



Rome, July 1, 2008

TO THE LAITY OF THE COMPANY OF MARY OUR LADY

Dear Friends:

Just a few months ago we concluded our celebration commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Church's approbation of the Company of Mary, Our Lady. The reflections and studies, along with the various gatherings that took place, have helped us get to know one another better, strengthen the ties among us, widen our horizons and appreciate our complementary gifts. We feel very strongly that we bear a gift that has been shaped by the open dialogue that has transpired with each historic moment throughout the different periods of our existence, as well as within the very heart of each culture where the Company has been implanted. The worldwide celebrations have made us aware of this richness. The experience in its totality has been a source of motivation and a call to commit ourselves to do our very best in assuring that the educational project of Saint Jeanne continues to bear fruit in the world today.

Today, in the worldwide Company of Mary Our Lady, we convoke the **XVI General Chapter**¹, will take place in **Rome, July 1 – 31, 2009** entitled:
Culture, Identity, Interculturality, Universality
From the perspective of the Kingdom

The General Chapter is a very important event for the Company of Mary and for those who, in one way or another, are associated with us. It takes place every six years and its *goal* is to take an in-depth look at the characteristics of the present-day reality from the perspective of our educational mission, discern the greatest needs which we must address and indicate common lines of action for the following period. It is with this goal in mind that the theme of the Chapter has been selected.

In recent years the various social phenomena of globalization, immigration, forced displacement... have made the "different" and "differences" more strongly apparent. In most parts of the world on a daily basis we come across people of different races, cultures and creeds. Because our social realities are more diverse, complex and universal than ever before, we are faced with new possibilities as well as the emergence of new problems and

¹ Constitutions of the Company of Mary 2006, Gov. 38, p. 89.

conflicts. This situation calls for the kind of education that addresses these new challenges and prepares people to confront this new reality in a positive and constructive manner, encouraging the proposal of policies that assure the rights of individuals and peoples.

At the same time, awareness of the fact that interculturality requires new ways of being, of moving and of acting moves us to reflect on what it means to have world-wide presence, in a world in which the intercultural dimension is part of our identity.

In the study of our educational mission that took place as part of the 400th anniversary, it became evident that the worldwide dimension of the Company makes it possible for us to “look at the educational mission in its plurality and in bringing together our limited visions we can approach it in complementarity and integration. Combining the local and the global in addressing specific needs is a current demand, something that is not only characterizing our education today, but that of the future.”² We are aware of the fact that universality offers us many possibilities which must be explored.

We are called to live this mission with the profound understanding that we “continue to extend our hand collaborating in God’s creative action,”³ a God who is revealed through communication and encounter, a God who asks us, like Abraham, to interiorize and accept God’s word, to go out of ourselves, to go beyond the familiar and open ourselves up to the unknown, to the different, to differences.⁴ This path involves a growth process which requires finding ways to strengthen our interior life, that space in our hearts that allows us to “go beyond appearance, piercing the most intimate structures of creation and of our very selves.”⁵

We begin a very important year, and with great confidence we prepare ourselves to live it as a special time of encounter with the God of life, that God who, 400 years ago, invited a woman, Jeanne de Lestonnac, to join her hands with His in the mission of salvation, projecting the image of God through education.⁶ We embark upon this journey together, according to the desires and possibilities of each group: Laity Network, members of our educational staffs, alumni, all those who feel part of our educational mission....

At the opportune time we will provide you with material and the proposed program for the study of the selected topics in preparation for this Chapter.

We are most grateful to each and every one of you for the opportunity to be companions on the journey, sharing our mission in co-responsibility and complementarity as we extend the Kingdom of God.

Affectionately Yours,

Beatriz Acosta Mesa odn
and General Team

² The Educational Mission of the Company of Mary: challenges and responses. Edic. EdiMend, S.A. México D.F. 1^a ed. Marzo 2008, p. 15.

³ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴ Cf. Genesis 12,1.

⁵ Ibid, p. 251.

⁶ Ibid, p. 119.