



Rome, July 1, 2008

TO THE COMMUNITIES OF THE COMPANY OF MARY OUR LADY

Dearest Sisters:

Just a few months ago we concluded our celebration commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Church's approbation of the Company of Mary. Even now we continue to hear echoes of this great experience. 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. In times of light and darkness, amidst favorable or adverse circumstances, in joy as well as in pain, at this current moment in history that is uniquely ours to live and to shape, we feel called and compelled to do our very best in order that the charism of Saint Jeanne continues to bear fruit in the world today.

Within the framework of this experience, we convoke the **XVI General Chapter**¹. As previously agreed at the VII General Assembly,² the Chapter will take place in **Rome, July 1 – 31, 2009**. It is entitled:

***Culture, Identity, Interculturality, Universality
From the perspective of the Kingdom***

The goal of the General Chapter is, “in *union of hearts*, find specific ways to *express, in our day*, the values intrinsic to our charism.”³

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 conflicts. This situation calls for the kind of education that addresses the 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.

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

² VII General Assembly. Bordeaux-Orvieto 2003, p. 28.

³ Cf. Company of Mary Constitutions, 2006, Gob. 37, p. 89.

Looking for the appropriate means and living according to the values and attitudes needed to make interculturality possible is not always an easy task. This implies learning new ways of being, of managing conflict, of dedication...; based on a sense of personal identity, we must stress the mutual growth that comes from interconnectedness and interaction.

At the same time, a greater awareness of what interculturality entails obliges us to reflect on the importance of being a Universal Company, in that the intercultural dimension is part of our very identity.

The survey on Universality-Interculturality prepared for the VII General Assembly⁴ dealt with what it means to truly become a Body that seeks complementarity, and one that is engaged in a process of mutually improving ways of extending our hand to the most urgent needs in our world today.

We find the notion of “inter”, with all of its nuances, appearing evermore frequently and with greater emphasis in each of our most recent documents. For us, Company of Mary, the prefix “inter” speaks of interrelationship, of joint projects, of new structural forms... of how, throughout many years now, we have been looking for ways to express our “apostolic dynamism and the need to join forces in order to carry out the mission.”⁵

The in-depth study and reflection in preparation for the General Chapter and the Chapter itself will move us along even further, deepening our understanding of “inter” as a common thread that touches who we are and what we do. The concept of “*inter*,” over and above its functional and organizational aspects, is rather *our way of being, moving, and acting in the world*.

In our following of Jesus, living out this process strikes at the very core of what gives our life meaning: embodying the person of Jesus and other-centeredness. It places us before 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.⁶

Allowing the reality of the Other, and others, to reshape and transform us is a “growth experience,”⁷ providing the means for our inner life to grow, to create that space in our hearts that allows us to “go beyond appearance, piercing the most intimate structures of creation and of our very selves.”⁸ This enables us to embrace the dying inherent in this transformation process because it is in living the Paschal experience that we are molded into persons of faith. It is where our words and actions become credible, offering the world what it most needs.

Participating in the Chapter dynamic, fully aware of the responsibility entailed, will help us overcome fatigue, indifference, superficiality,

⁴ VII General Assembly, p. 123.

⁵ Cf. XV General Chapter. Rome 2003, p. 209.

⁶ Cf. Genesis 12,1.

⁷ Expressed by Francesc Torralba Roselló in his conference in the Education Congress in Barcelona: “Educating for the Transcendent,” The educational mission of the Company of Mary: challenges and responses. Edic. EdiMend, S.A. México D.F. 1^a ed. March 2008, p. 249.

⁸ Idem, p. 251.

hopelessness, settling for the “minimum”... It will inspire and impel us to seek the freedom and fullness expressed in the Beatitudes, to joyfully embrace the Gospel paradox, “die in order to bear fruit,”⁹ that is, abundant fruit. We rest on the belief that the Lord is showing us the way, as has been the case throughout these 400 years of life and history.

The recent documents resulting from the reflection and studies that have taken place attempt to express what we live and what we want to live. These documents will serve as our resource material in preparation for the Chapter. There are vital current topics which we must study and explore, and that together with the General Chapter theme, identify the new realities and issues which must be carefully examined and unraveled. For this purpose study papers written by individuals who have researched these topics will be provided.

We will use a methodology that hopefully “touches” our lives in specific and concrete ways; one that leads us to review our daily living, encouraging each and everyone of us to discover and to take the “next step.”

We are sending the Provincials and Delegates the program for this preparatory stage of the Chapter. They will send it on to the communities upon the convocation of the Provincial Chapter.¹⁰

The members of the Laity Network and the lay people sharing in our mission and passion for a more humane world will participate in the Chapter preparation in a particular way. Sensing their commitment to journey with us as companions on the way, co-responsibly participating in the mission and helping us extend the Kingdom in a complementary way, is a source of support and motivation for all.

We embark upon a year of grace and we trustingly ready ourselves to live it as a special time of encounter with the God of Life, the God revealed in Jesus making us participants of His Kingdom. Each of us today is the hands that God needs to continue building the Kingdom. The interior life, interculturality, dialogue, working for justice, care for life... are expressions of this commitment.¹¹

Mary of Nazareth knew what it meant to have to leave her homeland for other lands; without prejudices she welcomed the encounter with different races and cultures, serving as God’s mediation. She accompanies us on our journey.

Affectionately Yours,

Beatriz Acosta Mesa odn
and General Team

⁹ Cf. John: 2, 24.

¹⁰ Cf. Company of Mary Constitutions, Gov. 65 y 66, p. 97.

¹¹ VII General Assembly, p. 18.