit helps us to “dream dreams”; without dreams history does not change.

The Spirit infuses **Hope** and **Life**. The God in whom we believe and whose love we are called to manifest is the God who gives life and gives it in abundance.

I hope and pray the “visions and dreams” of the first Christian community will enlighten us and also spur us on throughout the Chapter, as we stand at the crossroads and face all that concerns the life of the Society, its mission and community. Our future depends largely on our “dreams” and our “visions”. Today the Spirit invites us, calls us, to discern and to listen to the newness of the Word speaking to us through events and circumstances and through each one present here.

During the preparation for this Chapter the words of Madeleine Sophie to Adrienne Michel in 1811 have challenged and inspired me: “If I had to live my life over again, I would seek only to listen to the Holy Spirit”. It is with her words and with Madeleine Sophie herself that I declare the General Chapter of 1994 open.

Sing: *Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Let us pray:

Come to us, Father of the Poor,
Come, Giver of Gifts,
Light of our hearts;
Wash what is unclean,
Pour water upon what is dry,
Heal what is hurt,
Loosen up what is rigid,
Warm what is freezing,
Straighten up what is crooked and bent,
Be with us, dwell within us;

Come, Light of our hearts,
Renew us day after day
as we seek direction for our Society
in the years to come. Amen.

Aylmer, Québec
8 July 1994

INTRODUCTION

We have been walking the road to Emmaus since 1992 and, as General Chapter, we have come to the crossroads. Looking back over the road together, we have seen the broad vision of the Society and its reality which is both fragile and full of promise. This Chapter has been a shared adventure, opening our eyes to signs of life and enabling us to respond together. This has not always been easy, but we have made progress through our trust and attentiveness to the Spirit and to each other.

The desire to nourish and nurture life and to defend it where it is threatened has been strong in us, and this is the thread which integrates all the themes, unifying them and giving them their perspective. As women and as RSCJ in search of a refounding impetus, we move towards the threshold of the third millennium.

We are impelled to open our eyes to the realities of our world in the throes of profound change. Forces of life and death struggle in constant ambiguity. As **international community**, We are challenged to collaborate with others in our efforts for life.

In the face of conflict and violence in our world, **education for reconciliation** becomes an urgent necessity which demands of us the search for justice, respect and truth.

This task begins in each one of us and touches every level of our service and of our **community life**, whether it be international, provincial or local. The founding vision of St. Madeleine Sophie continues to inspire us in a divided world where we believe that to live in solidarity is a sign of communion.

We discover the pierced Heart of Jesus when we contemplate this reality. His desire to communicate and share life draws us to give our lives in following him. It unites us and awakens in us the **eucharistic dimension of our spirituality**.

We want to make this dream reality during the next six years. Some aspects of co-responsibility at the international level will strengthen communication, solidarity and interdependence.

The participation of all the members of the Society will enrich and deepen our commitments and give rise to new ones and new promise for the future.

This Chapter is just one stage and our findings are limited, but it opens up vistas of ongoing discoveries.

OUR RESPONSE, AS SOCIETY, TO A WORLD IN PROFOUND TRANSITION

The Society chooses to let the world set its agenda, to name specific calls of the world and the Church in our present moment. Only thus can we be where the piercing of the heart is taking place; only thus can we be where God's fidelity and mercy are being revealed (cf. Const. #162).

OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS

In 1988, the General Chapter called us to acknowledge the political dimension of our solidarity with: poor people in their struggle for life; women in their subordinated status; young people in conditions of crisis; and the world's migrants and refugees in their vulnerability. The events of the past six years certainly confirm this call.

Absolute poverty¹ has worsened in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America and, though decreasing, is still a human crisis in large parts of Asia. In many countries, the consequences of violent conflict, the AIDS epidemic, external debt² and related structural adjustment policies,³ state corruption, and environmental degradation are exacting a toll in human suffering and intensifying the effects of poverty. In all of our countries, certain economic and political processes - often compounded by racism, sexism, and/or ethnic and religious discrimination - displace various groups of people, making them marginal and superfluous. In 1994, we are more certain than ever that ours is a world of people on the move, dispossessed and driven out, within and across borders, by forces in which they have absolutely no say. RSCJ who have been living and working with people in such desperate situations over the past six years find in them resilience, profound commitment to life, and the will to organize themselves to take action.

In 1988, we took tentative steps to name our commitment to improve the condition of women. Since then, along with the rest of the world, we have been learning about the extent and severity of violence directed against women at every stage of their existence and in all aspects of their lives. Helen McLaughlin's letters have sharpened our awareness of the suffering women undergo and called us to compassion. We have grown in our understanding of all the barriers sexism imposes. This deeper understanding has been prompting us to go beyond stereotypical views of feminism in order to hear, in the women's movement, a real call of the Spirit. So has work, in our local settings, with women whose inner strength enables them to make life more human for all, including themselves.

In some countries, we have come to see that the oppression of women also limits their participation in the Church. Certain forms of language, hierarchical structures, and aspects of organization, ritual, and teaching exclude the experience and gifts of women. Scholarship on women's issues, including feminist reinterpretations of Scripture and theology, has helped some of us to reflect more deeply on our experience as women in society and in the Church and to be prepared, beyond anger, to act constructively.

The 1988 Chapter reflection on the crises facing young people is, lamentably, even more true today than when it was written. No wonder, that young people around the globe are concluding that human institutions are corrupt and will fail them, and that they can do nothing about it. While the demoralization of young people is of urgent concern, especially to women with an educational mission, we can, at least take heart from their willingness to give voluntary service and their passionate concern for planet earth.

When the 1994 Chapter reviewed the orientations from 1988, the delegates realized two additional issues have marked the past six years: extensive, even explosive violence and widespread damage to ecological systems. We have begun to understand that it is not possible to separate action on behalf of poor people, women and children, young people, migrants and refugees, and indigenous peoples from commitment to counteract violence against persons and against the earth.

RECENT PROFOUND CHANGES

We have known for decades that ours is a world of rapid and far-reaching change and that it will continue to be so. Even so, nothing prepared us for the profound transformation in the international system since the last time the Society met in General Chapter. We have been living through an epoch future historians will doubtless define as a watershed in human social development. We have seen the collapse of Communism. We have seen the fact and the bitterness of apartheid overcome by those with a vision of what human society can and should be. We have seen walls fall that we thought were immovable until people power broke through.

We are living with the consequences of the *apparent* triumph of capitalism and the distortions that result.⁴ We have seen the proliferation of arms but also the destruction of some nuclear weapons. The rapid development of communications technologies enables people around the world not only to witness, but also to participate in social movements. The rapid development of biotechnology means human beings are acquiring the capacity to direct organic processes, as well as social ones. All these developments give rise to ethical dilemmas and challenges. We have hardly begun to comprehend the implications of these transformations. The stripping away of familiar international structures and landmarks, along with the ideologies that sustained them, has left us alternately elated or despairing, and often without a compass.

These extraordinary events have occurred within the context of other important social phenomena already underway for decades. Changing roles within the family and increasing burdens on families have significant social consequences in many part of the globe, as does the crisis of family life. In some countries, many people experience a crisis of moral values and a lack of ethical moorings.

Not surprisingly, such fundamental change can provoke retreat to old, failed solutions. The world is witnessing the re-emergence of fascism, nationalism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. New orthodoxies, such as neo-liberal economic theory, are spreading.⁵ Fundamentalist movements are prominent within all major religions. Everywhere, we see the resort to spiritualist solutions. In local, national, and international settings, we hear the appeal to "tend our own gardens".

Although we sometimes feel paralyzed by the complexity of global issues and powerless in the face of human suffering, we have reason to hope. The world has also witnessed the way human beings can pull together, against the odds, to achieve the incredible: small, creative steps that build civil society and defend human rights.

The changes underway in our world create a rare and important opening for new responses to urgent human problems, provided the human community can be creative and courageous enough first to imagine, and then to implement, new social, political, and economic solutions.

The General Chapter of 1994 calls 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 important new forms.

OUR ORIENTATION FOR THE NEXT SIX YEARS

Within ourselves:

Rekindle our hope and keep it alive.

We might begin by *examining whether we have given up hope* in the possibility that human beings can create more just and peaceful societies. Without such hope, how can we respond, as educators, to young people in their disillusionment? Our commitment to solidarity requires such hope, lest we participate, unintentionally, in the view that the poor or marginalized may be discounted because they have no capacity to change or to effect change. Hope opens our eyes to the small steps that groups all around us are taking in favor of more just and equitable structures and solutions. Hope holds fast to the essential human values that might be lost as people focus on material well-being. Such hope finds its strength in the faithfulness of God.

Keep trying to go to the roots of problems.

Disciplined searching to understand the root causes of injustice, inequality, and the denial of freedom is the on-going formation the world requires of us if we are to carry out our mission as an international apostolic community. Our evangelical service requires this. It is the asceticism of the RSCJ educator.

Be there with the poorest and the marginalized and be evangelized by them.

The on-going work of our inserted communities to discover with their peoples alternative, more human ways of living is as essential as effort to work for justice at the international level.

Within our Church:

Act courageously on our conviction about the prophetic role of religious life in the Church.

This means making space for new ministerial expression of our charism and being attentive to the new places in which the Church is taking root.

At times, being prophetic within our Church requires us to resist the forms of retrenchment and involution that emerge in our local settings.

At times, it calls us to affirm and collaborate in the efforts of many individuals and groups to be the people of God.

At times, it means working toward a Church whose commitment to justice and equality for women is reflected in its structures.

At times, it calls us to endorse and participate in the creative and courageous efforts of the Church to mediate between peoples and governments and to advocate solutions based on respect for human rights.

Whatever our ministerial service, make the connection between faith and life.

Depending on our particular settings, this may mean:

- drawing on our own faith in a God who can bring life out of death: when we need to stand by poor people whose resilience ebbs, whose attempts to exercise “people power” are defeated; when our service seems ineffective; or when God seems silent in the face of human tragedy.

- in situations where secularism has reinforced a loss of meaning, accompanying persons in their search and announcing the gospel in new ways.

- assisting young adults (or older ones) in discriminating between resort to spiritualist solutions and development of an authentic spirituality which is rooted in the experience of the incarnate God and finds its expression in solidarity.

- ensuring that our work of education is rooted in the gospel and motivated by our analysis of the needs of the Church and the world.

Within Our World:

Act courageously on our conviction about the prophetic role of religious life in the World.

This is no ordinary time. Many of our countries are living in the aftermath of decades of war; civil strife; authoritarian regimes; one party rule; disastrous economic priorities and programs; structural discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion; systemic corruption; and failed state institutions or projects. The need to recover, to reunify, and to rebuild is imperative. Recent changes in our world have opened possibilities for this work, but this opening might close over if the moment is missed. In response, many individuals and groups are trying to develop and then put into practice a new moral vision of what human societies can and should become. They are engaging in the project of building civil society⁶ and authentic democracy, based on respect for human rights and care for the earth. They find ways to call attention to, and to resist,

new or re-emerging threats to human life. They work at local, national, and international levels, often achieving their goals by forging imaginative and effective links among them.

The 1994 General Chapter calls the Society to join this process, to collaborate with such initiatives in our own settings, as a significant aspect of the prophetic role of religious in building the Reign of God.

In the face of change, imagine new human possibilities.

Our world is desperate for justice, desperate for hope - and desperate for the vision and leadership they require.

Can we recognize, and foster, in the human rights movement, the biblical call to protect the bruised reed, to care for the widow and the orphan, the homeless beggar at the gate?

Can we discover in the work of small and large social movements, within and beyond borders, the multiplication of the loaves and the talents? Through our participation, can we help ensure such groups practice the values they seek to implement?

Can we recognize in the ecological movement the gospel call to be faithful stewards of all that has been entrusted to us?

What is our own role in new efforts among our peoples to rectify corruption by acting honestly and justly in daily life?

When the political and economic solutions or ideologies to which we have given allegiance have failed to accomplish their purposes, can we find the courage to recognize the fact? Can we find the discipline to learn why? Can we foster, in ourselves and in others, the hope and the creativity to begin again, to imagine the new response?

Can we hear in the strong desire for "one world" – a desire we share with so many – a deeper desire for life and oneness in God?

How can we make the Society's internationality good news for the poor? How might we ensure that our decisions to cooperate and integrate within and across regions serve the wider community?⁷ Can we see in our efforts to become an international community a parable of what it could mean if the human community were to make of our world an international society?

STRATEGIES

At the central Level:

The 1994 General Chapter asks the General Council to:

- set priorities (involving the membership) for the response of our

international community to the needs of the Church and the world (e.g. a call to Africa);

- facilitate networking and communication between and among provinces (e.g. building the community of provincials, inviting the Society's participation in work for a "Jubilee Year" focused on writing down the external debt in poor countries;⁸ enabling Society representation at the International Women's Conference in Beijing, 1995);
- call on provinces to share personnel and resources according to priorities;
- put in place a methodology and processes that will enable members of the Society to deepen their understanding of critical issues of justice and peace (e.g. resource kits that compile research and analysis on key problems);
- set up meetings among RSCJ working in response to named priorities (e.g. those working with refugees, those working in the ecological movement, etc.);
- link the Society, at the international level, with other groups working for justice and peace (e.g. investigating the possibilities of NGO status, the feasibility of a justice/solidarity desk, etc.).

At the provincial level:

The General Chapter asks the provinces to:

- identify the ways in our own local circumstances that civil society needs to be reshaped;
- identify ways that individuals and communities within the province, in their various circumstances, can participate with groups taking creative steps for more human ways of living (including the small steps anyone can take no matter what her circumstance or her age, e.g. being hospitable, remaining interested in events, writing letters, volunteering, tutoring, recycling, etc.);
- take initiatives to link horizontally with other provinces for the sake of our mission;
- find ways to strengthen commitment, among members of the province, to the international dimension of our Society's mission;
- respond, with generosity, to calls from the central level.

At the personal and community level, many other strategies will be suggested by these orientations.

Notes

¹ Absolute poverty is a deficit in what is necessary for minimal well-being: lack of access, on a regular basis, to sufficient calories, safe and drinkable water, minimal preventive health care, and basic education.

² External debt: includes the debts governments and public agencies within any country owe to governments, intergovernmental organizations, or banks outside of their countries, as well as the obligations of private debtors within a country for which the government has guaranteed repayment. Usually, these debts must be paid in hard currency.

Approximately 33 countries are "debt-distressed." That is, their debt service (combination of interest and principal payments) is more than 25% of their foreign exchange earnings. Much Latin American external debt is owed to private banks. Most Sub-Saharan African debt is owed to other governments and intergovernmental organizations.

³ States undergoing a balance of payments crisis (often related to their debt service burdens) are eligible for increased financing and/or debt rescheduling or reduction if they agree to work out, with and under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a plan to "adjust" their economic policies along a market-oriented line. Typical Structural Adjustment Packages include policies to contract imports (devalue local currency), increase exports (depress wages), reduce public spending (cut the government payroll, reduce social sector spending, cut subsidies), stimulate investment (privatization), and increase domestic income (user fees for public services.) If, on paper, this makes sense from a financial perspective, the reality is that many very poor countries import essential goods (like food, medicine, oil, mechanical equipment, etc.) and many people are on the government payroll, few poor people can afford the new fees for schooling, water, or health care; they depend on food subsidies; and their wages are already at, or below, subsistence level.

⁴ "We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called 'Real Socialism' leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization" (§35); "Economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous...[it] loses its necessary relationship to the human person" (§39). John Paul II, Centesimus Annus.

⁵ Neo-liberal economic theory refers to a rejection of Keynesian economic theory and a return to classic, free-market economic theory in which the government plays little or no role in the regulation of the economy. Neoliberal economic reforms mean reduction in government direction of the economy--apart from the government's role to create incentives (e.g. tax arrangements) that favor investment and private initiative--and reduction in public spending, that is, in the provision of government services and safety nets. Structural Adjustment Policies, described above, follow this line.

⁶ There are many definitions of civil society, some antithetical. At a minimum, the term refers to what quality of relationships fills the space between the individual (or the collection of individuals) and the state. The moral vision of civil society is based on respect for the dignity and freedom of the person and the responsibility of persons, together, to shape the common good and to ensure that the institutions of the state are grounded in that. It is possible to build civil society within and across borders.

⁷ Some recent examples of regional cooperation and integration in the Society include: a joint noviceship in France and Belgium; joint care for elderly religious in Holland and Germany; meetings of Young Professed in Asia, Latin America, and Europe; regional meetings of Provincials; and the European Forum. Some provinces have also expressed intuitions about possible realignment of provinces in response to changing circumstances within and beyond the Society.

⁸ Peace and justice groups around the world are calling for this "jubilee year," in the biblical sense of the term (cf. Lev 25:1), fifty years after the establishment of the international financial institutions at Bretton Woods.

TO NURTURE LIFE BY EDUCATING TO RECONCILIATION

A CALL

The reality of our deeply wounded and divided world,
where change is rapid and far reaching,
but where there are signs of hope;
all this impels us to contemplate that world
in and through the Heart of Christ.

It is as an international community,
rooted in our spirituality and charism,
that we are called to respond
with a **new urgency**
to the most pressing needs of our world
as educators:

*women of communion,
women of compassion,
women of reconciliation.*

The Gospel invites each one, wherever she is, to search with compassion and hope
for ways to build communion.
We need conversion and we want to enter into the process of reconciliation which
God offers us in Jesus.

A CONVICTION

*We are sent by the Church
to communicate the love of the Heart of Jesus.
In Him all find their true growth as persons
and the way towards reconciliation with one another.
This we believe, this we want to proclaim (Const. #10).*

A LINE OF ACTION

We feel the urgency to EDUCATE TO RECONCILIATION based on respect for
oneself, others, the earth, in truth and justice.

Respect demands welcoming the richness of differences:

- letting ourselves be challenged by the values of other cultures;
- accepting the call to change our stereotypical attitudes, our inferiority and superiority complexes towards other persons and different mentalities.

Truth requires:

- confronting conflicts and sufferings without negating them,
- going to the roots of issues, believing in the capacity of persons to search for just solutions and to forgive.

The search for justice requires:

- looking at the world through the eyes and feelings of those who suffer any kind of poverty or marginalization;
- being aware that there are structures which oppress and destroy humanity;
- growing in sensitivity to the suffering of those who have neither voice nor power;
- educating to a deeper commitment to justice.

The search for reconciliation and peace calls us:

- to develop methodologies based on non-violence
- to foster relationships where there is participation and reciprocity.

For this to be possible we need to create spaces that give welcome, to be in solidarity with persons so they can live, value the meaning of life, discover their own worth and be open to the gift of faith.

AN EMPHASIS

Creative COLLABORATION with others is essential in our educational work, as well as in our efforts towards reconciliation.

Open and vulnerable, we want to learn from our sisters and brothers of every age, race, creed and social condition, allowing ourselves to be challenged to live more authentically in the Spirit of the Gospel.

We wish to share the richness of our charism and the educative intuition of Madeleine Sophie handed down through history and lived today in greater internationality.

This gift that we have received urges us to work with others towards a more habitable world.

We want to collaborate and to be in solidarity with groups and institutions which defend human rights and which work for justice and peace.

A COMMITMENT

Wishing to deepen our vocation as educators and give it a new, corporate expression, we commit ourselves

To nurture life by educating to reconciliation,

**and in each province to explore this call,
making it concrete
and being open to where it may lead.**

If we let ourselves be led by this movement, together we can dream of a world where life is able to grow, to be reborn, to be celebrated, where all can share joyfully as sisters and brothers harmony with all of creation.

Cf. Constitutions
IEC Document
Chapter 1988
Letters, Helen McLaughlin:
Peace (June, 1990)
Compassion (April, 1992)

INTERNATIONAL APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

The reality of the world,
the following of Christ
a deepening of our roots
call us to a conversion and a collective movement as an international community to
choose and nurture life wherever we are.

As the Chapter of 1994 we have experienced anew the strength of our **internationality**. We are convinced that our living internationality is no longer a choice but a responsibility in the face of the calls of today. This gift, which we have received from the time of St. Madeleine Sophie, is a joy for us.

The extent of our internationality, which is rooted in our charism, calls us more and more to respond to the needs of the world, especially to the powerless and marginalized. It also calls us increasingly to a deep contemplative outlook on the world, which leads to non-violent political action in such areas as nationalism, violence, injustice, and oppression.

We experience the originality of each culture which enriches our internationality. At the same time, we notice the tension between our various cultures and internationality, and we suffer from this tension. Individualism, racism, the fear of losing one's own identity, the need for self-affirmation at the expense of others prevent us from going to the heart of each culture, embracing it without condescension and allowing ourselves to be challenged by it. To en flesh the Gospel in different realities we need constant conversion. We believe that to live in interdependence and solidarity is a sign and a witness of communion in a divided world.

In response to the calls that the world makes to us, we commit ourselves to live the following lines of action:

- a) that provinces strengthen the lines of communication among themselves in order to collaborate with one another and to provide accurate and up-to-date information about their countries so as to counter-balance information received from mass media;
- b) that provinces, in a spirit of co-responsibility, communicate the steps they have taken to live internationality;
- c) that provinces, with the central administration, share information about their needs in order to deepen community of goods;
- d) that communities, provinces and the central administration participate in international projects for justice in collaboration with other organizations (Cf. Chapter '88);

e) that provinces emphasize internationality in initial and ongoing formation:

- * by providing opportunities for cross-cultural experiences to foster openness and reverence for other cultures;
- * by assuming the wealth of diverse cultures and their rhythms as a contribution to the international community;
- * by requiring the study of languages;

f) that each person deepen her passion for mission to respond in co-responsibility and solidarity to provincial and international needs.

To live our internationality at all levels is a challenge to authentic community living where we integrate our differences. To live internationality is a decision that makes for dynamism in **local and provincial apostolic communities**. To live internationality is a witness to the Good News.

Our reflection on the world has made us aware of how our communities are challenged and transformed by their local contexts. We asked ourselves, "How do we contribute, in this context, to the transformation of civil society?"

This led us to return to the initial vision that St. Madeleine Sophie had when she founded the Society. Her all-embracing vision sprang from the analysis of the chaos of her time. Her words offer us new insights about how to live community today:

- *"Cor Unum et Anima una in Corde Jesu."*
Expressing our love through the quality of our relationships and welcome; mutually supporting one another in continuing the mission of Christ.
- *"To converse among ourselves about the things of God."*
Sharing our lives and our faith simply and fostering mutual accompaniment.
- *"What will the spirit of the Society be?" "Generosity."*
Giving our life freely with joy; accepting difficulties with courage; and opening our hearts and homes to others.
- *"If I had my life to live over again, I would seek only to listen to the Holy Spirit."*
Being responsive to the call of God in an attitude of discernment.
- *"The true spirit of poverty is so essential to the Society of the Sacred Heart . . ."*
Living simply; resisting consumerism; respecting the earth.
- *"If they are allowed to have any special preference ... this predilection would be just and praiseworthy if it is directed towards the poor children."*
Showing our preferential love for the poor and supporting their cause.
- *"The times change and we must change with them."*
Listening to and analyzing the changes in the world, ready to let ourselves be converted.

- *"If we had pupils whom we could form to the spirit of adoration and reparation . . . "*

Contemplating the heart of Christ in the world and working in collaboration with others to heal our wounded humanity.

- *"We shall raise up a throng of adorers from ail nations... "*

Searching together and with others for a way of new life and hope.

- *"If I had to go to the ends of the world..."*

Supporting one another in our enthusiasm for the mission; welcoming different cultures and allowing ourselves to be questioned by them.

We are invited to continue to explore and to integrate in our own particular context the insights of St. Madeleine Sophie's founding vision.

If we live this vision, our apostolic community becomes a **prophetic sign** and a **source of life** for ourselves and for others.

EUCCHARISTIC DIMENSION OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

I have compassion on these people....give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37).

The compassionate gaze of Jesus
directs our eyes and our hearts
towards a world where many are like
"sheep without a shepherd"
and brings to birth in us the desire
to give our lives as women of compassion and communion
to nourish life
to help life grow
to defend life.

We make our own the passionate desire of Jesus
"I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John
10:10). But we feel powerless and helpless,
the task seems beyond our capacities.
We feel ourselves called to a rebirth,
to welcome once again the grace of our vocation.

We feel a new strength
coming from our spirituality,
as a movement of the Spirit
which springs from the **open side of Christ**,
a dynamism
an inspiration
a fire
which can transform and transfigure our lives
and give us a prophetic vision of the world.

Hope impels us to try to make of our world
a great banquet
an open table
where both bread and word are shared
where Christ wipes away the tears of so much oppression, injustice, violence,
division.
What draws us together is the celebration of the daughters and sons of God
where the little ones are the first
and where we wash one another's feet
which are weary from the journey.

All of our reality
personal,
communal,
apostolic
finds integration there
and becomes eucharistic.

Madeleine Sophie's vision of adoration
invites us to enter into the thoughts of God's Heart...
"which remain from age to age
to save their lives from death
and to give them life in time of famine" (Ps.32:11-19).

The gift that has been confided to us -
to be contemplatives in action-
guides and sustains us
in the sometimes difficult process
of integrating all aspects of our lives.
Living and celebrating the Eucharist
through the light and shadow of daily life
becomes one single movement.
The Spirit reveals the presence of Christ
both in the Sacrament and the world
which suffers and waits in hope.
The Body of Christ continues to be broken
in and through many of our sisters and brothers
and participation in the Eucharist
is sometimes even an occasion of division and pain.
All experience can become part of the Paschal journey
if we are prepared to recognize our contradictions,
remain open to dialogue, and take steps towards unity.

Our life in **community**
calls us to Eucharist
as the root and source of all our relationships.
We are sent back to our communities
impelled by a love which makes sisters around the common table,
more able to acknowledge our hurts
and capable of forgiving and being forgiven,
giving space to each one
thus becoming a sign of unity in our diversity.

Our experience as **women**
calls us to keep in our hearts
the remembrance of what Jesus did:
as gift of life to others.
We set out again
ready to nourish life
through our service as **educators**,
weaving relationships of trust and communion,
creating a space where life can flourish.

The poor, the marginalised
the victims of violence
call us together to live Eucharist
as reconciliation.
This mystery of the body broken

and the blood poured out today
sends us to the world to be bread shared,
the real presence of the love of God for others.
Our experience of **internationality**
invites us to live Eucharist
as a call to overcome our difficulties,
accept our differences,
and celebrate a feast where all our cultures find a place.
We set forth again with our eyes opened,
recognizing the action of the Spirit in each one.

The beauty of our **earth**,
the ecological crisis,
the dignity and weight of human work
call us to live the Eucharist
as a place of unifying and renewal of all creation.
Bread and wine transformed
into the body and blood of Christ,
send us to our endangered earth to care for it
and to make it livable for all people without exception.

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.
With them, we want to continue to search
how to live and express it for today,
how to proclaim
with hearts burning within us
that we have recognized the Risen Christ
in the breaking of bread.

Reflecting on our spirituality has been a process in which we have shared moments
of joy and pain, of certainty and doubt.

We have known the joy of rediscovering the eucharistic dimension of our spirituality
as it energizes our life and mission. At the same time, we have painfully recalled the
scandal of worship without justice, division among Churches, laws and traditions
which cause suffering and even exclusion, as well as our own differences of
understanding and living eucharist.

This experience has been a gift even though the journey has been difficult and
uncertain.

The words of the Risen Christ to the Emmaus disciples: "Was it not necessary that
the Christ should suffer and so enter into glory?" (Lk 24: 26) both enlighten and
strengthen us, reminding us that our faith is permeated by the paschal mystery.

This is an **invitation** to continue travelling the road together, as Society, sharing our experience of Eucharist with one another, allowing our charism to continue to unify our lives and sustain our hope.

SOME ASPECTS OF OUR INTERNATIONAL CO-RESPONSIBILITY

The General Chapter seeks to develop a more active collaboration among the provinces by communication, solidarity and interdependence. These three means allow us to live responsibly both multiculturally and unity. We ask the Superior General and her Council, in collaboration with the provinces to seek new forms of this co-responsibility.

COMMUNICATION

We want to find new means of sharing information, but above all of developing reciprocity among ourselves. The provinces which do not use one of the three languages of the Society experience real difficulty and they suffer. We wish to open ourselves more and more to listen to and embrace different cultures and modes of thinking. The central administration will be attentive to facilitating the translation of the documents of the Society in provinces which express a need for it.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

We want to continue to deepen our understanding of different aspects of solidarity as expressed in the Chapter of 1988 and to find new ways of putting them into practice. By international solidarity we mean a way of:

1. working together for the poor and for justice:

To choose in each province, as far as possible, a person with some training who is concerned with issues of justice and peace. From those RSCJ the General Council will name a coordinating committee of three persons who will facilitate the creation of a network. The principal tasks of this network could be:

- to facilitate communication, to share information and to further reflection on how we can work for justice;
- to help the Society raise its consciousness of unjust situations both locally and worldwide;
- to collaborate with other organizations, e.g., NGO's;
- to have a liaison with a member of the Central Team.

The members of this network, while remaining in their own province, would make every effort to communicate by mail, FAX, etc.

2. collaborating among ourselves, supporting one another and finding ways to express mutual collaboration and support.

The General Chapter wishes to facilitate and intensify the bonds among provinces:

- to envisage various gatherings happening with greater ease and simple and rapid methods of communication,
- to foster mutual service and exchange of resources, keeping in mind the complexities and rhythms of the various provinces,

- to develop these links will allow a greater opening to internationality and will strengthen the unity of the whole Society.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Whatever our culture we must learn from one another. We have to receive and to give. Interdependence can lead us to decide on projects and bring them into being together, to consent to sharing personnel, which can sometimes involve costly decisions for some provinces.

A.) In facilitating **exchange of personnel**, it is important to clarify the reasons for these exchanges:

- 1.) to respond to international priorities and to urgent needs in a province in function of such priorities;
- 2.) to respond to an appeal and/or to a personal need of an individual.

The General Chapter gives the broad orientations for the coming six years. The General Council decides the order of priorities; it is attentive to emergencies and creates means of responding. In order to make these priorities operative, the General Council provides for regular communication among provincials. It will find assistance in the Assembly of Provincials and in commissions which it may name. When it is a case of exchange of personnel for a service of several years, the discernment takes place among the person offering, the two provincials concerned, and the General Council. In this whole process it is important to maintain a frank and open attitude. The General Council makes the decision or ratifies a decision already made, according to the situation. The Superior General sends the RSCJ to her new province.

B.) Interdependence leads us to be attentive to **giving an account of our responsibilities**. This demands a climate of listening, of search and of discernment. A few questions on a particular aspect could be posed each year to provincials and mistresses of novices to facilitate exchange with the Superior General and/or the General Council.

This same climate is met at the provincial level each time an RSCJ or a community (with or without a resident superior) gives an account to the provincial or to her delegate. (Const. #113)

To live in interdependence requires of each one, wherever she is, to find means of maintaining a balance between coresponsibility and the service of authority.

CONCLUSION

Hope is the thread that unifies these texts, transforming the pages into an invitation: to open ourselves personally and communally to the call of the Spirit and to share experience in mutual trust.

These pages are unfinished. We stop to give thanks for what is "already here" and we open ourselves to the "not yet".

The future is before us.

"The fate of the Society is in our hands."

DECREES

1. Prolongation of the Mandate of the departing General Council

The General Chapter extends the mandate of the Superior General elected in 1988 and her Council to allow the Superior General elected in 1994 and the members of her Council sufficient time to make the preparations necessary in order to assume the responsibilities of their new service to the Society.

The date proposed for the new Superior General and her Council to assume their functions is the 8th of December 1994.

2. Participation of Young Professed in the Provincial Chapters

The young professed are eligible for the provincial chapters as capitulants according to the provisions of the provincial plan of government. Decision *ad experimentum*.

3. Duration of Temporary Vows

The duration of temporary vows is set at six years with the possibility that the General Council may allow a province to set the duration at three years plus three years *ad experimentum*.

DECISIONS

1. Length of the mandate of the Superior General

The General Chapter confirms that for the Superior General elected at this Chapter, the length of the mandate will be as indicated in the Constitutions.

2. Length of the mandate of the Provincial

The Chapter confirms the length of the mandate of the Provincial for three years with the possibility of another three years, according to the Constitutions #149.

3. Composition of the General Chapter of the Year 2000

1. Each province/district/area..... 1 delegate
more than 150 members..... 2 delegates
more than 300 members..... 3 delegates
more than 450 members..... 4 delegates
more than 600 members..... 5 delegates

2. Provinces having two countries:

If there is more than one community or a minimum of 6 RSCJ in the second country and if the Society has been there for a reasonable length of time, the Provincial Chapter may choose a delegate from the second country. The interpretation of "a reasonable length of time" is left to the General Council. For new countries the criteria are left to the General Council.

3. Provinces which have only one delegate, but have 10 or more RSCJ who are 50 years old or under, 1 additional delegate.

4. Celebration of the Golden Jubilee

Golden jubilees will be celebrated fifty years after the first commitment. This decision will take effect from 1 January, 1995. It affects those who made their first commitment in 1945 or afterwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mandate of the Superior General

The General Chapter recommends to the next **General Council** to take the necessary measures to study the question of the mandate of the Superior General in order that the next General Chapter may make a decision on it.

2. Vocation Ministry

The General Chapter recommends to the provinces to pay special attention to youth and vocation ministry, to make provincial and inter-provincial plans during the next six years, to communicate among provinces and to the General Council the projects undertaken and to evaluate this issue seriously in the next General Chapter.

3. Associate Members

The General Chapter wishes to encourage the movement for associate members.

CLOSING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

Patricia García de Queveda, RSCJ
Superior General Elect

We have come to the end of the Chapter, and I feel the need to speak to you from the depths of my heart. I do so with profound gratitude because I have felt the support and the commitment of each one here and also the prayer of the whole Society.

The new stage of openness which begins today urges us to take hold with open eyes and open hearts of the experience of this time of grace, this time of the Spirit. This is the hour of the Spirit.

We have felt the Spirit among us, accompanying us, listening to our deep desires. At the beginning of the Chapter, we said, "Come!" That was the invitation Helen gave at the opening, and now we are certain that the Spirit has come to transform and recreate us.

Let us remember the road we have taken. To remember together is a way of sharing the bread of the Covenant.

When we arrived at the Chapter, we had already perceived something of the life of our provinces, districts and areas, and we had felt their heartbeat. We had walked the Road to Emmaus, and here we have taken the risk of living in an attitude of discernment and of paying the price required. We have contemplated the world; and even though we have reason to hope, we have been aware that the complexity of the problems leaves no room for optimism.

The symbols which have accompanied us help us to look at the experience of these weeks and to recognize how we have grown in depth. But what is depth? It is to understand the life within; that means having a "within" which communicates with the "without".

We have not stayed on the surface; that is why there have been moments of suffering. And putting our finger on our inevitable differences, we have felt a call to be open, to listen to one another, to try to understand one another, not only with the intellect, but with the heart, and thus to offer one another the best of what we have to give. Is this not a call to conversion, to let ourselves be transformed by the paschal mystery of Jesus?

We have touched the deep aspects of internationality. This experience has pushed us to seek to know one another better, our different races, cultures and countries with their ways of weaving relationships. An anthropological perspective threw a new light on our internationality. Now we are asking: "What is God saying to us through the profound experience lived in this Chapter?"

In the midst of our work we heard a particular appeal: Rwanda assumed a special place in our prayer and our commitment. Our vocation as RSCJ does not allow us to see without acting, so we expressed as a Chapter our profound desire to live in solidarity. The wealth which our internationality gives is not for ourselves, and once more we heard the cry of the marginalized of the world and the urgent call to be present to them.

We form an international apostolic community; as one of our texts says, "We are convinced that living internationality is not a choice but a responsibility in the face of the world's calls".

To return to our own countries with dreams and plans will give life to each step of this new stage. It is the time of refounding, of deepening our basic values, of expressing them with the strength of the new life that the direction of the Chapter brings. Let us not forget that "a moment of refoundation is an experience of conversion, of confirmation and of sending" (Opening, Chapter 1988).

I am sure that Madeleine Sophie is looking on us with tenderness, with the desire that her little Society, rooted in the attitudes and the sentiments of Jesus, dare to take risks and to proclaim by its life the love of God who gives himself to us.

The end of our Chapter coincides with a great feast, the Assumption of Mary and we can celebrate it as a call to be fully happy, to be fully God's. Today's Gospel speaks of the meeting of two women, Mary and Elizabeth. Both carry a new life within them, and in the heart of Mary deep joy gives rise to a song of gratitude because God has looked on the littleness of his servant.

We are also preparing for a meeting, the meeting with our sisters of the whole Society who are waiting to welcome the annunciation received during this chapter. With them we sing Magnificat, and we make our way given direction by the new life which we hasten to communicate.

Now I want to address in a special way the one who has led us for these twelve years with generosity, simplicity, clarity and depth. I want to say to Helen in the name of the whole Society: **"Thank you!"** We have learned so much from you and from each member of your Council. We have gone forward together and we have experienced mutual fidelity as a guarantee for the stage ahead.

Each day we gather around a table, and our hearts open wide to welcome Jesus Risen in each one of us. His presence has set our hearts afire, and we have dared to dream together, to discover the life within us, a life which we want to be "brand new" in order to communicate it with hope.

"Le Monastère" - Aylmer 15 August 1994

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