



## CHRISTMAS LETTER 2025

### Hope...

As the Jubilee 'Pilgrims of Hope' draws to a close, we sense that our pilgrimage must continue, even though, perhaps, it has not yet begun: hope is in the present! Pope Francis has relaunched our journey before leaving us, and now it is up to us to continue it, as the Jubilee logo encourages us to do.

In the Bible, Good News and Hope go hand in hand, not as a sweet dream filling us with illusions, but as the promise of the Lord's coming. The horizon is opening up, definitively: *"You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts"* (2 Peter 1:19).

Hope sees the blessed time of God's coming into this world. It sees that presence that nothing and no one can erase in us, in the depths of our beings: we are created in the image of God. It is the Good News telling us that we are 'blessed' as we are not closed in on ourselves: in the midst of our frailties and tears, God wants our lives to be already part of his Kingdom.

And yet, how tempting it is to doubt! It is enough to read the news in the morning to wish we would no longer see the misfortunes of the world or hear its cries. It is enough to look at ourselves to understand that Jesus' best friends are also those who desert him. Great is the temptation to remove what horrifies us with the wave of a magic wand, whatever it may be: revolution, incantation, accusation, justification...

*'If you are the Son of God'!* In the desert, alone with Satan, or in the midst of the crowd waiting for a miracle, or even when faced with the traps set by his accusers, the Lord closes the door to the temptation to show his power.

The Cross will be the ultimate testimony to this freedom. ‘*By entering into his Passion, Jesus (rather) shows what man is worth in his eyes: he is worth the death of the Son of God.*’<sup>1</sup>

‘Do you understand what it means that I love you?’ was the title of a book published a few years ago.

## ... With Alix

One of the greatest gifts that life gives us is meeting people who believe in us<sup>2</sup>. They awaken our sometimes unsuspected, deepest desires, and lead us on the path to our vocation. What our hearts dared not imagine becomes possible. When we surrender to the trust placed in us, hope rises and unlocks doors.

Alix was one of those people. And she continues to believe – to hope – in us. Blessed are we, Sisters of Notre Dame, if through our presence today, others can rise up! Blessed are we all when, following Alix's example, we strive to help those we meet on our journey to grow!

Let us not be afraid to ask Alix for ‘the impossible – nothing less,’ as Pope Leo would say – she who wanted to ‘build a new house’.

Let us ask her to ‘renew the house!’

How? Let us begin by sitting down! “*And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. (For) whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."*” (Mk 3:34-35). Apparently, they are doing nothing: they are just sitting there, listening. Let us ‘do’ the same!

How can we understand ‘renewing the house’ today?

It is not a question of seeking out ‘*wells of vocations*’, to use Pope Francis's expression<sup>3</sup>, but of loving others who are searching for their path in life and happiness.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Guillet: ‘Rejected by men and by God’ in Christus No. 278 ‘With the Bible through trials’

<sup>2</sup> “*When I try to define the good that has been given to me for years, I tell myself that such a privilege, however rare it may be, cannot be unique; that there must sometimes be, a little behind us (...) someone who is neither our shadow, nor our reflection, nor even our complement, but himself; someone who leaves us divinely free, and yet compels us to be fully who we are.*” Marguerite Yourcenar – Memoirs of Hadrian (Homage to G.F.) Ed. Folio.

<sup>3</sup> “The strength of vocation – Consecrated life today”

Nor is it a question of allowing ourselves to be guided by 'Ars bene moriendi'<sup>4</sup>, as an ageing Europe is doing: although necessary in the current context, it cannot have the last word. For old age is fruitful: "*God needed women in the winter of their lives to accomplish the history of salvation: Sarah, the prophetess Anne, Naomi, Elizabeth...*"<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the circumstances, our religious life must be guided by the fire of the desire to "live and live well", which enables us to bless and praise<sup>6</sup>.

This desire does not tell us what to do, it only tells us: '*This is the way; walk in it, "when you would turn to the right or to the left"* (Is. 30, 21.)

And if, faced with the demographic decline of religious life, we sometimes think that we have 'failed', let us look at what the first Apostles experienced in Jerusalem, Athens and Rome: Christian life – religious life itself – does not seek mass adherence, it appeals to each person in the secret of their hearts.

Let us ask him to 'renew us!'

The CND<sup>7</sup> special issue dedicated to Sister Elisabeth Giron<sup>8</sup> after her death helps us reread one of her letters addressed from Rome to the entire Congregation. Dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1969, and therefore written in a context different from ours, it has not aged a bit:

*"The Council marks a point of no return for the Church, somewhat like the crossing of the Red Sea closed the way back to Egypt for the Hebrews. The Church is experiencing its Passover (and), within the Church, religious life too (understands that it must) opt for a radical transformation, live a conversion (...).*

*This "conversion" is first and foremost a conversion of gaze (...) From a fearful and defensive gaze towards the world, it must move to an attentive, free and serene gaze, illuminated by Faith, a truly contemplative gaze.*

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<sup>4</sup> 'The art of dying well': another quote from Pope Francis in the same interview.

<sup>5</sup> Mariola Lopez Villanueva, RSCJ – GA UISG May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> '*They will welcome all those who come (except those who are quarrelsome or disturb others with their chatter)*' (Peter Fourier).

<sup>7</sup> The Congregation's Newsletter until 2016.

<sup>8</sup> 1907 - 1986; Superior General from 1966 to 1978, she is credited with leading the *aggiornamento* of the COL following the Second Vatican Council, namely the decisive choice of apostolic life after 400 years of 'mixed' life.

*We need each other to glimpse the conversion to which the challenges of the Word resonating in God's present time are driving us. It is this Word that must give the Congregation its face (...).*

*What will be the features of this face? This face does not challenge the values we live by (poverty, celibacy, obedience, community life), but the way we live them, a way that must be meaningful to an evangelical life that today's world needs to discover for its salvation.*

*But what is an evangelical life? (...) The evangelical life is first and foremost a call to the person.*

*'When I look at what the Gospel tells me, first of all it does not tell me something: it gives me a person who is the Son of the Father, Jesus of Nazareth, risen and living among us through his Spirit.*

*This person who is given to me asks me through the Gospel and the life of today: "Who do you say that I am?" Which is exactly like asking me: "Who do you say that you are?" He asks me: 'What is the place that I, Jesus of Nazareth, risen and alive, have in your life? Am I the meaning of your life? "Not: 'Was I the meaning of your life?" But: "Am I the meaning today?" The word of Jesus, the Gospel, is this radical challenge to every moment of our lives: "Are you made by your human aims, or by someone who loves you and gives meaning to your life and death?"*<sup>9</sup>

*(...) Thus committed to the adventure of faith in following Christ, we are preceded by a multitude of witnesses who, on the basis of a Word, left everything behind. On this path of joy, suffering and glory, the Virgin Mary leads us, she whose beatitude is to have believed."*

We are still here!

When we reread Alix's story, it is striking to note the struggle she endured during her short life: with herself, with her era, which looked down on the woman she was, the educator and devotee she wanted to be.

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<sup>9</sup> J. Radermakers

On several occasions, without hiding her episodes of depression and the ‘devilry’ that haunted her dreams, she revealed herself to be a true ‘resistance fighter’, humbly but firmly holding on to her project of a ‘new home.’<sup>10</sup>

Today, we face similar challenges in that they also call on our courage.

To mention only our internationality – an essential dimension of our Congregation as well as a vital necessity for our world<sup>11</sup> – are we capable of giving it priority, to the point of not asserting our own culture?<sup>12</sup> How much interest do we take in those who do not speak our language and whose country is far from ours? What bonds do we forge among ourselves that are not just the easy ‘likes’ of WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook groups?

Our internationality calls us to walk together, and therefore to be mindful of each other's pace, to adjust our own to theirs, even if it means sometimes having to slow down or, on the contrary, speed up!

The ‘new home’ that will be 428 years old at Christmas this year is not intended to provide me with comfort, security, well-being or freedom: it is the one I have chosen – and which has welcomed me – to remain permanently open.

What kind of renewal are we ready for?

*“From the outset, Mary experienced with her fiat what Jesus would later discover: the Spirit cannot vibrate in what is strong, secure, and rigid. And he will rejoice discovering that the Ruach, the Spirit, vibrates with what is fragile, tender, weak, vulnerable... and from there he transforms us. God sees smallness, Jesus gives thanks, full of joy, because he wanted to reveal himself to those who need others.”<sup>13</sup>*

When we take our vows, we are filled with enthusiasm to ‘leave everything behind to follow Him’, perhaps expecting, like the Apostles, a reward in return<sup>14</sup>... But it is our whole life that will teach us to give our trust without expecting anything in return, until

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<sup>10</sup> In her *Relation*, Alix mentions her resistance to her father’s authority (as he wanted her to join the Poor Clares of Verdun) and to ecclesiastical authority (Peter Fourier himself was ready to follow the path of a ‘normal’ religious life, i.e., cloistered.)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pope Leo XIV’s repeated calls to building bridges.

<sup>12</sup> ‘How can we live internationality? We want to respect the diversity of cultures, human and spiritual formations... But what unites us is that we have all chosen to be Sisters of Our Lady with the Gospel as our rule of life: this transcends all cultures and all ages.’ Sr. Marie-Alexia Nguyen – Speech given during her term as Superior General (2008 – 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Mariola Lopez Villanueva, RSCJ – GA UISG May 2025: “Consecrated Life, a hope that transforms.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mt 19, 27.

the moment when the end comes and nothing more can be taken from us. It is when everything is taken away from us that the authenticity with which we have given our lives is revealed.

Let us ask Alix to 'grow' with her!

I invite each Sister to read – or reread – at least one of her texts<sup>15</sup>, and to stay with her throughout this year; to share this reading in community; to invite those with whom she works to come and drink from the source of our Foundress.<sup>16</sup>

Life itself is hope: we recognise one in the other and vice versa!

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<sup>15</sup> Texts edited and posted on the website (reserved area):

- *La Relation* (commentary by Sr. Paule Sagot),
- Praying for 15 days with Alix Le Clerc (Sr. Marie-Alexia Nguyen),
- Spiritual Writings (collected by Sr. Marie-Laure Bradel),
- The Spirituality of our Founders (Sr. Paule Sagot),
- At the Source of the COL – Handbook Founders' writings,
- At the source of the COL: St. Augustin – St. Peter-Fourier – Bd. Alix Le Clerc,
- A short history of the COL: Foundation – Development – Constitutions,
- The Blessed Alix Le Clerc (Sr. Marie-Claire Tihon).

<sup>16</sup> To understand the mentality of Alix's era and the courage she had to show, we can refer to a book by historian Régine Pernoud – *Women in the Days of Cathedrals* – which analyses the situation of women over the centuries: after being neglected by Roman law, women were honoured or at least treated as equals to men in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, then fell back into the shadows in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries with the rediscovery of Roman law, which was much more favourable to merchants than feudal customs.

Three years before the opening of the school in Poussay, in 1593, '*a ruling by the Parliament of Paris prohibited women from holding any position in the State*'...

Régine Pernoud refers to three quotations from prestigious authors that illustrate '*classical and bourgeois thinking*', which would prevail until the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- Richelieu: '*Nothing is more capable of harming states than this sex... The best thoughts of women are almost always bad, in those who are guided by their passions, which usually take the place of reason in their minds, whereas reason is the only true motive that should animate and drive those who are engaged in public affairs.*'
- Voltaire: '*We have seen women who were very learned, as there were women warriors, but there have never been any women inventors.*'
- Restif de la Bretonne: '*Women prefer, without realising it, a government where they must obey without question to one where they would have the choice of obeying or not.*'

Ed. Livre de poche p. 339 – 340.

Today, as yesterday and tomorrow, we are called to live and to hope:

*'Do not say that there are few of us and the commitment is too great for us. Are you saying that two or three clouds are few in a summer sky?*

*In no time, they spread everywhere... Lightning zigzags, thunder crashes and rain pours everywhere.*

*Do not say: there are few of us, just say: we are.'*<sup>17</sup>

With Alix, let us turn to the nativity and ask her to 'raise our courage' to welcome and follow the one she desires to be 'our entire love.'

*'Always keep one eye on me and another on your faults to correct them, and you will achieve your desire.'* These are the last words of her *Relation*<sup>18</sup>, the ones we have chosen to open and live her year.

Let us ask her to take our hand and hold it until the last day!

## **Merry Christmas!**

With all my fraternal affection,

Sister Cécile MARION, cnd-csa  
Superior General

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<sup>17</sup> Korean poem copied by Sr. Elisabeth Giron.

<sup>18</sup> *Relation* n° 70.