

# LIVING HISTORY

## The Generalate of MARY MILLIGAN RSHM 1980 - 1985

### III



SOURCES OF LIFE  
Study and Reflection on the RSHM Heritage



MARY MILLIGAN RSHM

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The Generalate of  
MARY MILLIGAN RSHM

**SOURCES OF LIFE**

Study and Reflection on the RSHM Heritage

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Publication of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary



## Preface

Sister Mary Milligan, reflecting on her time as General Superior from 1980 to 1985, wrote an account of her mandate in September 2006, close to the beginning of her long illness which sadly led to her death on April 2 2011, a loss for her province and for the Institute.

Mary's reflections on her time as General Superior were written in the form of an imaginary interview entitled 'Windows on the World'. In this "interview" she said much but we felt there was more to be said about the time she served the Institute in this ministry. So we asked Maria Lucia Brandão, her Assistant, and Catherine Dolan, General Secretary during Mary's mandate, to find a way of expanding Mary's text with some further information.

This book is essentially Mary's 'Windows on the World', with the addition of brief passages from Mary's Memoir, 'Tell us, Mary, what you have seen along the way' (California 2009), and excerpts from the 'Report of the General Council to the 1985 General Chapter'. These additions are indicated in the text by means of square brackets. Some of Mary's letters to the Institute have been selected by Marjorie Keenan and are presented in Appendix 2.

Our thanks to Catherine, to Maria Lucia and also to Marjorie who initiated the project and indicated the steps to be taken.

To Mary Milligan, our deep gratitude for who she was, and for the great impetus and collaboration she gave to the study of our Sources.

Maria Antónia Quinteiro  
RSHM Sources Group Coordinator  
October 2011



Sister Mary Milligan

# Contents

Preface	i
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Interview Begins	7
Chapter 2: Context – Second Vatican Council	11
Documents of Vatican II	14
Chapter 3: Call to Justice	15
Chapter 4: Constitutions	18
Chapter 5: Church	23
Chapter 6: Co-Responsibility / Collaboration	28
General Council’s Presence in the Provinces	31
Chapter 7: Sources	33
Chapter 8: Mandates given by 1980 Chapter	35
Enlarged General Council Meetings	39
International Meetings	39
Chapter 9: Important Last Words	40
Appendices	45
Appendix 1: 1980 General Chapter, Closing Address	47
Appendix 2: Letters	53



# Living History

## III

### Introduction

This is the third volume in the series *Living History*, a Sources of Life project, for which five of the most recent General Superiors (1963-2007) agreed to reflect on the history of the Institute during the years in which they served in this ministry. The first volume was written by Sister Margarida Maria Gonçalves who was General Superior from September 1963 until August 1975 and the second by Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado who reflected on her time as General Superior from 1975 until 1980.

This volume is that of Sister Mary Milligan, reflecting on her time as General Superior from 1980 until 1985. Mary chose to write it in the form of an interview and called it “Windows on the World”.

Sister Mary Milligan was born on January 23, 1935 in Los Angeles, California, USA. She entered the RSHM Novitiate in New York and was later sent to the International Novitiate in Béziers, France.

She was elected Councillor during the second mandate of Sister Margarida Maria Gonçalves. At the end of her term, she remained in Rome to complete her doctoral studies at the Gregorian University. She rendered a priceless service to the Institute by writing her dissertation on the Spirit-Charism of Father Gailhac, giving a solid foundation to future research and study concerning RSHM history and spirituality.

Her careful research concerning the legacy that Father Gailhac had left the Institute in his numerous writings allowed her to determine an important aspect of the nature of the Institute. While Mary, Mother of God, has a special place in the spirituality of the Institute, the Institute is clearly Christological. Interestingly, long before promotion of women in society, Father Gailhac did not hesitate to call the RSHM to be ‘other Christs’.

At the request of Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado, Mary coordinated the institute-wide process of revising the Constitutions of the Institute. A Special Commission was formed to draft a text, and Mary gave the Constitutions their final form. As directed by *Perfectae Caritatis*, the new text was faithful to the original scope of the Institute, that of knowing and loving

God and continuing the mission of Jesus Christ “who came that all may have life” (Const.1).

The 1980 General Chapter elected Mary as the 10th General Superior of the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. At the Chapter, the delegates unanimously approved the revised Constitutions and during Mary’s mandate she and her council remained in dialogue with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes until the Holy See approved the new Constitutions on February 24, 1983. Subsequently the implementation of the Constitutions was an objective in the Council’s visits to the provinces, in Constitutions Retreats and in meetings of the Enlarged General Council.

The Living History Series will hopefully continue. Sister Patricia Connor (1985-1995) and Sister Catherine Dolan (1995-2007) have agreed to contribute. Both asked however, that they be given sufficient time to distance themselves from the recent past in order to be able to interpret the various significant events of their mandates.

Marjorie Keenan, RSHM

February 24, 2009



Mary, Patricia Connor and Catherine Dolan  
RHSM General Superiors 1980 – 2007  
Montebello, Western American Province, 2008





# **Windows on the World:**

An Imaginary Interview with Sister Mary Milligan, RSHM

Held in the North Hollywood studios of KSHM

**September 2006**

**Interviewer: Sally Seaforth (SALLY)**



# Chapter 1

## THE INTERVIEW BEGINS

SALLY: Good morning, Sister Mary (SMM)

SMM: And to you as well, Sally.

SALLY: This morning we are here in our studios to reflect on your time as general superior of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. As you know, this interview is part of our regular programming which is intended to bring several general superiors of your congregation to our listening public.

SALLY: First of all, would you refresh our memory about those years? Which years were they?

SMM: Yes, I will be happy to. I was elected the tenth general superior of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) on August 3, 1980. I was also the first general superior born in the United States. Our Institute is international and, whenever we gather, it is important to us that sisters be present from all of our provinces, regions and other administrative structures. Our leadership teams at the general level are chosen by the direct vote of the delegates, that is, of sisters who have themselves been elected or selected as delegates to the international meeting called a “chapter”. The chapter which met in 1980 was the sixteenth chapter of our history. I served as general superior from 1980 until 1985, that is, for five years.

SALLY: Just what do general superiors do?

SMM: Let me first of all clarify that a general superior does not act alone, except in certain legal and clearly defined cases. Most often she acts as part of a team, a “council” which also has certain very well defined roles. While I most often refer to “I” during our conversation, there is always a “we” behind what I say. During my five years of service at the general level, I was blessed with two very fine councilors: Maria Lúcia Brandão from Portugal, and Bríd McGrath from Ireland. We worked closely

with Sister Mary McHugh from the United States. She was general treasurer until 1982 and was followed by Judith Lupo, from Brazil. Catherine Dolan from England, our current general superior, was general secretary in 1980-1985.

Let me from the outset speak of Sr. Bríd's illness and death which took us all by surprise. Bríd had spent some time in Sag Harbor during the summer. She loved the water and the sun, as many of you know. She returned to Rome looking rested and well. We were to leave Rome for a visit to the English/Irish province. Just before we left, Bríd noticed that none of her skirts fit her and she had some discomfort in the abdominal area. She saw a doctor in Rome who advised her to see her own doctor right away. It was in Ireland that she was diagnosed with cancer. It was hard for us to grasp the fact that she was so ill. When we realized that she was failing rather rapidly, we spoke of her future. For quite a while we hoped for a recovery; at other times, we knew we needed to be prepared for her death. From afar, Bríd followed the work of the council. I asked her to stay on the council, should she wish to. I remember well how sick she had been at Easter time. I was in California where my brother-in-law was dying (he died on Holy Thursday). I left just after his death to go see Bríd in Ireland. She died on May 16, 1984.

As painful as Bríd's sickness and death were for us, we counted it a privilege to accompany her in those last days and to live so closely the paschal mystery of Jesus which is the center of our life. Since the general chapter of 1985 was fast approaching, we did not replace Bríd on the council.

Now back to the question you asked about what a general superior does. This question is a difficult one to answer because, while there is a common role description, each leader at the general level meets the challenges of her own times, and she meets them with the unique talents and abilities that are hers. According to our constitutions, each chapter member participates in decisions with a view to greater fidelity to our

apostolic vocation. Together, all the chapter members set goals and establish priorities for the future. Let me give you an example of how each leadership team brings its own vision and talents to the task.

In the early 1980's we were concerned about Africa. We felt that our structures on that continent did not favour the desired autonomy of our sisters there.

We had a number of sisters in Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mali. We noted that the sisters in those countries had minimal contact with each other across national boundaries and we felt the need to revise our structure on the African continent in order to facilitate communication. We appointed a Coordinator for our African Mission. Her responsibility was to encourage interchange among the four countries where we were, to promote more frequent contacts among those countries, and to make sure that the needs of the various areas were met. It was during this time that Mozambique became a region, that is a structure which had a high degree of independence.

No doubt in other times and other places we might have acted differently. But we needed to respond to the needs of our times.



Mary with general councillors, Srs. Maria Lucia Brandão (left) and Bríd McGrath (right), 1980



Mary with the generalate community and Maria Leonor Fernandes in 1982

## Chapter 2

### CONTEXT – SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

SALLY: What was the most pertinent issue which brought your talents and your call into play?

SMM: Let me tell you of several which called on my energies and talents and those of the council also. There are five of them. I will take them one by one and will elaborate on some of them. That will enable you to ask questions as well. Is that a good way to proceed?

SALLY: Yes, and I am grateful for the opportunity to ask a few questions

SMM: The five issues I am referring to are the following:

- Call to justice
- Constitutions
- Co-responsibility and collaboration
- Church
- Sources

SMM: You will notice, Sally, how interwoven these five themes are.

To understand the growth of our Institute in the years 1980-1985, it is vital to set the second Vatican Council as a context for what happened later. So much of what I say here you have already heard from my predecessors Margarida Maria Gonçalves and Maria de Lourdes Machado. The Vatican Council began October 11, 1962 and ended December 8, 1965. Though there had been other councils in the history of the Church, never had there been one so well prepared for, so rooted in the participation of all 2000 bishops present, so conscious of the world which surrounded it. Because of this event, we were – and are today – able to speak of a world church. The Council examined every aspect of church life. Documents had been prepared ahead of time but were revised during the various sessions of the Council. The fundamental question which needed to be decided was the Church's relationship with the world.

Those of us who are religious know that we used to speak of “leaving” the world, leaving it as if there were somewhere else to go! But wariness of the world extended throughout the Church and even today there is no one “image” of the church commonly accepted by all believers.

Three documents of Vatican II had a particular importance for religious: *Lumen Gentium* which provided a theological reflection on the nature of the Church; *Perfectae Caritatis*, addressed specifically to religious women and men; and *Gaudium et Spes*, the final document of the Council which had not been foreseen in the beginning. *Gaudium et Spes* traced out the fundamental stance of the Church vis-à-vis the world. Many of us can still cite the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

The second part of the document presented “a number of particularly urgent needs characterizing the present age” (№ 46). Addressed were the dignity of marriage and the family, the development of culture, socio-economic life, the life of the political community, peace and the community of nations. These human questions are the concern of the Church today as in the past.

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Institute (1999) Sr. Margarida Maria Gonçalves reflected on past chapters. “The General Chapter of 1963, at which the general superior and her councillors and the general secretary and general treasurer were elected, took place right in the heart of the Vatican Council.” Our Institute was given the extraordinary grace at that time of being led by Margarida Maria Gonçalves, who was profoundly rooted in Vatican II. As the eighth general superior 1963 – 1975, she gave us great continuity in our response to Vatican II. She wrote at that time (1999):



“Taking advantage of the presence of all the bishops of the world at the Council in Rome, we invited all those bishops from the dioceses in which there were RSHM to visit individually the Generalate, that is, the home and administrative center of the RSHM. Many theologians, resource people of the Council were also invited to our house to give information on the Council Directions, Constitutions and Decrees – especially about *Perfectae Caritatis: The Renewal and Adaptation of Religious Life*. In a word, the Council is the great reference point of the activities of the RSHM General Council and is, at the same time, like a gust of strong wind of change for the Institute, which shakes many sisters and institutions in all the provinces. Thus, during the five years which preceded the Special General Chapter of 1968/1969, the Institute began the process of renewal.”

All religious congregations were required to hold a general chapter preceded by an extensive consultation of all the sisters of the Institute. The sisters were encouraged to read current theological and biblical writing and to broaden their horizons.

If we look out of a window focused on the Church and on the world in 1980-1985, we see not only the context of the Vatican Council but we also see a very complex world in transition. We began that period in the midst of significant world events whose effects we continue to experience. In 1980, Zimbabwe gained its independence after years of civil war. Polish shipyard workers began a strike which would lead to the establishment of the first independent labor union in the Soviet bloc. Political movement in the Philippines gave hope for free elections there. On the other hand, Archbishop Romero was murdered in El Salvador. Brazil’s movement toward a church of the people through “comunidades de base” inspired other churches. Terrorism became common in those five years. And the OPEC nations raised the price of a barrel of oil to \$32. The hope of freedom and independence, however, seemed to outweigh the violence and oppression around us.

## Documents of Vatican II

### Constitutions

- *Dei Verbum*  
Dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation
- *Lumen Gentium*  
Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- *Sacrosanctum Concilium*  
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- *Gaudium et Spes*  
Pastoral Constitution on the Church

### Decrees

- *Ad Gentes*  
Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity
- *Presbyterorum Ordinis*  
Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
- *Apostolicam Actuositatem*  
Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity
- *Optatam Totius*  
Decree on Priestly Formation
- *Perfectae Caritatis*  
Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life
- *Christus Dominus*  
Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church
- *Unitatis Redintegratio*  
Decree on Ecumenism
- *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*  
Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches
- *Inter Mirifica*  
Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication

### Declarations

- *Gravissimum Educationis*  
Declaration on Christian Education
- *Nostra Aetate*  
Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
- *Dignitatis Humanae*  
Declaration on Religious Freedom

## Chapter 3

### CALL TO JUSTICE

The seeds of justice were embedded deeply in the soil of the Vatican Council. Especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, particular challenges were launched to the Church. The call to understand and implement those challenges is one that continues to our day. When our 1980 chapter met, it looked also to its predecessor. The 1975 chapter was almost entirely given to a reflection on justice. It was inspired by several biblical passages: Micah 6:8: “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” We also kept the ninth chapter of Luke before our eyes.

Like the Church in synod, our chapter of 1975 understood that justice was not optional; it saw that justice is a question of right relationships and is intrinsic to charity.

In my letter of February 24, 1985, I stated:

“The creation of the human person in God’s image is the foundation of the document *Gaudium et Spes*, № 40 on which all else stands. Human dignity, the call to freedom and community, the equality of all persons, social justice, the value of human activity – all are rooted in the mystery of creation in God’s image.”

Love for what is human and for all persons has expressed itself in different ways these past twenty years. It has generated the Church’s commitment to justice and to the poor. The call to inculturation, to the evangelization of cultures, to respect for cultural diversity is an offspring of concern for all things human. The recent stand of Church leaders throughout the world on questions of war and peace, of economical and political life, on the rights and dignity of various classes of persons – all these reflect a commitment to God’s temple which is humanity.

Our Institute has shared and been part of the Church’s new awareness of its mission in the world. We have come to understand better the founder’s original dream for the Institute – that we should give our lives so that all people might live, that we would “support any fatigue, sacrifice or renunciation so that God’s reign might be established in all hearts.” Two of

the clearest, most unequivocal signs of that reign in our world are, as they were in the time of Jesus, mutual love among the disciples and the proclamation of the gospel to the poor. Our 1975 chapter marked an important moment of the Institute's understanding of the importance of those signs. With the whole Church, it recognized that a commitment to justice is an integral element in our mission and that the formation of true community is in itself mission.

SALLY: You certainly have a lofty understanding of justice. But have you been able to implement your vision? On so many occasions, groups express their ideals but little change is made in the lives and work of the members of the group.

SMM: You are certainly correct in this observation. Justice, like the entire gospel message, takes a lifetime to understand and to live. We were helped by several factors, however. First of all, at the level of the universal Church, a synod on justice had taken place. It reminded us that justice is a constitutive element of preaching the gospel. In other words, justice is not just one element of our lives but is essential to it. Moving toward that conviction helped us to look at concrete elements of our life – and we did that together.

We were also aware that our sisters had begun to change their ministries. They came into contact with situations and systems of injustice which greatly heightened their awareness of the world around them.

SALLY: Once again, it looks as if you opened a window on the world. And that you responded to what you saw there. Was there anything else, anything “from within”, so to speak, which prompted your action for justice?

SMM: Actually there was. For at least twenty years, we had been studying the life and writings of Jean Gailhac, a parish priest from the south of France who founded our congregation. And study had taught us much, even dispelling certain myths that we carried from one generation to the next. Again, let me give you an example.

In 1968 and 1969, we had two sessions of a general chapter. We went into that chapter generally thinking that we had been founded for the work of education. Indeed, the majority of our sisters were involved in education or some work which was auxiliary to education. What we discovered through our study of our founder and foundresses (there were several), was that we were involved in education because that is what the bishops asked of us in their dioceses. Our archives showed us clearly that Father Gailhac intended that we be founded for “all the works of charity” – or the “works of zeal”, as he might say – according to the talents and possibilities of the sisters. In other words, we became massively involved in education as a way of respecting the gifts of the sisters and the requests that came to them from bishops in a variety of places: Northern Ireland, Portugal, Liverpool, the United States. All of them, without exception, needed schools. It was clear in those early days as well that there should always be a school for the poor as well as other works.

One other element which has helped us to concretize our commitment to justice comes from our constitutions. In paragraph 8 of our constitutions, we read the following:

*We share the deep love of Jean Gailhac for the poor. Faithful to our heritage, attentive to the signs of the times and the call of the Church, we are committed to the service of evangelical justice, wherever we are and whatever our ministry.*

Const. 21:

*Fidelity to the gospel, the Church and our founder leads us in our lives and ministries to solidarity with the poor and with victims of injustice.*

## Chapter 4

### CONSTITUTIONS

SALLY: Several times you have mentioned “constitutions”. Could you elaborate more on that term? It sounds as if your group is very focused on the law. Is that so?

SMM: You have heard reference to the second Vatican Council a number of times. That event was surely a “window on the world”, especially on the cultural, political and social worlds around us. The Vatican Council was a meeting of the world’s bishops who gathered to look at the Church in all its aspects, in all its challenges. Since it was a universal meeting, it was meant to touch every aspect of the Church’s life. And so it looked at religious life also and asked religious congregations to “update” their practices and styles of life, to assess whether their way of living was in fact meaningful to this age. The word “aggiornamento” was used, not only of religious life but of the whole Church as well. In judging their relationship to the world, religious were to look at their origins, that is, at their fundamental inspiration which gave them birth. That original inspiration and the gospel were to be the two major criteria of judgment.

As religious, we were called upon to revise our internal law, to ensure that our lives were consistent with the gospel and deeply rooted in the gospel. We were to look through a variety of “windows” and let ourselves be challenged by the reality we saw around us.

In 1975, during the general chapter of that year, I was asked to form and coordinate an “International Constitutions Commission”. That commission was to assure that all the sisters would have the opportunity to participate in the process of writing the constitutions. We wanted every sister to experience that the Constitutions were truly theirs.

First of all, every province and region was represented on the Commission. Each one was to bring the thoughts and suggestions of her own province to the entire Commission. Each member was good at reflection and so capable of advancing our thinking beyond the thinking of the group. To give the Commission members a first-hand experience of the various provinces, we met each time in a different place. And so our drafts were named the Fátima text, the Kingston text and the Bayssan text. Once the various drafts were drawn up, they were sent to all the sisters of the Institute for their critique and their suggestions.

The constitutions received unanimous approval on the last day of the chapter of 1980. The joy in the chapter room was palpable. The formal approval by the Sacred Congregation of Religious and for Secular Institutes came two years later, on February 24, 1983.

Once the constitutions were approved, the general council and other sisters who were experienced in spiritual and religious formation began to give “constitutions retreats.” Placing our constitutional renewal in the context of prayer and reflection on our mission greatly helped every sister to understand better our origins, our history and our spirituality. Through the constitutions retreats, the sisters were able to appropriate the gospel message as expressed in our constitutions.

Twenty-five years after the approval of the document, the entire congregation is again looking at our texts, asking ourselves how we have implemented them. The process of evaluation once again involves all the sisters; it incorporates individual as well as community reflection; and always the general level is included as well. The general council was initiator of the process. Our general chapter of 2007 will incorporate results of that work in its own agenda. We want to make sure, once again, that we are responding to real needs of today’s world.

Let me come back to your question about the role of the law in our life, Sally. I hope you have seen that the gospel is the center of our life. Our constitutions articulate the gospel for us and give us a perspective on God's will for us. The final paragraph of our constitutional text reads:

*We, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary look on [our constitutions] as the expression of how our communal life unfolds and develops. United in our faith and zeal, we will do all in our power to observe them as we continue our journey to that fullness of life to which we have been called.*

We state that:

*We share the particular gift of the Spirit given to Jean Gailhac, to Mère St. Jean, and to our first sisters for the life of the world. Responsible for this gift, we ask of God openness to the Holy Spirit, attentiveness to the Word active in our world, continual conversion of heart.*

And so you see how our own internal law opened a great number of windows on the world. In some sense, we saw every aspect of our life in a new way, each one representing a new revelation of the world around us. One has only to look at a timeline to realize how "newness" was arising all around us with the election of John Paul II, the first Polish pope.



OMNIA PRO JESU PER MARIAM  
ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE D I MARIA  
CURIA GENERALIZIA  
Via Lucchesi 3 - Tel. 679.94.35  
00187 ROMA

August 29, 1980

Dear Sister,

These constitutions are the fruit of our process of corporate reflection during these past five years. Each of us has prayed, reflected and shared our experience with the sisters of our province. Here at our general chapter, we have taken the process a step further and have enabled the "word" of each province to enrich the other provinces. Our individual "words" have given birth to a corporate WORD. We believe that the Spirit has been with us and we trust that these constitutions will truly guide, enrich and direct our lives for the good of the whole Church.

The accompanying text has been approved by the general chapter and promulgated to the whole Institute. I ask you to receive it with great faith, looking beyond the words to the life they mean to convey to each of us personally and to the Institute as a whole. We are asked to assimilate and interiorize the constitutions, so that the law will be truly written in our hearts and will free us to serve God and His people with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

These constitutions will be presented to the Sacred Congregation of Religious for approval. Living "the mystery of ecclesial consecration", as Pope John Paul II reminded us on August 20, 1980, and sharing Father Gailhac's great love for the Church, it is important to us that our corporate word be "tested" by the wisdom of the universal Church. While awaiting ecclesial approbation, the constitutions have full effect in the life of the Institute.

May the constitutions be a source of joy and encouragement to each one of us. May they deepen our bonds with one another. May they challenge us to re-commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, his gospel and his mission.

Affectionately in Christ,

Mary Milligan RSCM

## DECREE

This Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, by virtue of its authority to erect, guide and promote institutes of the consecrated life, after careful examination of the constitutions presented by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, acceding to the petition of the Superior General and her Council, herewith approves, within the limits of common law these same constitutions as amended according to the observations made by this Sacred Congregation. May the generous living of these constitutions encourage all the Sisters of the institute to an ever-deeper commitment to their consecrated life, to Christ and to his Church in the spirit of Father Gailhac, their founder, and after the strong and tender example of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

Given at Rome, February 24, 1983.

Feast of the founding of the institute.

E. Card. Pironio, Pref.  
Augustine Mayer, Secr.

## Chapter 5

### CHURCH

My five years as general superior were certainly shaped by events in the universal Church. The windows open to me were multiple and they showed me a world of great hope as well as of great shadow. The first annual circular letter I addressed to the entire Institute was centred on hope and on newness. I wrote at that time: "The Institute also in some sense is living through a 'new beginning'. Our constitutions call us to renew our personal and community lives for mission. They have created a certain sense of expectation among us. While this expectation can deepen and nourish our hope, real Christian hope goes beyond any feeling of expectation. And it is to this hope that we are called." I then quoted from the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Cardinal Pironio, who visited our chapter. While with us, he repeated his perennial message which was always one of hope.

The election of John Paul II at that time had also been a source of hope. He was young and vigorous and conveyed hope for the future. His first encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis* repeated often: "Open the doors to Christ; do not be afraid." Indeed, in those first years of John Paul II's papacy, hope seemed abundant. Not long after his election, he called for a Jubilee Year of Redemption (1983-1984). There were a series of meaningful ceremonies in St Peter's basilica that year. The general council likewise met informally with John Paul II during the public audience of July 18, 1985. Just before the 1980 chapter began, the generalate community was invited to attend John Paul II's morning Mass. He would be going to Brazil shortly and, we were told, he was eager to improve his Portuguese! We were pleased to accept the invitation and after Mass in his private chapel, we had some time with him and presented him some of our written documents which might be of interest to him.

From 1980 to 1985, the new revision of canon law was approved. There were also two synods held in Rome – one on the family and the other on penance and reconciliation. At that time, I wrote another letter to the sisters of the Institute, outlining the various changes made in the constitutions in view of its approval. I wrote to the Institute: "May our constitutions, lived in

creative and responsible freedom and fidelity, be for us 'joy for the heart, light for the eyes, new life for the soul (cf. Ps 19)'." That prayer continues to be mine to this day.

Only in re-reading my annual circular letters do I realize how frequent was my exhortation to read and learn from the various papal encyclicals. In 1981, I refer to *Dives in Misericordia* which underlines the fact that there is no true justice without mercy. Peace was the theme of that letter and, at that point, I was struck by the "increasingly central role that the churches are playing in the quest for peace..."

Likewise in 1981, I quoted somewhat extensively from Mother Rita Rowley's circular letter on the Church. She reminded us of *Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris*, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The promulgation of the code of canon law in 1983 prompted our reflection on the meaning of law in our life, specifically the relationships among freedom, justice, love and law. In February of 1985, it was *Gaudium et Spes* which drew our attention, perhaps because it was the twentieth anniversary of that document of Vatican II. It is noteworthy that this year – 2006 – marks the fortieth anniversary of that same document which remains as meaningful today as when it was written. It continues to challenge us to make the joys, the sorrows of all humans our own.

SALLY: You have had a number of opportunities for understanding the law. Have the other sisters had similar ones?

SMM: They certainly had their own experiences, but I must admit that my own were unique. There were three events which they did not have and which I tried to communicate to them vicariously. Each one emphasized a different aspect of "church".

The first of those experiences took place in June 1983. At that time I was the first alternate of the Executive Committee of the International Union of Superiors General, a group of ten major superiors from diverse countries who met with Pope Jean Paul II. We set the agenda ourselves and the warm atmosphere of trust made it possible for any participant to introduce auxiliary topics in the course of the conversation.

[The meetings were called because of a mutually expressed desire on the part of the Holy Father and the UISG to enter into dialogue.

The themes of the meeting were generally:

- Apostolic religious life, formation, and vocations,
- Religious women in the local church, with specific attention to our relationship with bishops,
- Religious life and culture, focusing especially on the reality of pluralistic forms of religious life.] *Memoir page 44*

We had three sessions with John Paul II, each one lasting about 1½ hours. My only regret was that there were no follow-up meetings after the original three.

[I came away from my experience in meeting with John Paul II recognizing how important it is to engage in dialogue with the hierarchy or institutional church locally and throughout the world. Working within the structures of the Church should be fostered, embraced, and tried and tried again. When engaged with the hierarchy, it is important to be able to speak their “language”, to understand from where they come and how their history has formed their values and opinions. I do not believe that conflict is where we want to put our energies, but rather dialogue and consensus. I fully understand how some may lose heart or patience with the necessary and often tedious processes involved in making changes one believes are right or important to the growth and relevance of the Church in this world. However, looking forward can often be enriched by looking back to understand the context for existing policies, rules or writings of the Church’s leaders. This is not to say that we should ignore the “prophets in our own time” who may at times, like the prophets of the Old Testament, find themselves somewhat unwelcome because of the messages they herald. “A prophet is not without honour save in his own house.” (Matthew 3:57). It is the prophets in our own time who often give us hope.] *Memoir p.45*

A second experience came through the International Union of Superiors General also. Approximately once a month a group of about sixteen major superiors met with 16 officials of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. The agenda came from either group. Personally I did not find those meetings helpful. The atmosphere of openness existing in the

papal dialogue seemed absent from the discussions of the “Council of the Sixteen”, as we were called.

Finally, I would like to quote one of my letters at length. It tells of my experience of church in Mozambique primarily, but also in the Zambezi region. The year was 1981.

“From March 27 to April 18 I had the privilege of living with our sisters in Mozambique. There is no need to explain to you the situation in that country which is openly Marxist-Leninist according to the Russian model. Suffice it to say that the Mozambican Church is a suffering Church... But suffering, persecution and loss of prestige have surely brought clarity to her proclamation of Jesus Christ. The Church of Mozambique is a Church of the people. Our sisters there are part of three dioceses: Maputo, Beira and Quelimane. In the diocese of Quelimane (province of Zambezia) we have fifteen sisters in five communities. The diocese has for several years been developing a ministerial church. In each local Christian community, there are various ministers, most of whom are lay men and women. There are the animators of the community, the ancients, ministers of the Word and catechesis, lectors, cantors, ministers of the Eucharist. There is the ministry of the family, of charity and mutual help, of ecumenism, of hospitality, of vocations, of justice and peace. Various values of African culture – for example, hospitality, respect for the “ancients”– have been recognized in these ministries.

In Zambezia, as well as in Maputo and Beira, our sisters are involved in various works. Some teach in elementary or secondary schools (all education has been nationalized), others are involved in the formation of animators or catechists of the Christian community, others are in nursing and others again in work at the diocesan level. I was struck by the ability of our sisters to adapt to difficult and trying situations with serenity and hope. Lack of external freedom in the proclamation of the Word has certainly not hindered that Word from “growing” among the people (cf. Acts 6:7).

In a land where bread is a precious and often scarce commodity, it occurred to me that this Church was truly centred on the Bread of Life. It is a Church

- where the Bread of the Word is heard and done,
- where the Bread of the Eucharist is broken and eaten,

- where the Bread of one's life is given and shared with great simplicity.

Just as in the early days of Christianity, persecution seems to have brought new life to the Christian community. Is it that the stripping away of non-essentials enables a healthy focus on essential values? Is it trials manifest more vividly the Church's identity with her crucified Lord? Is it the incarnation of the ancient truth that 'the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church'?"

[That visit to Africa made me realize more deeply that the Church in our world is shaped by the faces, circumstances and cultures where "the Lord reveals a particular aspect of His face through the local churches." I was especially struck by the respect and reverence the African church has for its "ancestors" or ancestors. More and more I came to recognize that the Church is much more than an "organization" or "structure". It is a mystery, a blending of all aspects of the human condition... In all countries the Church is a Church of bread broken and shared. "The church, whose daughters we are, is a mystery which will always call us to deep faith." *May 1981 Circular*]

*Memoir p.44*

SMM: And so you see, Sally, three experiences of Church – one referring to the Church hierarchy; the second underlining the collaborative nature of the Church, a collaboration which does not always succeed; and the third the example of a suffering Church which is also a church of the people.

Do you have any questions about this response?

SALLY: Not just now. I will need some time to reflect on what you have said about CHURCH.

## Chapter 6

### CO-RESPONSIBILITY / COLLABORATION

From our earliest days, the RSHM worked with lay persons, even in the foundation of our Institute. Our mission in Portugal was a response to “Miss Hennessy” who was the blood sister of two of our sisters. She invited them to work with her in the “Collège anglais,” a school in Porto, Portugal. Our sisters responded positively. In the foundation of Sag Harbor, New York, again it was a lay woman Mrs. Sarah Peter who was responsible for bringing us to that lovely beach town which was a little whaling village. The lay persons who helped us in the first foundations were numerous.

How did I experience co-responsibility and collaboration? As mentioned above, it was largely with the church, local and universal, that I worked during the five years of my time as general superior. I refer not just to those of the hierarchy but also with a number of general superiors of other congregations. Rome was a wonderful place to be, in those days. We often met with each other and were able to discuss together any number of questions.

[Participation in various groups and meetings here in Rome helped us to “keep informed of the needs of the world and new orientations of the Church and religious life” (Const. 53). It has also enabled us to collaborate with others in the area of communications, education, finances, justice and peace, etc. Presence at meetings is assured not only by the general council but by members of the generalate community as well. As of May 1983, Sr. Mary Milligan has attended meetings of the Executive Council of the International Union of Superiors General as first substitute. The Executive Council meets for three days every three months...

These contacts have been most fruitful for us, broadening our vision and allowing us to see the life of our own Institute more clearly. They also help us to appreciate the extraordinary work of apostolic religious throughout the world.] *Report of the General Council to the General Chapter, 1985*

Our constitutions remind us that each one personally is responsible for the life and mission of the RSHM. As a matter of fact, collaboration seems to me to be a mode of operation rather than a topic or theme. Throughout the five



years we are discussing here, our council tried to cooperate with a variety of persons. That we collaborated with the universal church seems evident from what we have already said. We worked together with the provincials and their councils.

[We have called on sisters outside the council to attend to certain concerns:

On-going communications among our Mexican and Colombian sisters: Sr. Maria de Lourdes Machado (Brazil), 1980-1983.

Coordination of work on the Sources: Sr. Marjorie Keenan (Eastern America) 1981 – 2007.

Coordination of our mission in Africa: Sr. Maria Leonor Fernandes (Mozambique), 1982-1987.

Each of these “coordinators” has been responsible and accountable to the general council and has remained in communication with us. Their assistance enables us to offset the disadvantages of being a small number at the general level and helps us to follow certain aspects of the life of the Institute more closely. These “intermediate structures” allow us to respond to certain needs, to call on sisters according to their particular talents and capabilities. They have likewise promoted participation of sisters in the provinces in reflection as well as in specific tasks.] *Report*

We travelled to a variety of places where we could meet the sisters and “share our hope” with them.

[In response to par. 53 of the constitutions, we visited all the provinces within the first two-and-a-half years of our mandate. The general objectives of these visits were stated as: to strengthen the unity of the Institute; to assist in the implementation of the constitutions; to get to know the Institute. Council members were also present at various other significant moments in the life of the provinces, most often at the request of the province.

In spite of the fact that the time we spent in the various provinces was always “too short”, and despite the frequent language difficulties, this direct contact with individual sisters, with communities and local situations helped us to understand the diversity and richness of the Institute as well as some of its limitations. We especially appreciated working with groups – councils, commissions, committees – as we felt this was an experience of

genuine collaboration, that is, working together to achieve a common objective.] *Report*

In 1999, Sr. Catherine Dolan stated: “This aspect of co-responsibility demands from leadership and from the whole Institute a listening stance, listening to God, listening to each other, listening to the world and events around us.” We witness the formation of the Extended Family which promises to be a privileged means of formation.

## GENERAL COUNCIL'S PRESENCE IN THE PROVINCES

### EASTERN AMERICA

- October / November 1981 - VISIT
- July 1982 - Constitutions Retreat (Mary, Bríd)
- August 1982 - Province Assembly
- Easter 1983 - Constitutions Retreat, Kingston (Mary, Bríd)
- March 1984 - Inter-community Meetings (Mary, M. Lúcia)

### ENGLAND / IRELAND

- February / March 1981 - VISIT
- July 1983 - Constitutions Retreats (Mary, Bríd)
- October 1983 - Enlarged Provincial Council (Mary, M. Lúcia)
- October 1984 - Provincial Chapter (Mary)

### PORTUGAL

- July / August 1981 - Constitutions Retreat
- Provincial Council (Mary, M. Lúcia)
- April 1982 - Provincial Council (Mary)
- October / November 1982 - VISIT
- June 1984 - Provincial Council (Mary)

### VISITS TO AFRICA

- March 1981 - Mali (M. Lúcia)
- July 1984 - Mali (Mary)
- March / April 1981 - Zambia (Mary, Bríd)
- January 1985 - Zambia (M. Lúcia)

- April 1985 - Zimbabwe (Mary, Bríd)
- January 1985 - Zimbabwe (M. Lúcia)
- March / April 1981 - Mozambique VISIT
- January 1985 - Session on Constitutions
- Regional Chapter (M. Lúcia)

**WESTERN AMERICA**

- March / April 1982 - VISIT
- June 1982 - Constitutions Retreats (Mary, Bríd)
- April 1984 - Extended Provincial Council (Mary)

**FRANCE**

- March, June 1981 - VISIT
- December 1982 - Constitutions Retreat
- Provincial Council (Bríd, M.Lúcia)
- August 1983 - Provincial Assembly (Mary)
- October 1984 - Provincial Chapter (Mary, M.Lúcia)

**BRAZIL**

- January 1981 - Constitutions Retreat (Mary)
- February 1982 - VISIT
- October / November 1983 - Extended Provincial Council (Mary)
- December 1984 - Provincial Chapter (M. Lúcia)

## Chapter 7

### SOURCES

Throughout this account, I have interspersed information about our origins, our history, the writings of our founder and our early sisters. The Sources are an on-going project at the general level. I have had the privilege of working with the writings of the early days of our congregation's life and many of our first sisters.

[Many of us knew that the fundamental texts contained great riches of spirituality and apostolic dynamism just waiting to be reflected upon in personal prayer and community dialogue. Some work had begun prior to our General Chapter in 1980. However, heightened appeals of our sisters throughout the Institute to gain access to source documents in the language of the province in which they lived were heard at the general chapter. The chapter members, therefore, set objectives for the Sources Committee:

- To put at the disposition of the sisters and other interested persons documents and studies concerning the origin and development of the Institute;
- To organize primary source material in such a way as to ensure that future research is based on reliable and complete documentation.] *Memoir p. 20*

From the beginning of our mandate we worked closely with Marjorie Keenan RSHM who was appointed coordinator of the project *Sources of Life*. The objective of the program was to make accessible to the sisters the written sources of our Institute (see Const. 74-76b). The program has consistently attempted to involve the greatest number of sisters possible, according to their talents. All of the letters of Father Gailhac have been typed as have those of the foundress, M. St. Jean, and M. St. Croix. A series of short studies has been published. The history of the Institute – *A Journey in Faith and Time* – was projected to have four volumes, each volume corresponding to the mandate of the general superior. It is hoped that the fourth volume will appear soon. Throughout our five years, we encouraged the sisters to use the sources in their lives and ministries. They have done so and we have accumulated a number of sources for our own prayer and

spirituality. Recently members of the Extended SHM Family have had source materials available to them as well.

I continue as part of a core group responsible for this over-all project. The core group suffered the loss of one of its most talented sisters when Rosa do Carmo Sampaio died on March 23, 1998.



Sister Marjorie Keenan and Mary at work on the Sources

## Chapter 8

### MANDATES GIVEN BY 1980 CHAPTER

Excerpts from Report of the General Council to the General Chapter 1985

[Two priorities were adopted at the 1980 general chapter: formation and communications.

#### **Formation**

Within the first year of our mandate, five formation directresses were named. In December of 1981, sisters involved in initial formation met with the general council. The purpose of that meeting was to draw up a unified plan for formation in the Institute and to discuss various aspects of the formation process. This meeting was preceded by a month-long session on the sources which enabled the formation directresses to be in direct contact with the writings of the founder and the history of the Institute.

An on-going correspondence has been maintained with the directresses of initial formation. They send a report to the general council twice a year.

In April 1984, a plan of collaboration between the two American provinces was drawn up. According to this plan, effective as of September 1985, there will be in North America a novitiate for English-speaking novices and another for Spanish-speaking novices. The sister responsible for initial formation on the continent will be assisted by a Spanish-speaking directress of novices and by a representative from each of the American provinces.

The area of ongoing formation has been a constant concern and objective of the general council. We see both our presence in the provinces as well as international meetings as means of ongoing formation.

Formation, both initial and ongoing, has frequently been the focus of our reflections. We feel, however, that in spite of our efforts we have failed to accompany and adequately direct initial formation in the Institute. We do not sense a common vision of formation, nor do we feel that formation teams function adequately throughout the Institute. It is not always clear how the general orientations of the Institute are incarnated in a specific cultural setting. Part of the difficulty, it seems to us, is lack of clarity about the respective responsibilities for initial formation, specifically as they touch the general and provincial levels. We would recommend to the next general

council that provincial superiors, formation directresses and the general council meet together in an effort to articulate a common vision and assure solid and relevant formation for the future.

### **Communications**

In 1981 we asked that a sister in each province be prepared in communications skills in order to form an international communications team within the Institute. Those sisters met in Los Angeles in August 1982 in conjunction with the Enlarged General Council. They presented a proposal to the EGC which was approved and put into effect. This plan helped us to broaden our notion of communications to include not only the written word but also participatory structures, audio-visual media, and interpersonal communications skills. Responsibility for international sharing of news was decentralized and assumed by the communications team. The general council has maintained contact with the coordinator of the team and has, at regular intervals, submitted news from the generalate.

Our perception is that the team has been as effective as its weakest link. Where the team member has not functioned as proposed, the province has received little consistent communication from other provinces and from the generalate. In some provinces the system has functioned most satisfactorily. From the general council's point of view, it has been a decided advantage to have the task of gathering, translating and publishing news removed from the generalate and assured by sisters who are adequately prepared in the skills of written communication.

### **Sources**

In February 1981, Sr. Marjorie was appointed coordinator of the project SOURCES OF LIFE. She has continued in that capacity to the present. Each year, Sr. Marjorie has presented a progress report to the Enlarged General Council and she has been in continual contact with the general council.

The objective of the SOURCES OF LIFE program is to make accessible to the sisters the written sources of our Institute (Const. 74-76b). The program has consistently attempted to involve the greatest number of sisters possible, according to their talents.

The general council is convinced that work on the sources is an essential factor in fidelity to our own identity and mission in the Church. We are



convinced as well that knowledge of our origins and history can release new apostolic energies in us and help us to read and respond to the signs of our times. We recommend that the work continue and become an ongoing activity in the life of the Institute.

### **Congregational Planning**

The chapter of 1980 asked the general council to “initiate congregational planning”. From the beginning of our mandate, we recognized the importance of planning, but we were unable to perceive in the 1980 chapter discussions a clear notion of how congregational planning was understood by the chapter. We sought assistance in planning primarily from the Institute of Cultural Affairs, an international ecumenical group qualified to give such help. Within the limits of our own understanding of our mandate, we undertook each of our activities – visits to the provinces, international meetings, sources and communications programs – by clarifying goals and objectives and choosing means to attain them.

According to our constitutions, the Enlarged General Council “participates in planning at the Institute level” (54b). Each year, the EGC has spent at least three days of its meeting in planning. International meetings and other events, specifically the general chapter, have been a yearly concern. This meeting with provincial/regional superiors has been an invaluable help to the general council, not only in planning but in other areas of life and work as well.

At the EGC meeting of 1981, with the theme “Unity for Mission”, we looked at our presence in Africa. Africa was chosen because “our presence there touches four provinces; the general council had visited all four countries where we are – Mali, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe – and had been able to involve the sisters there in preparation for the EGC; limited numbers in Africa made possible an ‘overview’ of our presence there”. This concretization of congregational planning enabled us to name a coordinator for our mission in Africa.

We have come to see congregational planning as a process, a method of working to help us to choose our future. One of the difficulties we experienced in congregational planning stems from the different understanding of the concept present at the general chapter of 1980 and

from the fact that that chapter determined no specific areas of planning. It seems important to us, therefore, that the general chapter of 1985 set specific goals and establish priorities for the Institute for the next five years (cf. Const. 55). These goals and priorities could then be implemented in the Institute through a coherent process of planning.]



Judite Lupo, Mary, Maria Lúcia Brandão and Catherine Dolan,  
outgoing generalate team at the 1985 general chapter

## Enlarged General Council Meetings

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1981	Porto, Portugal	Unity for Mission RSHM Presence in Africa Vocation Education
1982	Los Angeles, California	“Go Proclaim the Good News”: The Challenge of Provincial Leadership
1983	Sag Harbor, New York	Unity and Mobility for Mission
1984	Penmaenmawr, Wales	Preparation for General Chapter

## International Meetings

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Topic</b>
December 1981	Rome	Directresses of Formation
April/May 1982	Tarrytown and Rome	Sisters Giving Constitutions Retreats
May 1982	Rome	Provincial Treasurers
July/August 1982	Los Angeles	Communicators
December 1983	Rome	Education at the Service of Justice
March 1984	Tarrytown	Chapter Preparation
July/August 1984	Rome / Béziers	On-Going Formation Program (Sisters 25-35 years professed)

## Chapter 9

### IMPORTANT LAST WORDS

Before we close this interview, there are a couple of things I believe important. First of all, our council moved from the generalate on Via Lucchesi. We rented from the Foreign Missionaries of Paris all but one floor of their former generalate. This move was necessary in order to fulfil the objectives of our council. We felt it essential to offer hospitality to our own sisters when they passed through Rome. The apartment on Via Lucchesi had little space for visitors. Another essential point for us was the conservation and accessibility of our archives and written sources of the Institute.

I am quite aware that there are certain things of great importance which I have not mentioned. That is because certain things now form the fabric of who we are. We held a variety of international meetings – on education for justice; communications, and formation of our members, among others. We had several meetings focusing on formation – in December 1981 and in Rome and Béziers for on-going formation. Both of these events continue today.

Throughout the year preceding the chapter of 1980, I had prayed for freedom in the fact of the upcoming elections which were scheduled. I went into the chapter willing to serve as general superior or in some other way. As the chapter moved forward, I began to see “Congregational Planning” as taking a central place in the years to come. As I reflected what I had heard from the sisters – and from those with whom I discerned – I began to see that many of the reasons suggested for my continuing were in fact a recognition that we had done well. I felt that I had given my best to the Institute, having served for six years on the general council of 1969-1975 and having brought the Constitutions process successfully to completion.

In my final letter to the Institute on August 2, 1985, I stated that I did not feel I was laying down a burden. My years in general government were rich, happy and graced. I was “granted a view of the extraordinary generosity and love of God which is truly the life of our Institute. The life and prayer of our older and sick sisters, their joyful fidelity and loving welcome of God’s will have sustained me constantly. They have, I believe, given me too the courage to follow the loving kindness of God leading me at present.” When

I was elected in 1980, I already knew almost all the sisters. Many told me they felt I was “the right person at the right time”. I believe that was true.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to have walked alongside our sisters and, through them, of contributing in some way to the creation of a world of peace, justice and love. I have learned much from my companions on the way. Thank you, Sally, for helping me to recall those years which were so deeply satisfying and so uniquely challenging for me. In the final window which I open, I see John August Swanson’s ‘The Procession’. Swanson is a local artist in Pasadena, California. He brings to his work an extraordinary colour and energy which are his characteristic. I imagine all those men, women and children, each one dressed in colourful clothing, underlining an extraordinary diversity. We are like that procession, each one facing the same direction, going toward a common goal. Each one is different from the others. They carry the object of their quest with them, as we ourselves do though we imagine that God is outside of us or beyond us. And yet the Easter proclamation is always there: *I will be with you always*. And so it is.

Los Angeles, 2006

RELIGIOSE DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA  
CURIA GENERALIZIA  
VIA ADELAIDE RISTORI, 26  
00197 ROMA, ITALIA

August 2, 1985

Dear Sisters,

On this eve of the closing of our seventeenth General Chapter, I want, one last time as General Superior, to write to you. I want to explain to you the “word” that I perceived during the Chapter, and which surprised me as much as it might have surprised you.

As you know, a process of discernment precedes the elections of the general council. During this process, I understood very clearly that the reasons given me by the delegates to continue as General Superior were a confirmation of the past rather than a mandate for the future. The directions we have set for the Institute in the next five years requires a new vision and different gifts and skills. This understanding on my part was accompanied by a deep peace – and even joy – which is surely the sign of the Spirit’s action. The sisters with whom I spoke to verify my freedom in my inclination not to continue as General Superior confirmed the truth of my decision. If the outcome of my discernment process was a surprise to the Chapter, it was surely a surprise to me first of all. But then we know that our God is always a God of surprises.

As I leave office, I do not feel I am laying down a burden. My years in the service of general government have been happy and graced ones. For me, perhaps the greatest grace was being granted a view of the extraordinary generosity and love of God which is truly the life of our Institute. The prayer of our older and sick sisters, their joyful fidelity and loving welcome of God’s will have sustained me constantly. They have, I believe, given me too the courage to follow the loving kindness of God leading me at present.

Many of you will be disappointed by my decision, others will find it difficult or impossible to understand. I ask you only to support me in it. Five years ago, many of you told me “I was the right person at the right time”. I believe that was true. But these are new times and God has shown me that other gifts are needed.

I want to thank each of you for your prayer, support and friendship during these past five years. You have truly been sisters to me – and you remain that. I leave office enriched by each of you and I pray that somewhere, sometime we will once again be able to share and rejoice in our common faith and hope.

Affectionately,  
Mary Milligan RSHM





# Appendices



## Appendix 1

### 1980 GENERAL CHAPTER

#### CLOSING ADDRESS

We have come to the end of a long general chapter – a high point, a unique moment in our history as an Institute. Together we have reflected on our mission in the church today, on our ecclesial consecration, on our charism and spirit. We have established structures and articulated principles which we hope will lead us to life and call us to conversion. Never before in our history has every member of the Institute been involved in the expression of our corporate identity. Never before have we so participated in creating the law which we hope will help us to become better followers of Jesus Christ.

The process of this chapter has, I believe, brought us to a better understanding of what it means to be one body for mission, one body in mission. We have tried to reverence and embrace our differences. We have tried to go beyond them to what unites us most deeply. The oneness of our Institute is an extraordinary gift. Our unity, which we have begun to appreciate in a new way during this chapter, is not an abstraction. It is based on the quality of our relationships with one another. We have entered into new international bonds; we have deepened those within our own provinces. It is the strength of our love for and trust in one another that will enable us to continue to serve God's people in unity. Our ultimate witness in the Church will be "see how they love one another." The bonds created during these weeks will support us in our common mission: "That they may have life..."

THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE...

This phrase has been at the centre of our reflections these past weeks. We heard it at the end of Sr. Maria de Lourdes' opening address to this sixteenth general chapter. It has appeared as the title of each official bulletin sent from the chapter. In continuity with the original dynamic inspiration of Father Gailhac, we have used the phrase to describe the mission of our Institute today. Above all, we have lived this phrase for the past seven weeks. In our constitutions we call our general chapter an ecclesial event, a paschal event. It has surely been that. Our common search for truth – and for adequate

words to express our own corporate truth – has led us all on paths of pain, suffering, fatigue and a kind of death. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd who came that all might have life abundantly reminds us that life comes when the grain of wheat dies. We have persevered in our search; we have borne the pain of struggle, firm in our belief that through the mystery of Redemption lived in our hearts life would come to ALL – to each sister in the Institute, to the whole Church and to our world. This chapter has truly been life-giving. I trust that its fruits will continue to be life-giving for many years to come.

As a chapter, we have proclaimed our belief in LIFE. We believe in a God who is “Lover of life” (Wis. 11:27), a God who has acted in His Son so that all might have life, a God who continues to act in our history. We believe that every human person is called to share the marvellous gift of life in Jesus Christ. We believe that this life reaches its fullness in knowledge and love of God. This IS life – to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (cf. Jn 17:3).

Our commitment to the life offered to all has led us in recent years to a commitment to justice. Or rather, it has led us to express our original vision and mission in terms of justice. I would like to reflect with you for just a few moments on the biblical basis of justice and its relationship to LIFE.

In the past 25 years, the major Church documents treating of justice have based their theology on Gn. 1:27 – the human person, male and female, is created in the image of God. From *Gaudium et Spes*, through *Populorum Progressio* to Puebla, this text from Genesis has underpinned Church teaching on justice. In his opening address to the Puebla conference, John Paul II reminded the bishops of Latin America that “the primordial assertion of (Christian) anthropology is that the human being is the image of God and cannot be reduced to a mere fragment of nature or to an anonymous element in the human city.”

The dignity of every human person is inscribed in the very act of creation. By the gift of life itself, a fundamental equality exists in the human family. God Himself respects this equality which goes beyond race, colour, sex, social class or even moral response. He causes his sun to rise on bad as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest alike (cf. Mt 5:45). It

strikes me in this passage from Matthew, that both water and sun are the biblical images for justice.

God has created a community, a people to respect and foster this fundamental dignity and equality of persons. The covenant at Sinai not only established a relationship between individuals and God but formed a people – persons committed to one another in respect and love. Each member of the covenanted community of Israel bore a responsibility to care for the others, especially for those of their own family, clan or tribe. Those who had no family members to protect them – widows, orphans, and barren women – were to be the special object of the concern of the community. In this concern, the people were to IMAGE God who Himself bore a special concern for the defenceless: “Yahweh your God is the god of Gods and the Lord of lords, the great God . . . never partial. It is he who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing” (Dt. 10:18). When the protective social customs and structures of Israel collapsed, prophets arose to call the community to their fundamental obligations to one another. “Woe to those who refuse justice to the unfortunate, and cheat the poor among my people of their rights, and rob the orphan” (Is. 10:2).

The impartial justice of God was made flesh in Jesus Christ. He is the image of God par excellence, the universal brother of all. In him, “the human being acquires an unimaginable dignity” (Puebla 188).

Our tradition “that they may have life” has its roots in Father Gailhac’s own respect for the dignity of the human person. His life and writings gave eloquent testimony to his sense of human dignity and equality. His great desire to “save souls”, to cooperate in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, to make God known and loved reflects his fundamental belief that all are created in the image and likeness of God.

Like the God of the covenant incarnate in Jesus Christ, Father Gailhac had a great zeal for those who were defenceless, for those whose basic rights and equality were not recognized. That all might have life, he addressed himself in a particular way to victims of injustice.

Father Gailhac would not have used the word “justice” as we use it today. Nor would he have understood the context of global and structural injustice in which we live. But he would urge us today – as he urged our first sisters – to “continue the work of redemption”, to take as the “supreme goal” of our work to “lead others to eternal life.” The zeal he left us as our distinctive mark is rooted in the fundamental dignity of the human person, redeemed in Christ. He would ask us to be steeped in that conviction and to let it move us to action.

The general chapter of 1975 based its reflection on the ninth chapter of Luke’s gospel. Many parts of Luke 9 have nourished the prayer of the Institute since then – the mission of the Twelve, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” The liturgical reading the day this present general chapter began was Luke 10:1-20. We have moved forward a chapter! ...The Lord offers his Word to the Institute in Luke 10 as well. That chapter begins with the mission of the seventy-two. The same sense of urgency, the same admonition to poverty is reiterated here as in the sending of the Twelve. But they are sent two by two. I read there a call to look at the quality of our life together as we proclaim the good news and to reflect on what it means to be together for mission. A message of simplicity appears in Jesus’ joyful prayer of praise of the Father: “I bless you, Father, for revealing these things to mere children...”

Most importantly, Luke 10 reminds us that in love of God and neighbour is the promise of life: Do this and life is yours. How to love God and neighbours then exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Compassion - a correlative of justice in the Old Testament – is the heart of that parable. The key moment in it is when the Samaritan sees, is moved with compassion and acts. This movement – seeing, being moved with compassion, and acting – is a constant in the synoptic gospels, and it summarizes my prayer for the Institute in the coming years. I pray first of all that we may see – see the world with its beauty, its joy, its challenge, but with its misery and injustice as well. I pray that we will be moved with compassion, just as Father Gailhac was in his own times. This compassion, based on a belief in human dignity, is evoked wherever that dignity is obstructed.

Finally I pray that we would act. A constant in Father Gailhac's message to us was that we should manifest the faith that is in us. He speaks of a practical faith, which for him is a faith which acts. One of our delegates here put it well: For Father Gailhac zeal is the epiphany of faith. Basically, I pray that we would be like Mary, the mother of Jesus – women who not only hear the Word in the concrete circumstances of their lives, but women who like her put it into practice.

Sr. Mary Milligan, RSHM





## **Appendix 2**

### **LETTERS**



RELIGIOSE DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA  
VIA DEL LUCCHESI, 3  
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Christmas, 1980

Dear Sisters,

It seems very appropriate for me to write this first letter to the Institute during Advent when as a Church we are living the season of hope. The liturgical year has just begun and we “await in hope” the manifestation in the flesh of the goodness and graciousness of our God (cf. Titus 2:11, 3:4). There is a sense of expectation which touches something very deep in all of us and which we so often see reflected in children who wait with eagerness for Christmas to come.

The Institute also in some sense is living through a “new beginning”. Our constitutions call us to renew our personal and community lives for mission. They have created a certain sense of expectation among us. While this expectation can deepen and nourish our hope, real Christian hope goes beyond any feeling of expectation. And it is to this hope that we are called.

During Cardinal Pironio’s visit with us at the end of the general chapter in August, he reminded us of the need to live in hope, to express our hope to the world in which we live. Some would tell us that it is foolish to be hopeful. Surrounded as we are by “wars and rumours of war” – wars whose dimensions are beyond human comprehension – we are only too conscious of the disastrous possibilities of human freedom. Fear and violence have become part of our daily lives and our daily expectation. In the Institute also, we are quite aware of our poverty and helplessness. Statistics show our rising median age, our diminishing numbers. We may be aware at a local level that, in spite of our good will and our fidelity to prayer, the bonds among us are difficult or weak. Personally we may feel plagued by inadequacy, failure or rejection.

Somehow, the Incarnation of the Son of God teaches us that these “desperate” situations are precisely the ones in which hope is born. To recognize our own powerlessness and radical poverty and to believe that that is where God’s power is made manifest – that is true hope. Christmas reminds us that the glory of God is made manifest in poverty, in simplicity,

in powerlessness. While there may be a certain romanticism in the crib scenes that we see at this season of the year, there is very little romanticism in the situations of poverty around us and in our own lives. Faith, though, calls us to believe that in our flesh too the glory of the Lord is manifest. Faith calls us to believe – “even in the face of the impossible” – that the glory of God is among us, that in our own weakness is God’s strength, that in our own “deaths” is God’s life.

If we were to “have our answer ready for people who ask us the reason for our hope” (1 Pt. 3:15), what answer would we give? Christmas invites us to reflect on the basis of our hope.

At this Christmas season, Sisters Bríd and Maria Lúcia join me in wishing each of you a very happy and hope-filled Christmas and New Year. During the next two years, we hope to be able to meet all of you. And just as Saint Paul longed to see the Christians in Rome so that he and they might find encouragement from their common faith, so we too would like our visits to be a confirmation of our mutual hope.

Affectionately in Christ,

Mary Milligan RSHM

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24 February, 1981

Dear Sisters,

The 24th February reminds us of our beginnings. It is in a sense our corporate birthday. It is 132 years since Appollonie Cure, Eulalie Vidal, Rosalie Gibbal, Cécile Cambon and Rosalie Jeantet concretized their own vision, articulated and clarified by that of our Founder. These 132 years represent a 'journey in faith' for hundreds of women. We stand where we are today because of their vision, their faith, zeal and courage.

Birthdays are a time of celebration. In spite of their obvious relationship to our past, they inspire us to reflect on the future - on the year of life just beginning. They invite us to reflect on the gift of our life which is meant to be life for others.

On this our 'birthday' in 1981, I would like to share with you my own reflection on our life at this particular moment in the history of our Institute. It will, no doubt, be evident that my reflection has been inspired not only by paragraph 8 of our constitutions, but also by John Paul II's second encyclical letter, *Dives in Misericordia*.

*Dives in Misericordia*, using a free translation of Psalm 85, speaks of the kiss which mercy gives to justice. It says elsewhere that there is no true justice without mercy. Because of our own commitment to "be at the service of evangelical justice wherever we are", this letter on mercy is of great importance to us. I believe it is obvious that at times John Paul II uses the word 'justice' in a much more restricted sense than that which we mean in paragraph 8 of our constitutions. He speaks, for example, of justice as "suitable for 'arbitration' between people concerning the reciprocal distribution of goods in an equitable manner." "The equality brought about by justice," he says, "is limited to the realm of objective and extrinsic goods." At other times, in his interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son, for example, he describes mercy as we describe justice, seeing

“particular concentration on human dignity” as the focus of mercy. Or he sees mercy as “the most perfect incarnation of ‘equality’ between people” and therefore, as the most perfect incarnation of justice. Throughout the encyclical, he stresses human dignity and the basic equality of all persons.

It seems to me that the “kiss of justice and mercy” is symbolic of the love that is the source of both of those realities. In some sense, both justice and mercy are love, just as both faith and zeal are. When love stands before a situation of injustice, it acts and that action is just. Justice is love thirsting for the recognition of the human dignity of all people. Where any one’s basic human rights are infringed upon, where one’s God-given dignity is not recognized, there “evangelical justice” – that justice which springs from love – comes into play. Respect for the dignity of each person is at the heart of evangelical justice.

Justice is concerned with relationships, not only of individuals to one another, but with relationships of individuals to groups and structures as well. It is concerned with the distribution of goods insofar as that distribution is an expression of relationships. Where one individual’s or group’s wealth is held at the expense of another’s dignity, there justice acts.

In a recent article (Jornal do Brasil January 11, 1981), Fr. Marcello Azevedo explains that the Church’s concern for justice comes from her concern for the social context in which the human person is situated. In virtue of her mission to help women and men respond to God who reveals Himself to the whole person and to all persons as a whole, the Church considers herself authorized to reject and denounce all forms of social organization which, in her opinion, prevent or impede persons from attaining that minimum of dignity needed to be truly human and to give meaning to the truth that God is love, that He is Source of Life and that we are all brothers and sisters of one another. Structural oppression, the oppression of one group by another, of one person by another, does not witness to the brother/sisterhood of all human beings and therefore does not witness to God as the source of all life.

When our constitutions call us to “serve from the perspective of the poor” (16 – 19 i), they challenge us to stand with the materially poor in whatever ministry we exercise. We recognize the poor as victims of injustice and oppression in a world where power and wealth tend to be identified. We

recognize that the social context and structures of our nations and our world often do not allow the poor person the minimum of dignity needed to stand as a human being before others. For men and women oppressed by poverty, the face of the loving and merciful God is distorted by the lack of love and mercy of their brothers and sisters.

We are at the “service of evangelical justice” in every aspect of our lives - within our religious community as well as outside of it. Justice affects all our relationships. If “all human growth is effected in the context of relationships with others” (56), only those based on justice truly favour growth. The structures of our Institute, of our provinces and local communities must promote the dignity of our sisters, their fundamental equality and rights. Oppression can exist among us in any number of ways, often subtle ones. In preventing another’s growth, I am exercising oppression. Each of us might ask ourselves about the quality of our human relationships within our community. Do I in some way oppress my sisters? Is there anyone in my community whose growth I stifle by my domination, by my lack of trust, by my lack of interest or by my bad humour?

We might ask similar questions regarding our ministry. How conscious am I, how conscious are we, of the oppressive or liberating structures of our nation, our city, our church, or any social group of which we are a part? Do I fully respect and appreciate the basic dignity and equality of those with whom I work?

In a previous message to the Institute, I mentioned the importance of seeing, being moved with compassion and acting. On this our 132nd birthday, let us try to see the quality of our justice, of our relationships. Let the gift of life which has been given to us as an Institute grow through our own relationships with one another and with those who form the fabric of our lives. The five women who formed the first community of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary on February 24th, 1849, gave life to the Institute by giving their lives to one another. May the gift of our own life in 1981 be no less fruitful for the future.

Affectionately in Christ,  
Mary Milligan RSCM

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May 1981

Dear Sisters,

Twenty years ago, Mother Rita Rowley called the Institute to reflect on its role in the Church, on the ecclesial character of religious life. In her circular letter of 1961 she wrote: "We can see the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit at work in generating the vast collective movements in the church today – movements which are bringing about a deep Christian consciousness of the reality of the church itself." That letter spoke to us of our "ecclesial mandate", of "our public role as daughters of the Church", of the renovation which "means a re-awakening of the sense of vocation." We were reminded that "by her act of public profession, the religious is completely at the disposition of the Church...; the Church in turn carries out through the religious her own mission of apostolic sanctity."

Since Mother Rita wrote those words, we have lived intense ecclesial moments in the whole Church: the second Vatican Council; the papacy of John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II. We have been inspired by *Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris, Evangelii Nuntiandi*. We have seen and continue to see a rediscovery of the local Church, of the richness of various cultural expressions of the one gospel of Jesus Christ. The holiness of the Church has been evident in many outstanding and prophetic figures.

But our ecclesial experience has had its shadows as well. We have known deep divisions and serious disaffection dating from *Humanae Vitae*; a certain inconsistency between the mercy proclaimed by the Church and the sometimes harsh and rigid attitudes of its members. We have seen and continue to see injustices within the Church. The earthen vessels in which the treasure of holiness is carried are always in need of purification. We have at times seemed to walk on uncertain waters and may have genuinely cried, "Save us, Lord, we are perishing."



This twentieth anniversary of Mother Rita's first circular letter is an opportunity for us to reflect on our experience of "Church", to renew our faith in and love for the Church. The word "Church" evokes different realities for different people. Our understanding of reality is largely shaped by our experience. For some of us, "Church" connotes primarily "Rome" or a hierarchical structure; for others, the parish as such or the parish priest. For others still it means people, a community. Rather than examine the operative symbols behind our image of the Church, I would like to share with you a recent ecclesial experience and use it as a basis of reflection.

From March 27 to April 18 I had the privilege of living with our sisters in Mozambique. There is no need to explain to you the situation in that country which is openly Marxist-Leninist according to the Russian model. Suffice it to say that the Mozambican Church is a suffering Church . . . But suffering, persecution and loss of prestige have surely brought clarity to her proclamation of Jesus Christ. The Church of Mozambique is a Church of the people. Our sisters there are part of three dioceses: Maputo, Beira and Quelimane. In the diocese of Quelimane (province of Zambezia) we have fifteen sisters in five communities. The diocese has for several years been developing a ministerial church. In each local Christian community, there are various ministers, most of whom are lay men and women. There are the animators of the community, the ancients, ministers of the Word and catechesis, lectors, cantors, ministers of the Eucharist. There is the ministry of the family, of charity and mutual help, of ecumenism, of hospitality, of vocations, of justice and peace. Various values of African culture – for example, hospitality, respect for the "ancients" – have been recognized in these ministries.

In Zambezia, as well as in Maputo and Beira, our sisters are involved in various works. Some teach in elementary or secondary schools (all education has been nationalized), others are involved in the formation of animators or catechists of the Christian community, others are in nursing and others again in work at the diocesan level. I was struck by the ability of our sisters to adapt to difficult and trying situations with serenity and hope. Lack of external freedom in the proclamation of the Word has certainly not hindered that Word from "growing" among the people (cf. Acts 6:7).

In a land where bread is a precious and often scarce commodity, it occurred to me that this Church was truly centred on the Bread of Life. It is a Church

- where the Bread of the Word is heard and done,
- where the Bread of the Eucharist is broken and eaten,
- where the Bread of one's life is given and shared with great simplicity.

Just as in the early days of Christianity, persecution seems to have brought new life to the Christian community. Is it that the stripping away of non-essentials enables a healthy focus on essential values? Is it trials manifest more vividly the Church's identity with her crucified Lord? Is it the incarnation of the ancient truth that 'the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church'?

To live in a suffering Church calls for a deep faith and hope in the Lord's presence in His people. Most of us have been born into a society which is Christian and where the practice of religion is allowed and encouraged. While this is surely a grace, it can also lead us to see the Church sociologically rather than theologically. We can tend to look at the Church primarily as an "organization", as a "structure", rather than as a mystery.

Our constitutions speak of the "grace of internationality". One of the reasons why our internationality is a grace is that it allows us constantly to dialogue with other cultures, to learn from them. We can certainly learn from one another a sense of the Church. What our sisters in Mozambique are living tells us something about the very nature of the Church, wherever Christians are found. The Church in Africa reminds us that in all countries the Church is a Church of "bread broken and shared". Each country, each culture where the Institute is located has its own mystery of Jesus Christ in His people. The Lord reveals a particular aspect of His Face through the local churches. Through dialogue with one another and respect for differences, we are constantly reminded that the Church goes far beyond our own personal or national experience. The Church whose "daughters" we are is a mystery which will always call us to deep faith. Our love for Jesus Christ and our faith in His Church must be great enough to enable us to "live ever more fully the mystery of ecclesial consecration to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world" (Pope John Paul II to RSHM, August 20, 1980).

This year the month of June is dotted with great liturgical feasts – Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart, Saints Peter and Paul. On June 27, the Saturday following the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we celebrate the feast of the Heart of Mary. May each of these feasts be an occasion for deepening our sense of the Church and our commitment “in pure love and selfless service...to all the members of Christ Jesus.” (Idem.)

Affectionately in Christ,

Mary Milligan RSHM

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February 24, 1982

Dear Sisters,

This year the anniversary of the founding of our Institute coincides with the beginning of Lent, a season which calls us to express through prayer, fasting and almsgiving our desire for conversion. The coincidence of these two dates gives us a special opportunity to see the vocation we have received as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary as a call to continual conversion and ever-greater discipleship. Our constitutions make very clear this call to follow Jesus Christ in chastity, poverty and obedience lived in community; the Spirit speaking in our world makes urgent our living of this call.

God calls every Christian to holiness and freedom through following Jesus Christ, in whom alone we have access to God (Eph 2:18). The goal of every vocation is to be with Jesus and to go and bear fruit (cf. Jn 15:4,16), to be His companions and to be sent out (Mk 3:14). The call to discipleship implies ever-closer identification with the Master. When this Master defines Himself as the "One whom the Father has sent", union with Him will imply being sent as He was. "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (Jn 20:21).

Father Gailhac recognized this double aspect of discipleship and underlined it both in the spirit and in the mission he gave us as an Institute: faith, zeal; to know and love God, to make God known and loved. Oneness with Jesus Christ through faith will lead us to identify with His gift of Himself for others (zeal).

The call to follow Jesus is always a call to be with others as well. If the disciples were to be companions of the Lord, they were also to be companions of one another. Indeed, John's gospel knows them simply as "the Twelve" (6:71, 20:24). The disciples of Jesus – today as in the past – are called to break bread and to hear the word with others in community. No one is a disciple in isolation.

Our call to discipleship as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary is also lived with others in community. As an Institute, we have a tradition of

discipleship. The following of Jesus according to that tradition has created our own "story". The "great cloud of witnesses on every side of us" (Heb 12:1) is peopled with the faces of women who have trod the same path of discipleship, who heard a call to follow and responded faithfully and courageously.

The story of Appollonie Cure, her own faithful response to successive calls in her life is both illuminating and inspiring. Her understanding of the continuity of God's call was extraordinary. She did not see the death of her husband as an event altering the divine plan for her. She focussed not on the discontinuity of her life but rather on the continuity of God's call through the tragic circumstances of her "beloved Eugene's" death. She saw her vocation to religious life as a great grace – grace obtained by the prayer of her husband. "I firmly believe that it is his beautiful soul which obtained this great grace for me" (Sept. 18, 1849; see also Oct. 15, 1849). Her call to religious life was likewise her great support and consolation. She referred to the loss of her husband as the "great sorrow which I could not have borne had not God called me to such a beautiful vocation" (Oct. 15, 1849).

We know very little of the twenty years that Mother Saint-Jean spent as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. We do know that her simplicity, her goodness and her kindness make a deep impression on the community. In spite of poor health, she carried on the correspondence in view of our first foundations outside of France. We certainly may assume that she continued to read the events of her life and reflect on them in her heart, as did Mary to whom she had such great devotion. In this reflection, she continued to discover and deepen the Lord's call to her.

Our foundress's ability to read God's word in her life, her generosity in responding to that word are certainly a precious heritage for us. Our own call to follow Jesus Christ, like that of our foundress, "is not given once and for all" (Cons. № 54) but must be discovered and responded to each day. It will always be a call to deeper knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, to greater service to our world. The demands of such a vocation are many; we find them throughout our constitutions. It seems to me, however, that an attitude of "listening as a disciple" is basic to our response to these demands. To discover the Lord's call in the concrete situations of our life, we must be able to hear that call and to verify it in order to act on it.

First of all, we must hear the Word, the call in our life. "Each morning" we must awaken "to hear, to listen like a disciple" (Is 51:4). To listen to the Word within and without – in our hearts, in our community, in events in our world - requires a deep contemplative attitude to be formed in us. Only such a contemplative attitude will enable us to recognize the Lord in every human person, to criticize the values of our society in terms of the gospel; only deep contemplation can purify us to sustain the gift of self which a commitment to the "service of evangelical justice" demands. This contemplative attitude is essential to our vocation as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. How often Father Gailhac exhorts us to contemplate, to study Jesus Christ in order to "imitate" Him, that is to identify with His gift of Himself for the life of the world! "Keep Jesus Christ constantly in your mind, and even more in your heart; may He be manifest in our whole life."

The verification of what we hear is best done with another or with others. What we hear must be weighed in wisdom, tested in tradition, discerned in dialogue. The Word within us is deep indeed and can be confused with other voices within or without. Verification of the authenticity of the calls that come to us in our life is an important aspect of fidelity to our fundamental call to follow Jesus Christ. Following Jesus leads us often to hidden and humble service, at times to public and prophetic stances. Fidelity to our vocation requires that we be able to discern in ourselves and with our sisters appropriate responses to the calls we perceive. Again, verification of the word is done in the context of a community with its own traditions. In faith, we recognize our religious community as a locus of verification of the word.

It is the word heard and verified which we put into practice. One of the striking characteristics of Father Gailhac's spirituality is his insistence on authenticity, on congruence between what we say and what we live. Our faith is a faith which should manifest itself; our love for others must be effective. Indeed, for him, zeal was effective love; zeal was the "flame", the expression of love. In committing ourselves to evaluation of our life in the light of the gospel, we have promised to "strive for greater consistency between the values we proclaim and their expression in our personal and community life" (Const. № 31). This consistency must be a characteristic of our discipleship. In humility, we recognize the lack of consistency in our

personal and communal lives. How often we speak of the importance of being “women of the gospel”, and yet how little time we sometimes give to reading and contemplating the Scriptures! How eloquent we are about justice and peace and yet how divisive, complacent and oppressive we can be! On this anniversary of the founding of our Institute, let each one of us recommit herself to “evaluation of our life in the light of the gospel” – evaluation which is, in fact, evaluation of our own response to the great gift of our vocation within the Institute.

The call to discipleship continues to be heard in our world. The Lord continues to call Christians to follow Him – in marriage, in priesthood, religious life or other forms of consecration, as single women or men. To help others hear the fundamental call of God to them, to challenge them to respond to what God is asking them to become is an important ministry within the Church. In its “preferential option for young people”, the Third Conference of Latin American Bishops meeting at Puebla outlined the various elements in the Church’s ministry to youth (see № 1192-1205). Among these elements the Puebla document lists assistance in the process of discovering God’s call. Throughout our Institute, many of our sisters work with young people – in schools or other institutions, in parishes, in youth groups. In all our work with youth, we should seek to give good spiritual foundations and orientation which are a basis for mature vocational choice (cf. Puebla № 1200).

The Enlarged General Council meeting in Porto in August 1981 spent several days reflecting on vocation education. In our reflections, three characteristics of vocation work within the Institute emerged.

- First of all, that the religious vocation must always be seen in the wider context of the Christian vocation. Every vocation is a call from God to a specific service in the Kingdom. Our constitutions (№ 73) call us to help others recognize their call within the Church. Within this context, some young people will surely hear God’s call to follow Jesus Christ in a life of chastity, poverty and obedience lived in community and in service of the Kingdom.
- Secondly, the seeds of a religious vocation are normally planted in one’s youth. Jeremiah understood that his call to prophecy came

“before he was formed in the womb”. In a certain sense, this is true of all vocations. Understanding of Christian vocation, of the specific call to religious life, develops gradually. Vocation education, appropriately adapted and presented, therefore has its place in the education of children as well as of teenagers and young adults.

- Thirdly, all those in contact with youth – parents, educators, catechists – share in the task of leading Christians to maturity of faith and encounter with God. Qualified personnel, however, are also required in vocational guidance and youth work. Again, the Puebla document underlines the importance of preparing persons capable of working with youth as guide and friend, persons able to retain their own identity and to serve with Christian and human maturity (Puebla №1203).

One of the strongest characteristics of youth throughout the world today is a search for authenticity, often accompanied by a thirst for simplicity. Once again, our desire to share our life with young women whom God will call to our Institute demands that we look at the consistency between the values we hold and their concretization in our lives. The call to follow Jesus Christ in the way of discipleship within our Institute will come to young people today largely through the clarity of our own fidelity to that call in our lives.

With enthusiasm, joy and conviction, let us take the opportunity of the 133rd anniversary of the founding of the Institute to renew our lives of contemplation and service, to strive for greater authenticity in our lives of faith and zeal. This “conversion” will surely bring life to each of us, to all of us as an Institute and to the Church and the world. Let us find our model in the heart of Mary, heart which heard and verified the word and put it into practice. Let us ask her to teach us to be faithful disciples of her Son so that our lives may truly be “for the life of the world”.

Affectionately in Christ,  
Mary Milligan, RSCM



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February 24, 1983

Dear Sisters,

Though it is not yet two months old, the year 1983 has already been marked by several significant events in the history of the Church and of our Institute. On January 25, Pope John Paul II signed the code of canon law which has been in preparation since 1963. In promulgating the code, the Holy Father underlined that law is in no way a substitute for faith, grace or charisms in the Church. On the contrary, its purpose is to create an ordered ecclesial community where these realities can be fully effective and developed. The new code of law is intended to be a canonical expression of the ecclesial doctrine of Vatican II.

You will be happy to learn that on February 2 we received word from the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS) that our constitutions have been approved. While the official decree of approbation has not yet reached us, we are told it will bear the date of February 24, 1983. This date has special significance for us not only because it is the anniversary of our foundation; it marks as well the 84th anniversary of the first pontifical approval of our constitutions on February 24, 1899.

These events of great significance for us as a Church and an Institute invite us to reflect on freedom and the role of law in our lives. I would like simply to share with you some of my own convictions and invite each and all of you to continue that reflection.

Obedience to law can never be a substitute for freedom and responsibility. Our very obedience must be a free and responsible act. In modern times we have seen tragic examples of whole groups of people acting immorally because they were "following orders". Conscience must always be ultimately decisive—conscience which Fr. Bernard Haring calls "the sanctuary of creative fidelity and liberty" (Free and Faithful in Christ vol. I, p. 223). We have come to understand today that conscience itself must be formed within a social and cultural context. Any decision we make must be

seen in a context larger than the act itself. It must spring from a covenant morality, from the innermost depth of our being where God's Spirit speaks within us, where we respond to the divine claim on us.

Response to the Spirit of God within us brings us true freedom. Where the Spirit of God is, St. Paul reminds us, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). And, in fact, our greatest freedom lies in obedience to the Spirit of God within us.

That Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ whose work in the world is to bring it – to bring us – ever more under the reign of God. The Spirit speaking in our conscience, in the depth of our heart, helps us to recognize and extend the signs of God's reign: truth, peace, justice and love. The Christian conscience is, then, one which hears and responds to the voice of the Spirit within, the Word, urging action for freedom, human dignity, peace and love. In short, the law of the Spirit is charity. "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal 5:14). Insofar as we act in charity, in love, external law becomes unnecessary.

But our perceptions of what is required by love are limited and, at times, even false. The law, then, stands for us as a pedagogue, a teacher. Ideally the fruit of collective human/Christian wisdom, the law makes available to us the experience of those who have gone before us, of those who have learned from the limits of their own love. So for the individual, the law becomes not a yoke but a reminder. When the dynamism of our charity decreases, we feel the prodding of the law. Only when one hates a sister or brother, for example, does one feel the weight of the law, "Thou shalt not kill". As long as one loves the other as oneself, the prohibition against murder does not come into play. In the battle against individual and collective selfishness, "we must look carefully to rules and norms", but "when we allow the Spirit to guide us, we are less tempted to break the prohibitive laws that mark the boundaries of the order of love. Rather we joyfully approach the will of God as a manifestation of saving justice" (Haring, p. 344).

Law has a function not only in the life of the person, but within a society as well. Protecting rights and responsibilities of all members of a society, it expresses a covenant morality, that is, ways of being and acting which flow from respect for and commitment to the dignity and freedom of other persons. Church law is, Father Haring reminds us, "for the service of the

Gospel and the Church as a community of love, a fellowship in the Holy Spirit and a sacrament of the covenant with Christ” (p. 371).

Our own attitude to Church law, be it canon law or our constitutions, must be one of responsible and creative freedom and fidelity; to see the law not as legislation whose letter is to be blindly followed, but as a WORD expressing at this particular historical moment the moral demands of discipleship and the discipline of a living community covenanted to one another in its covenant with the Lord of history.

Understanding of our constitutions—the particular law of our Institute—requires that we keep in mind the mystery of the Church, holy and free because led by the Spirit of holiness and freedom, sinful and limited because sharing fully in the human condition. In our constitutions we have a privileged expression of our covenant with one another as disciples of Jesus within the Community of the Sacred Heart of Mary. We have expressed there the “particular gift” inspired by the Spirit of freedom within the heart of Jean Gailhac, Mother St. Jean and subsequent Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. In our constitutions we find articulated ways of living and acting which are meant to create a space where we personally and communally can know and love God ever more, make God known and loved in a spirit of faith and zeal.

Religious institutes come into existence through the free and creative action of the Spirit of God—the Spirit who is subject to no other authority than God’s own freedom, who is under no other law except that of grace, under no other power than the power of God’s faithfulness (cf. Hans Kung, “God’s Free Spirit in the Church”, Freedom and Man p.23). The vision which inspired our founder and the first sisters was of the Spirit and it is to that vision that we must be faithful today. This fidelity “serves the best interests of the Church” (PC n° 2). The Church’s approbation of a congregation and/or its constitutions neither creates the Institute nor gives it “permission” to exist. Rather, approbation gives canonical expression to the theological reality of ecclesial communion. It unites members of the Institute to “the Church and her mystery in a special way” (LG n°44c).

In granting approval to our constitutions, the Church has guaranteed that the form of life we have expressed there is able to lead us to holiness and

freedom, is an authentically evangelical form of life. Canonical approbation is likewise a statement to us that the universal Church recognizes, needs and wants within the world the particular mission which was given us by our founder: to be available to meet needs in a spirit of faith and zeal; to make God known and loved and to be at the service of evangelical justice wherever we are. Through its approval of constitutions, the Church enables certain members of the Institute to act in its name. Those sisters who receive promises/vows, for example, do so in the name of the Church; those who confide our ministries to us likewise send us in the name of the Church. Our ministries thereby become ecclesial in a very real sense (cf. PC n° 8b).

Our attitude toward law is deeply affected by the culture in which we live, the 'legal tradition' in which we were formed. Within the Institute, we have a diversity of approaches to law. Those approaches can mutually enrich one another. A "Latin" vision of the law can help an "Anglo-Saxon" one to go beyond legalism, beyond the letter of the law to its spirit. An Anglo-Saxon vision can enrich a Latin vision by its respect for the law, by its understanding of legislation as a protection of persons. In the months ahead, let us deepen our consciousness of our personal attitude toward the law; let us dialogue with one another regarding our understanding of the law in our lives, so that both canon law and our constitutions will be truly seen as helping to create a society where we can live by faith, grace and freedom.

Enclosed you will find a summary of modifications which have been made on the text of our constitutions since the general chapter of 1980. No essential changes have been made, the substance – and indeed most of the text – remaining as it was approved by the general chapter in August 1980. The modifications which have been made are primarily the result of a two-year process of on-going reflection and dialogue between the Institute and SCRIS. The constitutions were presented to SCRIS in September of 1980. In the spring of 1981 we received a first response and a list of suggestions. The substance of that response was communicated to you in a letter of September 1981. The SCRIS suggestions were studied by the Enlarged General Council, meeting in Porto in July 1981, and we incorporated those which we considered helpful and in harmony with our tradition and our 1980 general chapter. The majority of the suggestions were of a

canonical/juridical nature, and you will notice that the great majority of modifications occur in the sections on government and formation.

Our modifications were submitted to SCRIS in October 1981 and the constitutions were then studied by the Congresso, the group authorized to approve them in the name of the Holy See. Here they were approved subject to certain additional modifications. These suggested modifications, communicated to us at the end of June 1982, were again studied by the Enlarged General Council in August 1982, which once more incorporated those it felt useful and explained why certain others could not be responded to. From October 1982 until February 1983 the process of dialogue has continued. Members of the general council have been in regular contact with SCRIS and the dialogue, extremely painful at times, continued until certain modifications could be mutually agreed upon.

The modifications generally fall into five categories: 1) those requested by SCRIS for greater canonical or juridical precision; 2) those made for greater clarity; 3) additions specifically requested by SCRIS; 4) items moved from the complementary document to the constitutions; 5) additional modifications, not at the request of SCRIS.

Certain other stylistic adjustments have not been included. I would like to explain the third and fifth categories to you. I believe the other three are self-explanatory. Among the "additions specifically requested by SCRIS", some items were not mentioned by our 1980 general chapter, obedience to the Holy Father and our "dress as a sign of our consecration" in particular. In both of these cases, we have been asked to make explicit in our constitutions what is contained in church legislation or documents. Obedience to the Holy Father has always been implicit not only in our vow but in the ecclesial character of our Institute. This obedience is owed to formal commands of the Roman Pontiff to our Institute, usually through the superior general. The statement on dress is basically that stated in *Perfectae Caritatis* n° 17. It should be a reminder to us of the public nature of our consecration in the Church, as well as a challenge to dress in a way that is "simple and modest, at once poor and appropriate." At no time in our dialogue with SCRIS were we asked to wear either a veil or a uniform. I ask that this required addition to our constitutions not become the focus of discussion. Rather let it challenge each of us personally. The public witness of our religious life is

primarily through love and respect for one another and through the evangelical quality of our style of life and relationships.

The fifth category – “additional modifications” – includes adjustments of points not required by SCRIS. Generally these are the result of our own further reflection and discussion. Reasons have been given for each of the modifications made.

As soon as possible, the definitive text of our constitutions will be printed and distributed. Meanwhile, let us renew our desire to be faithful to the vision which gave birth to our Institute, vision which we have “written down, inscribed on tablets, so that its reading may help us to move forward...” (cf. Hab 2:2-3). May our constitutions, lived in creative and responsible freedom and fidelity, be for us “joy for the heart, light for the eyes, new life for the soul” (cf. Ps 19).

Affectionately in Christ,

Mary Milligan RSHM

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July 15, 1983

Dear Sisters,

Recently I have had a unique ecclesial experience which I would like to share with you. This is not the best time of year to communicate with the majority of you, but I would like to put my reactions on paper while they are fresh in my mind and heart, telling something about the meetings themselves as well as my own reflection on the experience.

On June 7 and 14 and on July 5, ten members of the Executive Council of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) met with Pope John Paul II to discuss religious life. As first substitute on the Council, I participated in the meetings. They were called because of a mutually expressed desire on the part of the Holy Father and the UISG to enter into dialogue. The agenda was established by the Executive Council, but the warm atmosphere of trust made it possible for any participant to introduce auxiliary topics in the course of the discussion.

For each topic on our agenda, one of the sisters gave an introduction and then opened the topic for discussion. At times we went around the table, each in turn giving her experience, opinion or insights. Generally, the themes of the three meetings could be stated as 1) apostolic religious life, formation, and vocations; 2) religious women in the local church, with specific attention to our relationship with bishops; 3) religious life and culture, focusing especially on the reality of pluralistic forms of religious life.

During the first session, our discussion remained general. We, no doubt, were somewhat nervous and we knew from the very beginning that there would be at least one further session. The next two sessions enabled us to become more concrete and to address areas of concern on each of the five continents. At a later date, the IUSG will publish a synthesis of the content of our discussions. I was responsible for the July 5 presentation on religious life and culture which, in fact, led to an excellent and fruitful dialogue.

We were each greeted personally by the Holy Father at the beginning and end of each session. It was obvious that we were guests being cordially received in his “house”. We met around a table in the papal library/studio for more than an hour. Cardinal Pironio and Archbishop Mayer of the Congregation for Religious were present with us and occasionally contributed to the discussion, but it was clear that the dialogue was primarily between the women religious and John Paul II. This latter listened with great attentiveness and stated that his listening was an explicit form of participation. His attitude of respect and eagerness to listen soon dispelled our initial nervousness. After more than an hour of discussion, we were invited to continue our conversation at the dinner table. Here again the dialogue was open and forthright, especially at the third session. We spent at least two and a half hours together at each session and certainly never felt rushed. Nor did we feel that we were being listened to unwillingly or as a duty! I have stressed the Pope’s listening to us, but I do not want to give the impression that he was only a silent observer. On the contrary, he participated actively, especially at the dinner table, by his own comments and opinions, his questions, sharing insights derived from his own experience both as bishop of Cracow and as pope.

There are other details I could add here, but I would prefer to share with you my own reflections on the experience. First of all, I was aware that we were living a truly historic moment. There are few other groups in the Church who have ever had - or who actually have - an opportunity to spend seven and a half hours with the Pope, in an atmosphere where freedom of expression is encouraged! The Executive Council of the USG (superiors of men’s institutes) had the same opportunity during the month of May, but from what I can gather, the Pope was much more at ease and relaxed with us. All ten of us present felt a responsibility to speak for women religious throughout the world insofar as we are aware of their diverse situations. We considered it, in some sense, a way of being a voice for the voiceless, and we tried to take that responsibility seriously. We certainly felt that our voice was not echoing in a “wilderness”.

Secondly, I found I had to revise some of my conceptions of John Paul II. I was struck above all by his great appreciation for religious women. At one point he stated his personal conviction that apostolically the presence of



religious women is more important than that of a priest. His appreciation was evident not only in his words but also in his way of relating with us.

John Paul II's understanding of apostolic religious life is likewise broader than I had thought, though, I suspect, our dialogue with him helped in this regard. He certainly does not see the work of religious women solely in schools or hospitals. While recognizing the value of these apostolates, he sees that they risk distancing us from people by putting us in contact only with those who choose to come to us. Small, poor, apostolic communities among the people give a strong ecclesial witness. We spoke of the importance of our identity and witness not deriving from our work alone.

It is so easy for us to see the Pope as someone who can either do nothing wrong or nothing right! The media in the various countries have a tendency to reinforce our images. The man we met with was a friendly man, seeming to be genuinely in search of greater knowledge and understanding through dialogue. He seemed intelligent and capable of keen analysis, no doubt as a result of his philosophical training. His experience as bishop of Cracow has been confronted by other experiences totally foreign to him; I was struck by his apparent ability to respect and learn from other experiences. I came away from our meetings regretting that each of you could not have the experience I had and especially that the Holy Father himself is so often unable to speak directly. His person and message are subject to distortion not only by the media but also by some who are responsible for speaking in his name. But then we too do that with Jesus whose person and message we are sent to proclaim. We too at times distort the message, not out of malice but because of our failure to understand it or to live it. The Church and the Church's pastor are as eminently subject to the laws of incarnation as was Jesus himself.

In spite of my obviously positive reaction to our meetings with John Paul II, I do regret that we could not address all the urgent questions in each of the countries. Hopefully these meetings will be part of an on-going and regular contact allowing us to enter into more specific questions rather than trying to give an overview.

What will the concrete results of our meeting be? I can only hope that they will serve as a means to strengthen our ecclesial commitment – my own in

the first place, that of all members of our institute, that of all women religious that we represent. I hope also that they will lead to the establishment of structures of dialogue which will make available to the universal Church the rich experience of various cultural expressions of religious life throughout the world.

Before leaving us at the end of the third session, the Holy Father gave his apostolic blessing to each member of our institutes. May this gesture help each of us to live in depth the ecclesial communion of which our constitutions speak (No. 10) and to continue to enter with loyalty and courage into the mystery of the Church.

Affectionately,  
Mary Milligan, RSHM

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24 February 1984

Dear Sisters,

One of the graces of the second Vatican Council was its rediscovery of the call of the whole Church to holiness and of the responsibility of the laity in the saving mission of Jesus Christ. *Lumen Gentium* declared:

“Upon all the laity rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation ever increasingly to all (persons) of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, let every opportunity be given them so that according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church” (Nº 33).

The same document underlines both the dignity and the responsibilities of lay Christians and situates them clearly in the Christian mission of witness, ministry and communion. While the New Testament gives ample and moving evidence of the active role of lay persons in the Christian mission, the history of the Catholic Church has not always expressed that role in its life and practice.

The code of canon law promulgated last year underlines the conciliar insights:

“Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ’s faithful. Because of this equality, they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ” (§208).

“All Christ’s faithful have the obligation and the right to strive so that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach all people of all times and all places” (§211).

Just as the role of the laity appeared in various conciliar documents (on ecumenism, on education, on social communications, etc.), so does it appear like a refrain in the new code – in canons referring to the Church’s

missionary activity, the education of children and the preaching of the Word of God, among others.

On this 135th anniversary of the founding of our Institute, as we continue to move toward our general chapter, I invite you to reflect on the laity, on their role in the Church and our relationship to them. Such reflection might lead to greater “ecclesial communion” and to more effective collaboration in the Church’s mission wherever we are.

Our constitutions speak of the complementarity of vocations with the Christian community. For this complementarity truly to be an “incentive to fidelity to our religious vocation”, it is important for us to understand and experience it. In seeking what is specific to both lay and religious Christians, one does so not in order to show that one is better or worse, “higher” or “lower”, more or less holy than others. Rather, an understanding of the distinctiveness of both vocations helps us better to put our specific gifts at the service of the Church and to live in a dynamic way the “complementarity of vocations evident there” (Const. n° 13).

There is, it is true, a sense in which we, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, are lay people. In speaking of religious *Lumen Gentium* states unequivocally that “from the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the clerical and lay states” (n° 43). Rather, both clerics and lay persons are called to religious life. Non-ordained religious are, therefore technically and canonically, lay persons. When some conciliar document speaks of the laity, however, it wishes to include “all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in a religious (institute)” (n° 30). The rather ambiguous position of religious vis-à-vis the laity has been manifest in many ways in our recent history. Religious women in particular have borne the consequences of this “double ecclesiology”. For the purpose of our reflection here, the term “laity” will be used primarily as it refers to a specific vocation within the Church, to those who “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG n° 31).

There was a time some years ago when we thought that what we did was meant to distinguish us from lay people. As the laity began to be involved in

our schools, as they became more prepared theologically, as they assumed leadership within Christian communities, some sisters saw this as a threat rather than as a grace. Religious had become so involved in certain activities that these activities tended to be seen as the quasi-exclusive domain of religious. Only reluctantly, for example, were lay people admitted as catechists and teachers.

If resistance to recognition of the laity as equally responsible for certain activities in the mission of the Church was at times a reaction on the part of some religious, so also was a tendency to “over-identify” with the laity. If what I do does not distinguish me from the laity, perhaps there is no difference! And so some religious acquired a sort of diffused identity.

While an adequate ecclesiology regarding the place of apostolic religious women in the Church has yet to be articulated, it seems clear that religious are to be, within the Church, witnesses to the Absolute of God in their lives. The experience of God’s love in their life has led them to concrete options: a life of celibacy, putting all their goods in common, a reference to a specific community of persons in all the choices of their life. They promise within a life structured by these options to seek “the perfection of charity in the service of God’s kingdom, for the honour of God, the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world” (Can. §573). This is the “gift” that religious are within the Church; this is the vocation which complements that of the laity.

It would no doubt be interesting and illuminating to re-read our Institute’s history in the light of collaboration with lay persons. In Father Gailhac’s sermons in the various parishes of Béziers, one can recognize his great appreciation of the Christian vocation and his awe of the dignity acquired through baptism. We know how he relied on lay women for the direction of his works, even before the Institute was founded. There is some evidence that at least one lay woman was closely associated with the first group of sisters, perhaps as portress. A married couple played a role in our Institute first foundation outside of France; Miss Hennessy continued to be closely linked with the “Collège anglais” in Porto long after the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary took over its direction. In their difficult situation in the 1880’s our sisters in Sag Harbor relied heavily on the advice and support of several Catholic laymen.

In responding to the call to collaborate with lay people, it is important that we not consider the laity as assuming a role because of the decreased number of religious. They are not “second class” Christians called to certain functions because there is no longer a sufficient number of religious to accomplish them. On the contrary, such collaboration is a value in itself, as an incarnation of a new understanding of the Church, as a grace given to our times. It would be well for us as individuals and communities to examine our attitude toward the laity and our understanding of their call to participate in the Church’s mission.

Working with lay people is mutually enriching. We certainly have much to learn from them. The love within many Christian families can teach us about fidelity, acceptance of others, about perseverance in the face of hardship and tragedy. The tensions and struggles of some families can relativize the difficulties we might experience in our own community relationships. The simple faith and prayer, rooted in reality, of many of our lay colleagues can be an incentive to deepen our own relationship with God. How much we can learn and can be challenged by the economic, political and social realities with which lay women and men are often far more familiar than we!

We too can help the laity to live more faithfully their own vocation. Where we have a spiritual or professional formation that they lack, that formation must be at their service, helping them to discover their own resources. Often religious have opportunities for formation that lay persons could not hope to have. Such formation becomes a luxury only when it is not put at the service of the Christian community. It must be a “good” acquired for others. By our lives of prayer, dedication, justice and simplicity, we can sustain lay persons in their own Christian dedication.

In our various works, we must move toward greater collaboration with the laity – a collaboration in which we are equal partners, having different vocations and gifts. We must challenge lay persons as they challenge us, support them as they support us, complement them as they complement us, collaborate with them as they collaborate with us.

Every vocation to religious life is born within the context of a lay Christian community. Religious life is not a “good” which religious must preserve but

is a gift given to the whole Church. Religious life must indeed be “fostered and promoted by everyone in the Church’ (can. §574). Closer contact with lay persons will help them to understand the depth of the Christian vocation that is ours, a vocation which often has little relationship to the image portrayed in the media, so prone to trivialize and caricature religious women.

The call to holiness, the call to evangelize and to promote justice and peace is a fundamental responsibility of all the people of God. As we approach the ecclesial event of our general chapter and as we remember with gratitude the founding of our Institute, let us take this truth seriously and try to incarnate it in our mentality, our attitudes, our lives. And let us thank God for the grace of living at a moment which has been called “the hour of the laity.”

Affectionately in Christ,  
Mary Milligan RSHM

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May 24, 1984

Dear Sisters,

This letter to wish you a happy feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary comes in the wake of a great sorrow. Through Sister Bríd's death just a week ago, God has chosen to call our Institute to a deep and painful entry into the paschal mystery. We are called to say YES to this mystery as Bríd herself did before she died. Those who accompanied Bríd closely during these past months were privileged to embark with her on an extraordinary journey of faith – one of darkness and light, of pain and joy. The journey was sustained in her and in them by a constant belief that, in fact, life springs from death if we receive it with open hands.

The moment we are living in our Institute is one that calls for great faith, for that faith which Father Gailhac meant to be the substance of our life, the quality of our zeal, the spirit of our Institute. Many of the provinces have been visited by sickness; we dream for the future and yet are aware of our rising age and diminished numbers. At a time when we see many needs around us and have rediscovered the diversity of our call to minister to those needs, we are conscious of our lack of adequate formation, preparation or ability to respond to them.

As we continue to prepare for our general chapter, there are three women of faith that we might invoke as our intercessors in a special way. All three were somehow like ourselves – given an important mission in the history of God's people and yet apparently without the human means to accomplish that mission.

The first of those women is Sarah. Both sterile and aged, she learned that she would bear a child. The book of Genesis (18:9-15) underlines her rather enigmatic laughter, but that does not prevent her from being remembered by future generations as an extraordinary example of faith. "By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised" (Hb 11:11).



The transition from Old to New Testament is made by Elizabeth, another woman “advanced in age” and sterile. Humiliated by her sterility, as was Sarah, she praises God when she does conceive. Again like Sarah, she believes that the Lord’s promises to her will be fulfilled.

And it is precisely for this faith in God’s promise that she praises her cousin Mary (Lk 1:45). Mary too has believed that, though she “had no husband”, she would bear a child. Her YES in faith was her mission, was itself the instrument through which the Christian future was created.

Scripture constantly shows us God acting through sterile women. It is surely not sterility in itself which saves, but faith that nothing is too hard, too marvelous for the Lord (cf. Gn 18:14, Lk 1:37). As we look on our own situation as an Institute, a situation which often seems impossible to us, let us call on these three women of faith – Sarah, Elizabeth and especially Mary. Let us learn from them that “advanced age” is no obstacle to participation in the Lord’s mission, that the lack of human means is the situation *par excellence* where God can work marvels for the good of the world and the Church.

I take this opportunity to thank you, as provinces, local communities and individuals, for your many telegrams, phone calls and letters on the occasion of Bríd’s death. Your expressions of sorrow, of prayer, of faith continue to be a support to us. On June 30, feast of the Heart of Mary, let us in a very special way renew our faith in the power of God acting in the mystery of weakness and death. Let us remember that the marvels of redemption were worked in a humble heart which believed and said YES. With Mary, let us too, as an Institute, renew our belief that the Lord’s promises to us will be fulfilled.

Affectionately in Christ,  
Mary Milligan, RSHM

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February 24 1985

Dear Sisters,

1985 marks the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the second Vatican Council. That event has shaped the Church most profoundly, to an extent that only future generations will be able to judge. Catholics were invited to acquire a new understanding of their mission, of their ecclesial identity, of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ within the Roman Catholic community. The Council set directions for the future; its documents were meant to form a new awareness in all members of the Church and in the Church as a whole.

We are still at the beginning of the post-Vatican II era. That Council's orientations are not yet fully the directions which we spontaneously take. Many of us, for example, can cite the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* words which so move us: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." And yet how many of us can claim to have made that phrase a motivating reality in our lives? The same paragraph claims that the community of the Church "realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history." Do we as an Institute have an effective understanding of what it means to be a community of Christians, of religious in solidarity with the human race and its history?

On this twentieth anniversary of the document *Gaudium et Spes* and in preparation for our general chapter, it would be well for us to hear once again the call issued by that pastoral constitution. The creation of the human person in God's image is the foundation of the document on which all else stands. Human dignity, the call to freedom and community, the equality of all persons, social justice, the value of human activity – all are rooted in the mystery of creation in God's image. The Church respects and values all of

creation and “believes she can contribute greatly toward making the human family and its history more human” (§40).

Because of its concern for human dignity and human history, Vatican II presented in *Gaudium et Spes* “a number of particularly urgent needs characterizing the present age” (§46). As we read these needs twenty years later, we recognize that they have lost none of their urgency: the dignity of marriage and the family, the development of culture, socio-economic life, the life of the political community, peace and the community of nations. These human questions are the concern of the Church.

Just ten years after *Gaudium et Spes* the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI appeared. Fruit of the synod on evangelization, this document underlined once again the Church’s concern with all things human, the Church’s mission in the world. “The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church... Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation of the Church, her deepest identity” (§14).

I would like here to underline only two aspects of evangelization which seem to me of special importance as we prepare our general chapter. These two aspects are stated in EN §4: “Fidelity both to a message whose servants we are and to people to whom we must transmit that message living and intact is the central axis of evangelization.” Our tradition as an Institute is rooted in this double fidelity. Father Gailhac expressed it, perhaps, as faith and zeal or as loving God and making God loved. At its roots, the spirit of our Institute is to live the “central axis of evangelization”: fidelity to the gospel and to people.

The “message” which is the content of evangelization is a Person, the Word made flesh come to free, to save, to redeem, to liberate, to give abundant life to humankind. The message is the Good News of the gospel, of the Reign of God. This message has been revealed and incarnated in Jesus Christ who always stands at its center as the One who makes knowledge and love of God possible, who reveals the mystery of the human person in all its depth. The incarnation was the great act of evangelization, making the message of God’s immense love visible in simple human form.

To proclaim this message in its purity, the Church, and each one of us, “needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for

hoping, to the new commandment of love" (EN §15). We ourselves have a constant need to be evangelized if we wish to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the gospel. We need to hear the Message proclaimed in liturgy, we need to contemplate it in prayer. We need to express it to one another and to receive it from our communities. We need to perceive it in the events of our world and hear it in those people among whom we work. When Father Gailhac expressed the purpose of our Institute, its motto, it was always "to know, love, glorify and serve God" as an integral element in "making God known, loved, glorified."

To hear the message is the *sine qua non* for its proclamation. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* underlines the fact that anyone who would participate in the Church's evangelizing mission must be a servant and a seeker of truth (§78). Only truth will set us and others free. We are not owners of this Truth but its servants. To preach any gospel other than that of Jesus Christ who IS the Truth is to be unjust towards those who long for the truth. Both prayer and study must root us in the Truth of the message which alone liberates. In a world of ever-increasing needs, we are sometimes tempted to short-circuit this facet of our mission. And yet it is essential both in our initial formation programs and in our personal and community life. Father Gailhac implied this in many of his letters where he writes of the importance of prayer and study in order to do the Work of God: "Prepare yourselves assiduously by prayer and study. Without prayer you will do no good at all, your works will be lifeless, their fruits few and of short duration... To prayer, you must add study" (GS/7/IV/77/A). In writing to the sisters in Lisburn in 1877, the founder reminds them that they are missionaries (evangelizers) and stresses the importance of both prayer and study. A religious who is holy but ignorant, he claims, will not be effective in mission. "Both piety and knowledge are needed to make a good missionary" (GS/21/11/77/A).

Our double fidelity is to a people as well as to a message. Perhaps the greatest challenge in our mission of making God known and loved today is to discover how to proclaim LIFE in this particular culture, to these people who have their own values, symbols, history and aspirations. Certain aspects of this question were touched in *Gaudium et Spes* (§53-62), but it was especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which brought the question to our awareness

and reminded all members of the Church that “what matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures”(§20).

Jesus was born as a Jew at a time when Graeco-Roman culture permeated all the Mediterranean world. From the beginning of the Church, the gospel was largely proclaimed through the vehicle of Western culture. As centuries passed, Western civilization itself was formed by Christian values, to such an extent that the terms “Western culture” and “Christian culture” were considered synonymous. As of the sixteenth century, evangelization and colonization of newly-discovered lands went hand in hand, and western forms of thought, practice and celebration were often transmitted as essential to Christianity. Indeed, “the standardization of the liturgy coincided with the discoveries of new continents and peoples. The Church of the time shared with the colonizers an esteem of western superiority which ignored the social structures and human values of the conquered peoples” (M. de Carvalho Azevedo, *“Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity”*, p.17-18).

Our own times are becoming sensitive to the rich cultural heritage of every people, to the values, meanings and patterns which underlie the social identity of a people. The word “inculturation”, which appeared in the theological vocabulary only very recently, refers to the dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a particular culture, to the on-going process of interaction between Christian life and a culture. It refers to the transformation of “all strata of humanity”, a society’s “criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life” (EN §19).

If the word and the concept have a theoretical ring, the challenge of inculturation is part of our everyday life. Vast movements of peoples have created multi-cultured societies. What are the pastoral and social needs of minority groups, of immigrant groups in a dominant culture? What effects do war or unemployment have on young people in our societies, on what might be called the “youth culture”? How is a new consciousness of women revising cultural values? How do diverse technological advances – from electricity to computers – affect our world view? We face the challenge of inculturation each time we wonder about how to transmit Christian values to the youth of our world; we meet it in our post-Christian cultures when

we no longer feel we have an adequate vocabulary to speak about transcendent values.

Paragraph 36 of our constitutions states that “our mission demands incarnation in diverse cultures” and speaks of discovering the presence of the Spirit in various cultures. First of all, it seems important to recognize that it is faith which is to be incarnated in various cultures. The Good News of the gospel is to take root there and to blossom into a community of believers who express their faith through the signs and symbols of their own culture. To be fully mature, this community in its turn must be an evangelizing one, concerned to communicate the Good News it has heard.

The incarnation of the gospel we are called to by our mission as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary is sometimes done within our own culture, sometimes in a culture which is not our own. In both cases, it demands great personal renunciation and a critical, discerning spirit. Not all elements of a culture are compatible with the gospel. Our “burning desire to proclaim the gospel and to oppose values contrary to it” (Const. §6) implies that we be able to distinguish the “seeds of the Word” from what is fundamentally opposed to gospel values. Such distinctions are not always evident, especially within one’s own culture.

When we are called to proclaim the gospel in a culture other than our own, we must, as the constitutions again remind us, “approach with respect those to whom we are sent,” recognizing that in some sense we will always be a stranger there, but a “stranger in our Father’s house.” The presence of the “resident stranger” in a culture is a challenge and a grace to the local population. Ancient Israel was called to give special respect and protection to the resident stranger, as it did to the poor. “Love the stranger, then, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Dt. 10:19; 24:17-22). The missionary in a foreign land, a “resident stranger” in the name of Jesus Christ, witnesses in a special way to the universality of the Church, to the urgency of the proclamation of the gospel message.

All members of the Church, in their own culture or not, have the task of “assimilating the essence of the gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.”

(EN §63) This is the heart of what evangelization is about; it is the heart of our mission to know and love God, to make God known and loved.

Our early sisters were often sent into foreign lands. While we certainly cannot claim for him the contemporary consciousness of inculturation, we do find our founder telling the sisters to open a night school since that is a custom in the country where they are and they must adapt themselves to the demands of the “works of zeal.” To a sister who apparently is having difficulty relating to her students, he writes: “You must study the customs of the country and adapt yourself to whatever is good in them” (GS/5/VII/80/A).

Our general chapter will meet in five months’ time. We will come together from many countries representing diverse cultures, but our concern will be the same: How can we as an Institute make God known and loved to the people of our times? In recognizing that evangelization is the task of all members of the Church, we will ask ourselves about the quality and form of our collaboration with others. Recognizing the fundamental role of witness in evangelization, we will look at our visible resources – personnel and material goods – to ensure that their placement and use are not obstacles to our evangelizing efforts.

As a common preparation for the chapter event, I ask each of you, especially those of you who will be delegates to the general chapter, to re-read and reflect on *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. On this 136th anniversary of the founding of our Institute, let us again hear the call to make God known and loved among all peoples and respond in fidelity and courage to that call.

Affectionately in Christ  
Mary Milligan RSHM



*"I have come so that all may have life and have it to the full." Jn. 10:10*



**Sister Mary Milligan**  
**Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary**

**Began...**

**Life:**

January 23, 1935

**Religious Life:**

June 28, 1955

**Fullness of Life:**

April 2, 2011



## BEGINNINGS

A seed was planted, not a large one but a small one  
just about the size of a mustard seed.

It was planted in Beziers.

In a needy people who did not know the seed was there.

It fell into a faithful heart and was carefully tended.

Women tended the seed.

It was watered by the tears of a weeping widow,

By the work of her good companions.

Like all seeds, this one needed to fall into the ground and die.

And so it brought forth good fruit.

Blown by the wind of the Spirit to distant nations,

offshoots sprouted.

The women did not proclaim themselves but

The One who sent them.

They lived in harmony,

they loved in freedom,

they walked in joy.

"Let us write the vision down", they said

"For there is still a vision for the appointed time;

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;

It will surely come, it will not delay." (Hab.2:3)

Has the time come? Has the seed grown? Is the vision clear?

Is their faith strong?

Another wind arises. Where will it take them?

"The wind blows where it chooses,

And you hear the sound of it

But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." (John 3:8)

**Listen to the wind. . . .**

Mary Milligan, RSHM, 1999





Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary