



CHRISTMAS LETTER 2022

Orienting ourselves

27th January 2022 – 27th November 2022

Exactly eleven months ago, the Chapter concluded its work in Rome and gave us four orientations, two commitments and two statutory texts: our roadmap until 2028.

The next Enlarged General Council to be held in February-March 2023 in Zalaegerszeg will reflect on how to implement it, so that this will not just a written text, but will inspire our lives.

Without trying to anticipate its decisions, I think that this roadmap has already urged us to orient ourselves: not because we intend to change our course - the Congregation has stayed on course for four centuries! - but because it urges us to constantly look at our compass, and question ourselves about the horizon that is before us. While contexts and mentalities evolve, changes of all kinds accelerate, and the future remains unpredictable¹, religious life holds on to its permanent identity, an essential identity we must return to when opportune and when not, in spite of fashions or ideologies, and even our own convictions at times.

“We are always tempted to start from ourselves rather than from God, to put our own agendas before the Gospel, to let ourselves be caught up in the winds of worldliness in order to chase after the fashions of the moment or to turn our back on the time that Providence has granted us, in order to retrace our steps. (...)

You are not here to shepherd yourselves, or to be on the climb, but to shepherd others – all others – with love. (...)

¹ According to a Vatican source, there are around 30 conflicts in the world today.

How many times did they prefer to cheer on their own party rather than being servants of all? To be progressive or conservative rather than being brothers and sisters? To be on the “right” or “left”, rather than with Jesus? To present themselves as “guardians of the truth” or “pioneers of innovation” rather than seeing themselves as humble and grateful children of Holy Mother Church. » (Homily of Pope Francis of October 12th, 2022 for the 60th Anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and celebration of Saint John XXIII)

Let me take up the orientations of the Chapter:

1. Sharing of the Charism:

What defines us is not the three vows - they do not distinguish us from other forms of religious life or other Congregations; what defines us is our charism: our charism sets us apart, it is our identity. After the Chapter, we had an exchange with Monsignor Carballo, Secretary of CICLSAL, and mentioned the proposal of a 4th vow of education put forward at the Chapter, which was then declined. Mons. Carballo rightly pointed out the pre-eminence of the Charism: "Why introduce a 4th vow in your Charism? The Charism is who you are!"

However, we cannot live this charism independently of the three vows. They teach us to live this identity in a communal and not individualistic way. Day after day, they teach us to abandon our "ego", though it keeps emerging over and over again.

Conversely, we cannot live these three vows independently of our charism: through poverty, chastity and obedience, our orientation will always be to "grow" and "make Him grow."

Sharing our charism really means to live our religious life as Sister of Our Lady.

2. Formation:

The objective of any formation, whatever it may be - including initial and ongoing formation - is a person's human and spiritual growth. It is about providing a backbone to help the person stand the tests of life, tools for reflection and decision making to encourage her to use her freedom in an orderly and creative way, deepening - reopening - her relationship with herself, the others, and God... These are the main dimensions of formation.

Nevertheless, no formation can exempt us from personal discernment. There always comes a time in life when a model is no longer sufficient,

when applying what we have learned no longer works. Our Constitutions and Statutes give us a framework, but they never exempt from discernment.

But what does discernment mean? Discernment begins with prayer. More than acts of piety or devotion, which are good, but not essential, prayer is fundamentally meditation, reflection on the Scriptures, contemplation, intimacy with the Lord².

"I want to learn only this from you", asks Saint Paul in his Letter to the Galatians (3, 1-5): "Did you receive the Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard?" (...) "Does then the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you heard?"

Of course, the Holy Spirit who "made us perform miracles" precedes our contemplation but it also derives from it. *"How much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?"* (Lk. 11, 5-13). Let us never grow tired of giving time, and space to this question every day. There is no mission without it.

Why is this so? Because religious life begins with a call and continues in the same way. Better still, it is nourished by all the calls that it has been addressed throughout the years. Calls to such mission, or responsibility, calls to accept or reject something ... Certainly, these calls are based on qualities, skills, human and spiritual formation, but these do not "entitled" me to any specific responsibility, which would entail the recognition of my diplomas and my value³.

Religious life is both a path of growth and diminution: growth of the "inner man" as Saint Paul says, and diminution of my "self".

No one has forced us to follow this path; we have chosen it freely and we must choose it again every day, re-orienting ourselves if necessary.

² *"True prayer is the gift of self to God, opening oneself to God, not the search for the perception of God and his action (...)*

Today, I understand that openness to God means opening the world to God. The surrender of all is more complete in the total surrender of one person. By letting God take more and more control of my own life, by letting Him take possession of me, just as fire takes possession of the burning log, I can radiate light and warmth to the whole world, even if their influence goes completely unnoticed (...)

We have nothing to offer God if not our total surrender."

(Ruth Burrows: Before the Living God; Ed. du Carmel P. 171, 163, 198)

³ *"What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not accept it?"* (1 Co 4, 7)

Experiencing a call sometimes goes against our aspiration to freedom; however legitimate this aspiration may be, let us ask ourselves what drives it: is it a desire for growth or a desire for promotion?

Living in a state of call – which is absolutely right! - is not a "sacrificial" attitude either: when we look back at the road we have travelled, we realise that we have received the hundredfold and the Congregation has given us everything freely.

The future of CND does not depend on our piety or devotions. It depends on the formation we seek to build every day in intimacy with the Lord and in relationship with the others.

Just as intimacy cannot be faked, the relationship can only be "face to face".

One might as well say that whispers in hallways, gossip, manipulative seductions, and controlling influences are more similar to the satanic weeds of the Gospel than to the fraternity that builds up the Congregational body.

Let us dare to encounter our Sisters "face to face"! Let us dare to build the Congregation and renounce what damages it, because our ego finds satisfaction in this.

In the community as in mission, there is a wonderful difference between investing one's talent - the talent of the parable - at the service of the common good or using it as a way to assert oneself, claim one's rights.

3. Inter-generational dimension:

Yes, let us dare! Let each one of us take the initiative to establish a relationship with a Sister whom she does not know, whose language we may not even speak⁴, but whom we want to acknowledge, to show an interest in her mission, to enter in dialogue with her...

4. Common home – integral ecology:

The Common Home that we are committed to caring for is not only about being energy efficient, sorting our waste, and producing our compost.

Our community life partakes in the Common Home, it contributes to making it habitable and relishes in every member's contribution to its

⁴ "DeepL" is a good free translation tool!

life. Are we sufficiently aware of this when we prefer to leave it, to go "on mission" where it is often easier to shine, whereas the community always brings us back to our limits and is a real school of humility?

Let us dare to return to this school, let us not desert it: our Founders wanted it to be the place of learning for the "Schoolmistresses" that we still desire to be!

On this first Sunday of Advent, let us ask the Holy Spirit to lead us once again to the nativity scene, to contemplate the unheard-of news of the coming of God among us in his own way, without making noise and forcing anyone to welcome him. A naked King, a God of humility, of non-power, and discretion.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to lead us back to the nativity to discover what was still hidden from us about the birth and the living strength of our Congregation. A "congrégationnette", daughter of Lorraine, whose glory Alix never showed us - nor urged us to seek, as she only invited us to stand firm in faith, and to "pluck up our courage"⁵ ... To hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Let's make room for Him!

Let's bring Him to life!

Merry Christmas!

With fraternal affection,

Sister Cécile MARION, cnd-csa
Superior General

⁵ *When her companions were put off by the many difficulties and contradictions encountered along the way, that threatened to destroy what they were striving to create, and when they were downhearted to the point of not knowing what they should hope for, Alix always held firm, out of a strong faith that she felt deep down in her soul, that God wanted this vocation from them... She plucked up their courage, saying that it was God's work.*



Holy Virgin Monasteries of Bethlehem; Child Jesus from Vietnam
Oratory of Fontenay