

# Challenges in the Educational Mission of the Company of Mary Our Lady

## Review of the XV Chapter and XIV General Chapter Documents

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The XIV General Chapter, Rome 1997, dealt directly with the educational mission of the Company reflecting on the theme: “*Education, mission of the Company, with the laity, on the threshold of the XXI century.*”

The last General Chapter: “*Founding Grace – Passion for Spreading the Gospel,*” Rome 2003, coincided with the 400 years of the “Night in the Cistercian Monastery,” the experience that gave birth to the Company of Mary. For this reason, emphasis was placed on deep reflection on this experience: Remembering with others the event which gave us birth, getting in touch with our roots once again, growing in the awareness of our tradition and of the richness of our history. All of this leads us to see ourselves as called to continue a mission which we, religious and laity in complementarity and in co-responsibility, are determined to creatively look towards the future, recreating the mission within our particular reality.

We have prepared a review, based on the XV General Chapter document as well as the previous one, focused on the educational mission of the Company of Mary, in the hope that it serves as a **frame of reference** in the celebration of the 400 years as Company of Mary in the world. In it we identify the **challenges** which we face at that this moment in history in **our educational mission**. Our reflection will help us to better understand these challenges and continue looking for new avenues of response.

## **A. Look at the condition of the world with the eyes of God**

The XV General Chapter Document, in a poetical and challenging format, begins by inviting us to see the condition of our world today with the eyes of God, the combination of night and light that surrounds us.

*“Only God makes you see with his eyes the “nights” of life:  
The nights of unbelief, of the irrelevance of faith and indifference to the gospel;  
Night in a world permeated with dehumanizing tendencies,  
Night for young people, who are manipulated and disoriented in so many ways;  
Night for displaced persons,, immigrants, refugees, and all those who must leave their country, their roots, their culture ...Night for so many people who have been uprooted;  
Night for people who are impoverished and excluded in so many parts of the world;  
Night that affects women in so many different ways;  
Night for the family, threatened and broken;  
Night for so many people who suffer the consequences of violence in thousands of ways .*

*Only God makes can make you see through His eyes the “light” in our life:  
The light that shines in your search and desire for transcendence,  
The light that illumines movements of peace, solidarity, and reconciliation across the diversity of people and cultures in the world;  
The light that is reflected in the advances of science and technology offering new possibilities of humanization;  
The light that shines through ethical options of men and women who enlighten our collective history;  
The light sends out glimmers of hope, generosity, sensitivity and care to so many young people who want to live and share life;  
The light of so many believers who are like small lamps giving light to the world when they denounce injustice, are mediators of peace and have a word of the Gospel to share with others.”*

To see the world and ourselves with the eyes of God is not always easy. It requires a great deal of realism and optimism, exacting a new outlook and a capacity for tenderness. Because only love is capable of discovering the good in the world and of enabling us to see its helplessness and weaknesses, love and affection allow our hearts to be touched leading us to commitment.

Jeanne de Lestonnac was a woman who learned to see with the eyes of God. Deeply aware of the problems of her time, she allowed herself to be “moved” by them and far from becoming overwhelmed by the immensity, she stepped into action. We find it written in, *The History of the Order*, in the account of the “Night of the Cistercian Monastery.”<sup>1</sup>

*“...she saw a great number of young people at the point of falling into the abyss and realized that it was she who should extend a hand to them.”*

Today, in the here and now, we are called, religious and laity of the Company of Mary, to continue the educational mission of Jeanne de Lestonnac. We are invited to take on a mission that requires knowing and embracing the social conditions of our people allowing our hearts to be touched by them. Only in this manner can we place ourselves optimistically with the sons and daughters of this world, that is, profoundly trusting one another.. It has been wisely stated that to be an educator one must be optimistic: “the pessimists can be good domesticators, but not good educators.”<sup>2</sup>

## **B. Dare to open up pathways of incarnation**

Looking at our world with optimism leads us to dedicate ourselves to opening up pathways of incarnation. The XV General Chapter Document insistently urges: “*Let us hasten to journey along paths of incarnation.*”

Ignatius of Loyola, a great teacher in the experience of God and a person whom Jeanne de Lestonnac constantly refers to, teaches us the relationship between seeing and acting. In one of the contemplations of the Spiritual Exercises,<sup>3</sup> he has us consider “how the three divine persons saw the plains or the globality of the entire world” and invites us to look around us, to “see the great capacity and globality of the earth, where there are so many and such diverse peoples, so different from one another”... We are asked to attentively observe that some are born healthy, laughing and enjoying peace, and how others are dying, are sick, crying and engaging in war... a world of contrasts, divided and conflictive. The Holy Trinity cannot remain indifferent, and they are moved to send the Son to incarnate Himself in this world, becoming one with humankind, and therein, transform it.<sup>4</sup>

Through our mission of education we are the ones who continue the mission of Jesus today. We are the “two hands that God wanted to extend to make His goodness and his tenderness visible” (Titus, 2-11). Through the educational mission that each of us, and together as a group, carry out God continues to open up pathways of incarnation, that is, create spaces of genuine human quality and of the Good News in our world.

## **C. Challenges to our educational mission**

In the XV General Chapter Document we find the challenges facing us in the educational mission of the Company of Mary as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They focus on the following **key points**. We group them in the as found below to help us in our process of reflection:

- **Faith** and the meaning of transcendence
- The **passion for spreading the Gospel**
- A **universal body** together with **others**
- In **proclamation** and the **song of gratitude** for life

The sense of urgency communicated in the words, “*let us hasten*”, compel us to take into account the immediate need, to intertwine the educational process with the emerging reality: mutation, evolution and rapid change.

### **1. Let us hasten in to journey along the paths of faith**

The description of the condition of today’s world strongly calls attention to “the lack of belief, the irrelevance of faith, the indifference to the Gospel, dehumanizing trends,” and

also “desires and search for the transcendent”, all of this is manifested in various expressions of faith and religiosity. Here we find the **challenge** indicated in XV General Chapter.

***“Journey along paths of faith that arise from a deep desire to make Jesus and his Kingdom the center of our life ... paths of faith that humanize us and transform our life into mission.”***

The previous General Chapter had underlined this point in the Educational Project, but from a different point-of-view:

*“In the face of the contrasting phenomenon of a diminishing belief, the search for the transcendent and new religious expressions, explicitly proclaiming the person of Jesus contributes to forming a Christian vision of the cosmos and facilitates inter-religious, intercultural, and ecumenical dialogue.”*

It is evident that the education offered by the Company of Mary is Christian, but it is also a fact that we embark upon this task within cultural contexts where the faith is not a given. More often than not, our cultures hinder the possibility of believing; the cultural substratum in which we live impedes it. The innovative message that the XV General Chapter conveys is the strong appeal it makes, compellingly **daring** us to live an experience of God which humanizes us through His presence so that we may be better witnesses. Our task as educators understood in this manner, acquires a comprehensive dimension, and transforms it into mission. “The educator Company of Mary is an educator, over and above the function and the task of teaching; it is a means of receiving and transmitting life. This integrating concept is what makes possible that the Company of Mary define itself as an institute whose educational mission is at the heart of what it is, and not only of what it does.”<sup>5</sup>

Understanding education in this way converts us into witnesses in the scriptural sense. The truth and consistency of our lives are what give quality to our educational endeavor and how it contributes to the building of humanity.

The XIV General Chapter highlighted the need to promote ecumenical, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. We believe it is important to look at it anew as a **challenge** for today. Over and above the interconnectedness brought about by globalization, we experience in our educational platforms the effects of different cultures and religions coming together as a result of strong migratory movements over the past few years. Perhaps today, more than ever, one of the fundamental objectives of education is to “contribute to the birth of a new humanism, with an essential ethical component and a wide space for knowledge and respect for cultures and the spiritual values of different civilizations, and in this manner offsetting a globalization perceived only in economic or technical terms.”<sup>6</sup> This very same thought was expressed in different words in the previous Chapter: *“in the face of scientific and technological advances, the birth of a new humanism... Recreate the humanistic tradition of the Company.”*

The interrelationship with other creeds and religions is no reason for us to think that our own identity must be eradicated, but rather, we should approach it as a present day challenge requiring of us changes in the use of teaching methods different from those used in the past, resolutely believing that one’s identity is affirmed, enriched and matured through dialogue.

## **2. Let us hasten to journey along the paths of spreading the Gospel**

As a consequence of that “loving look” at the reality of our world today, the XV General Chapter also motivates us to re-create in the here and now a particular way of commitment, that same passion for spreading the Gospel conveyed by Jeanne de Lestonnac. These are some of the **challenges** that we must face in responding to this moment in history:

## **2.1. “Seek from below, from the needy in this world, new ways of extending our hand”**

The previous General Chapter emphasized the common thread that is at the core of Jeanne de Lestonnac’s approach to education: *“from the perspective of the poor and excluded”*. Given the present reality, this focus is made specific in our Educational Project: *“In a social system of exclusion that generates human tragedy, the compassion and preferential love for the most needy.”* This last Chapter dares us to **“look from below, from the perspective of the most needy, for new ways of extending our hand.”**

When we carefully look at the inner structure of each of our educational platforms from this perspective, that is placing ourselves with the most needy, we discover that various aspects of these very structures demand new approaches:

The term **“unstructured” or “dysfunctional”** is one that most expresses the actual condition of our world: unstructured or dysfunctional families, dysfunctional social groups that would normally be a reference point, children and youth with severe social and emotional problems..., all this brings about acute vulnerability and weakness in individuals and groups. These become areas in which educators feel powerless.. Experts tell us that those who are the victims of social exclusion suffer more extensively the consequences of declining social structures. More and more, the symptoms of this social malady appear in all groups.<sup>7</sup>

This condition leads us to convert our educational platforms into “places of healing, of intensive care units, and institutions for recuperating hopes and potentials which are at risk, spaces of constant vigilance so that nothing that has the possibility for development and for life will be lost.”<sup>8</sup> Garcia Roca says that “in situations where there is a basic lack of fundamental structures, the primary function of education is no longer the diffusion of knowledge and learning, but the personal adventure of an encounter that produces values.” For Garcia Roca, “education must incorporate elements characteristic of an accompaniment that is exercised in a tutorial relationship, in services of proximity, and the rehabilitation of ethical forces.”<sup>9</sup> This means a total change in our manner of teaching, in our pedagogies, methodologies, structures... perhaps we have already considered it or perhaps it remains to be done...

Working together with **the family** is made indispensable if we want to respond to this great challenge. In the vision of reality presented in the last General Chapter, it notes, *“the night of the family, threatened and broken...”* The XIV General Chapter had already addressed the need for intervention with the family as a priority:

*“...affected today by the impact of strong socio-cultural changes and economics, the shape that it takes requires that we: deepen in a new ethical and anthropological understanding of family; discern the challenges that these conditions place on our endeavors to evangelize; accompany parents in their educational tasks trying to create close bonds and to educate in values.”*

Ministry to **women** in a particular way continues being a priority for us today. The last two General Chapters urge us to walk with them, *“pronouncing words of dignity and hope, of recognition and freedom.”*

Placing ourselves “from below,” with the most needy, in our various educational platforms means knowing that the **quality of education** so strongly demanded today entails, at one and the same time, the promotion of a **humanistic culture of excellence**. With the annihilation of social values in our current society, responding to the demands for quality education must include the urgency to educate for solidarity, and must implicate us in educational ways in the promotion of justice.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that we seek an education offering broad horizons and high goals. And that the cutting edge in the Educational Project of the Company contains the preferential option for the poor and excluded. Together with the necessary specialization in the scientific and technological fields, we should encourage a heightened sensitivity to human development in a broad understanding of the term. We must give importance to this recurrent theme in the XIV General Chapter regarding our Educational Project: *“a person’s worth, the humanistic dimension of the Gospel.”*

Placing ourselves in this frame of mind implies “going out” of our normal environment of education, and going beyond. Let us reconsider the directives of the XIV General Chapter: “... *extend our education to the excluded.*” From where we stand, opening our eyes and daring to see the faces of the poor is an ethical demand that challenges our particular style of commitment: that is, doing our part in creating a better world in solidarity with the poor. Endeavor to intertwine, network, draw together **different realities**, in order to bring about positive changes.

This openness to the new faces of poverty and exclusion contains the drive to explore and begin new educational programs or new structures that respond to their needs. It is one of the driving forces enveloping our charism in the exigency of the “more,” in the mission. It is a **challenge** that involves prioritizing and making new options.

## **2.2. “Promoting an education that helps a person grow in all that he/she is and helps him/herself make a commitment to the transformation of society.”**

The XV General Chapter continues reminding us that educating implies a helping relationship that brings forth all the potential from the person. It **challenges** us to continue fostering an integral education that prepares one for the present and for the challenges of the future, an education that prepares one for all times. The previous Chapter also pointed out: “*Teach to know how to be, how to feel, how to think, how to do, how to live with others, as a requirement in addressing the complexity of our world.*” It is similar to Michel de Montaigne’s famous saying, later adopted by Jeanne de Lestonnac herself: “*A well formed head is better is than one that is full.*”

**“Committing oneself to the transformation of society,”** is not a new insight, it forms part of the nucleus of our Educational Project. The previous General Chapter explicitly highlights this thought which is found throughout the document in one form or another: “*A contemplative look at reality in order to transform it.*”

Together with this, the last General Chapter explicitly joins together the idea of integral education and the transformation of reality, emphasizing the social dimension as an essential aspect of integral education. This is the **challenge** we must take on.

The quality education that we must provide in each of our educational centers must combine: personal focus and collaboration, autonomy and responsibility, personal success and the creation of community ties that enable us to carry out shared commitments. Certain aspects stressed are: “*In response to individualism, educating for dialogue, living with others, promoting the sense of unity, and contributing to the formation of social structures, networks of solidarity.*”

It would be interesting and necessary to reflect on what should be the methods to bring this about transformation. Perhaps, the time for thinking about great transformations has passed; rather, it is about “believing” that it is possible to transform our world, drawing up plans and projects that are feasible and putting into play whatever is within our reach to accomplish. Eduardo Galeano makes a statement somewhat like this:

“They are small things. They do not abolish poverty, nor do they free us from underdevelopment. They do not make the means of production and exchange available to all, nor do they expropriate the caves of Ali Baba. But perhaps, they set in motion the joy of doing something, of converting it into concrete actions. And at the end of it all, taking action over the present condition and changing it, even if just a little, it is the only way to prove that it is possible to transform it.”

To promote an integral education which includes the social dimension requires of us, as educators, knowing how to make the local-global and global-local connection, knowing how to combine what is specific with the bigger picture. Having ample knowledge of the

world, of the forces and mechanisms that govern it, moves us to make changes in our everyday life, believing that it is here that we put our utopias into practice.

**2.3. “To discern, moved by our desire to seek an opportunity for greater service: the greater urgencies, the new educational needs, the consistency between the being and the doing of an organization.”**

“To seek and to discern,” another of the reoccurring themes in our Educational Project, emphasized by the XIV General Chapter. These are indispensable tools, if we wish to impart an education that is consistent with an ever-changing world which offers countless options to choose from.

To constantly think about why we do what we do and to reflect, act, and evaluate – are fundamental elements of our daily pedagogy. It is essential to the exercise of our educational practice.

Nevertheless, discernment as a reoccurring theme in the Educational Project of the Company of Mary goes beyond being an important characteristic of our particular style of commitment. To discern, says Toni Catala<sup>10</sup> is a way of being and perceiving reality, a disposition of the heart, a habit. Discernment is not possible without a deep experience of the God of life. It requires women and men to live freely in order to serve. Training ourselves in discernment, in seeking the will of God, is an urgent need at this particular time in history.

It is this discernment that must lead us to look for and develop new responses for the new needs found in today’s world. It is a **challenge** presented by the last General Chapter: “offering creative responses, however risky, and yet consistent with our Educational Project and with the historical moment that we are living.”

The call to *consistency between the being and doing of an organization* is a particular point of **emphasis** in this Chapter.

For some time now, looking for and implementing different types of organizational structures has become a common practice in the various contexts of the Universal Company. The last Chapter made reference to this and we were encouraged to continue forward in this direction. A series of internal and external causes exist that motivate the search: the desire for joint administrative teams, lay and religious, in the operation of our centers, the small number of religious, the need to depend on qualified persons for this undertaking... They are necessary and important considerations in continuing forward into the future and they must force us to question ourselves regarding whom we wish to serve by these organizational structures. It is evident that our credibility depends, to some extent, on the corporate and institutional image that we project.

**2.4. “Entering into the world of youth, accepting their values and shortcomings, communicating the message of Jesus with new words that are comprehensible and inviting.”**

Young people are the preferred recipients of our educational and evangelizing activity; they are at the heart of, the reason for, our Educational Project: Jeanne de Lestonnac, “saw a great number of young souls at the point of falling into the abyss and she understood that she was the one who had to extend a hand to them.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, youth as the preferential domain of our apostolic action, in one way or the other, appear in all of our Capitular conclusions. The previous Chapter asked us to consider our work with youth as one of our priorities, and this last Chapter urges us to, “**enter their world and communicate the message of Jesus to them.**”

This invitation made by the XV General Chapter is a **challenge** we must address in a process of a contextualized evangelization, providing the means for interaction between all that is related to God and each young person in his or her own setting: his/her forms

of verbal expression, ways of expressing love, pain, friendship... To transmit the message of Jesus through signs and words that “touch” their cultural conventions and initiates an experience of encounter with the divine.

“The cultural contexts are very influential in transmitting values.<sup>12</sup> Our starting point is a diverse society, not one where a unified culture exists. Therefore, only when we concern ourselves with specific contextual realities can we address them in such a way as to connect the differing identities of diverse groups. It is necessary to carefully and thoroughly explore each cultural context, each place where we carry out our mission so that we can better ascertain appropriate educational strategies.

On the other hand, we cannot forget that cultural contexts are limited spaces, extended to those who have a similar and joint experience in daily life, therefore, they are restricted. If we want to move towards an interrelationship and dialogue with what is different ourselves, we must undertake the **challenge** of contextualization, introducing attitudes of openness to other cultures and different situations into our educational practices. Education today, in a world more and more interconnected, interdependent and globalized, requires having broad horizons that begin with one’s own setting and expands it. The proposition made by the last Chapter along this line is indispensable: *“In light of the dynamic globalization in our world we must create a consciousness of universal responsibility: helping individuals and groups affirm their identity; helping each person to own and create his/her culture; enter into dialogue with other entities, acknowledging and respecting them, promoting friendship among peoples... “Dynamically living the dialectic of the universal and contextual.”* states the Document of the last Chapter.

### **3. Let us hasten to open up paths of universality, of creating the Universal Body with others.**

The XV General Chapter **challenges** us to **unite our forces in response to the urgencies of the mission**, and to **walk with others**. This is another recurring theme emphasized in our Educational Project and highlighted by the previous Chapter: **“in diversity and plurality.”** The importance of the relations and inter-relations at different levels is emphasized:

#### **3.1. “Create relationships bound together by the acceptance of our limitations and differences, by the recognition of gifts and possibilities, and by a community living out a common mission.”**

All that has been expressed up to now would most likely be very difficult or impossible to live without a group of persons who, embracing a joint mission, complement one another in its accomplishment. The Delors Report from UNESCO expresses it with clarity: education, “sees itself obliged to offer nautical letters for a complex and perpetually agitated world, and at the same time, be a compass enabling its navigation, thus making of it a collective adventure.”<sup>13</sup>

Being community is an indispensable recurring theme in our Educational Project. This is pointed out in the previous Chapter: “a community that forms its members for a communal consciousness.” The XV General Chapter emphasizes **the relational dimension**. It considers relationships, realistically and objectively, as a bond which must be created and which is the foundation for building community. This is the **challenge** it proposes.

Making the Educational Project a **shared mission** happens in the building of a real, and not idealized, community. Jeanne de Lestonnac with great wisdom and a strong sense of practicality sets the foundation. Community is based on the “mutual union and conformity to better and more efficaciously fulfill the service entrusted to it.”<sup>14</sup> In the matter of genuine friendship: “there is nothing I recommended more than friendship among yourselves,”<sup>15</sup> This makes us aware of the interaction that exists between the relational element and carrying out the mission.

Building a tightly knit team requires taking into account a series of elements that make it possible:<sup>16</sup> creating a climate of mutual trust; facing conflicts in order to avoid creating a false harmony; expressing one's opinion, making clear decisions, and insisting in jointly carrying them out, even if one does not have the certainty that that decision is the correct one; assuming responsibility in giving an account of what is done and bearing with the inconveniences implied in requiring accountability; attention to the end results, placing the collective goals before personal recognition.

The team or the community is not built in a day nor is it built forever. Paradoxically, relationships are established after recognizing limitations and weaknesses.

### **3.2. “Continue advancing together, laity and religious, believers and nonbelievers, all who co-responsibly share the educational mission.”**

The XV Chapter expresses, with objectivity and realism, the need to continue moving forward together. It is clear and evident that each human group has its similarities and differences: differences in ways of being and thinking, in life experiences at different moments, in types of beliefs... All this is an enormous richness, if we know how to articulate it properly; this contributes to the building of a shared mission which more and more has to meet the needs of persons of diverse cultures and characteristics. The **challenge** is in knowing how to transform the difference in complementarity, discovering the valuable contribution that each person can make, and believing that we truly need one another.<sup>17</sup>

Generating dynamics of inclusion that favor the development of all groups is necessary if we truly want the educational community to exist.

We must be aware of the fact that we advance together in co-responsibility in the fulfillment of the mission of education, laity and religious, and this has progressively grown in intensity. To the degree that this is a reality it opens up new possibilities. Therefore, it continues to be expressed in the last Chapters. The Document of the XIV General Chapter stresses this important theme of our Educational Project: “in co-responsibility with others,” and this most recent General Chapter affirms the conviction and the fact that we move the educational mission forward in **co responsibility**.

### **3.3. “Seek new forms of solidarity with the Universal Body, establishing networks among apostolic platforms, encouraging communication, promoting the interchange of personnel, goods, resources and experiences.”**

The words preceded by, “**inter**”: inter-connection, inter-relationship, inter-dependency, inter-provincial... have become an important part of our vocabulary in these last few years. Setting aside the negative aspects of the phenomena of globalization, the truth of the matter is that all that goes into creating bonds, establishing relationship, complementing one another's vision, incorporating different realities and recognizing the fact that we need each other, have positive effects.

The XIV General Chapter already had specified some of these new forms of solidarity in the Body of the Company: “*Administrative structures, pedagogical and pastoral teams that animate various works at the provincial or inter-provincial level..., inter-provincial structures that promote reflection on the needs of education today and the ways of attending them...*” It states that “*the evaluation of the journey thus far taken impels us to go forward.*” In the six years between the two Chapters, these steps have multiplied, and the journey thus far taken is a help in beginning other similar experiences, and also learning from the mistakes and difficulties encountered.

The XV General Chapter **challenges** us to continue creating networks among the different educational platforms within the same city or zone, and it includes a new point of emphasis: “**seek new forms of solidarity in the Universal Body,**” explore and develop all the possibilities afforded us in being a Universal Company.

It is an invitation to broaden the horizons of our cultures and concrete realities, to forge new frontiers, to discover and explore the richness of universality. A challenge that involves overcoming apathy, having the courage to search and dare to venture new paths, committing ourselves to put forth our vital resources at the service of the Universal Body.

### **3.4 “Promote the growth and development of the lay network of the Company of Mary that is being formed. Together look for ways to make it possible.”**

For the first time in the history of the Company of Mary Our Lady, a group of lay people participated in the previous General Chapter. Their final Document expresses something of their experience: *“As we approached the fountain of the charism of Jeanne de Lestonnac, religious and laity together, we discovered the mission project of the religious apostolic life that has given life to the Company of Mary and that has evolved throughout the centuries. It is a new potential which is finding expression in the lives of lay men and women, believers and nonbelievers, who are eager to serve in a new way.”*

Once again, a group of lay people from different parts of the world assisted at the most recent XV General Chapter, sharing the process of reflection that took place throughout the Capitular year. The objective was to look for and discern the possibilities in journeying together.

The desire to grow in a Company of Mary identity was made evident and the desire for a **formation plan** that would be appropriate to the uniqueness, conditions and differences of each cultural context, allowing for initiative on the part of the different groups and gradually coming together in the creation of a lay network.

Religious and lay people alike feel that the charism of Jeanne de Lestonnac gives meaning to their lives; the **challenge** is to live it according to the different vocations, helping one another grow in the particular calling. It is expressed thus in the Capitular Document: *“We feel the urgent need to live out the charism in complementarity, mutually helping each other grow in our own vocation, with the same spirituality, together opening up paths of evangelization.”*

### **3.5 “To journey with others in diversity and plurality, and together create spaces of humanization and Good News in our world.”**

In this journey with others, the XV Chapter, **challenges** us to leave our comfort zones and particular interests, “to actively participate with groups that work for justice, solidarity, peace, in defense of life, the dignity of women, ecology... collaborating in NGOs, ecumenical and inter-religious movements, promoting mission projects in common with other congregations. It challenges us to network with other persons and groups, **diverse and plural**, engaged in the same venture of building humanity. Something that in different words was expressed by the previous Chapter: *“contribute to the formation of a social network, a network of solidarity.”*

## **4. Let us hasten journey along the path of proclamation and of a grateful song.**

The final Document of the XV General Chapter begins by inviting us to see our world with realism and optimism, and ends by urging us to sing a grateful song to life.

All the great classical thinkers express that the educator is the one who must transmit to those being taught what humanity has learned about themselves and about nature, about the most important inventions and creations...<sup>18</sup> It is an enormous task that requires **competency and professional discipline** and therefore, it is a process of continual

learning. The XV General Chapter Document insists on putting the necessary means for a specific and ongoing **formation**.

Along side all of this, experience is showing us that it is in our daily living, in the scenarios of our authentic interrelationships and unselfish service where we learn the truth of who we are and what it means to be who we are: human beings with our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which allow us to open ourselves up to the other and to the transcendent. To acknowledge and embrace the gift that each of us is and to **proclaim** it, more with actions than with words is the **challenge** that the last General Chapter places in our hands.

To experience, even in the “nights,” that life is a gift that is given to us because it enables us to **sing a grateful song**, and to set in motion all our creative resources in exploring and bringing forth, without losing anything, the potentials that each person possesses within.

To promote the dimensions of gratitude, joy, and trustful abandonment in the future in our educational platforms is another **challenge** that is presented to us in Chapter XV.

Going over the documents of the last two Chapters we clearly see the most important challenges that the XXI century holds for the educational mission of the Company of Mary. Dialoging, reflecting at depth, and letting these very challenges question us, in order to seek new responses that address the needs of today is the journey that lies ahead and which we must all walk together.

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<sup>1</sup> The Night of the Cistercian Monastery, is a historical account written 53 years after the death of Jeanne de Lestonnac... Cf. *History of the Order*

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Sabater, *El valor de educar*, Edit. Ariel, Barcelona 1997, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, p. 101-109

<sup>4</sup> Xavier Quinza, *Pasión y radicalidad*, Edit. San Pablo, Madrid 2004, pp.197,200.

<sup>5</sup> *La Compañía de María un proyecto de educación*, Edit. ACV ediciones, Barcelona, 1998, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, presided by Jacques Delors, UNESCO publications, 1996

<sup>7</sup> Darío Mollá, *Crar lazos: un estilo de comunidad educativa*, Jornadas de Pastoral, Federación Española de Religiosos de Enseñanza, Madrid 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Xavier Quinza, *Calidad educativa y práctica de la justicia*, FERE 2004

<sup>9</sup> Joaquín García Roca, *Oportunidades educativas y vida religiosa*, conference given at the XIV General Chapter of the Company of Mary, Rome, 1997, Subsidia 2-A

<sup>10</sup> Toni Catala, *Vida Religiosa “a la aposolica”* Sal Terrae, Santander 2004

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *History of the Order*, p. 62-64.

<sup>12</sup> Reference made to, Xavier Quinza *Calidad educativa y práctica de la justicia*, FERE 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Jaques Delors, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Edit. UNESCO, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> ODN, Foundational Documents – Rules of 1638, R. 40, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> F. Julia de Toulouse, *La vie de la venerable Mere de Lestonnac*, p. 194.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. Lencione, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> James C. Hunter, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*, edit. Prima Publishing, 1998, excerpt: “My first mentor in business management taught me a lesson on the importance of opinions contrary to mine... After a particularly hot meeting I said, why do you not get rid of those who disagree so that you can have more pleasant meetings? And he answered me, if I left you to yourself you would ruin the company, those whom you want to get rid of are precisely the ones who maintain the balance... If in your meetings all 10 of you agree, then probably 9 of you are not necessary.”

<sup>18</sup> Report Delors, Edit. UNESCO, 1996.