

LIVING HISTORY  
GENERALATE  
OF  
MARIA DE LOURDES MACHADO RSHM  
1975 - 1980

II



SOURCES OF LIFE  
*Studies and Reflection on the heritage of the RSHM*



Published by Sources of Life

Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

Series: Live History II

Cover: Well at the Mother House of RSHM in Béziers

By: Maria de Lourdes Machado, RSHM

Introduction: by Marjorie Keenan, RSHM

Translated by: Mary Murray, RSHM

Designed by: Centro de Fontes  
Brazilian Province

Printed: by Rona Editora



Centro de Fontes

Rua Cura D'Arç, 74 - Prado - CEP 30410-110

Belo Horizonte - MG - Tel.: (31) 3372.3470

email: [cfontes@rscmb.com.br](mailto:cfontes@rscmb.com.br)



*Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado*



## LIVING HISTORY

### II

### General Introduction

The Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary was founded in 1849 by Jean Gailhac in Béziers, south of France. It was a time of radical social and political convulsions which had led to the declaration of France as a Republic in 1848.

Soon after becoming a priest, Jean Gailhac had founded a Refuge for young women who had lived in prostitution, and also an Orphanage. A childhood friend of his, Eugène Cure, realized how important his efforts were, so Eugène and his wife, Appollonie Pellissier, supported Father Gailhac's work. When Eugène Cure suddenly died, Appollonie decided to dedicate herself totally to God and to Father Gailhac's work.

Father Gailhac knew some other young women who were looking forward to becoming nuns and they were ready to help him work with the women and the children who suffered. The time was right to found a religious congregation. Father Gailhac's plan was approved by the bishop and on the 24th of February 1849, the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary was founded.

From the difficult time of its foundation, with social, financial, political and religious problems, until this day, the Institute has had thirteen General Superiors. Each one of them faced unique problems and developed new ministries to respond to the needs of their time. The four volumes of *A JOURNEY IN FAITH AND TIME* tell us the fascinating story of the many challenges that the Institute faced, and of its expansion to Ireland, England, Portugal and, even farther, to America.

Five of the most recent General Superiors (1963-2007) have agreed to reflect on the history of the Institute during the years they served, often rough times for both the Church and the world. The nature of the project was explained to each one of them, but they are free to write in their own way. The name of the project is *LIVING HISTORY*.

Sister Maria Margarida Gonçalves wrote the first volume in this series. She was the General Superior from September 1963 to August 1975. Those were years that witnessed enormous changes in the Church and in the world, such as Vatican Council II and the Vietnam War. Both affected almost all the political, social and ecclesiastical aspects of life.

Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado wrote the present volume – the second in the *LIVING HISTORY* Series - reflecting on her time as General Superior from 1975 to 1980.

Sister Maria de Lourdes was born on March 21, 1924 in Rio Casca, Mina Gerais State, Brazil. After graduating from Sacred Heart of Mary School in Ubá, MG, she worked as a teacher at the same school. In 1944, she taught at the SHM School in Rio de Janeiro. In 1945, she decided to become a Religious, staying

in Rio de Janeiro, where she went to College at PUC (Pontifical Catholic University) to take up Letters. Later on, she became the principal of the SHM School in Rio and also worked as a principal at the SHM School in Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul State.

She served as Provincial Superior of the Brazilian Province twice, from 1966 to 1969 and from 1972 to 1975. From 1969 to 1972, she served on the General Council during Sister Margarida Maria Gonçalves' government.

The 1975 General Chapter elected Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado as the 9th General Superior of the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. At that Chapter, the Institute promulgated a prophetic document entitled MISSION: A CALL TO JUSTICE. It was based on the spirit of the document from the Second Bishops' Synod, which declared that the promotion of justice is an integral part of the Mission of Church. It is important to say that Sister Maria de Lourdes Machado was invited by the Holy See to be present at the historical meeting of the Bishops of Latin America – CELAM- which took place in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979.

Marjorie Keenan, RSHM  
February 24th, 2009



## CHAPTER I

### A WORLD AND A CHURCH IN TRANSITION: 1975 – 1980

In August of 1974, Sr Margarida Maria Gonçalves, General Superior convoked a General Chapter of the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. She called the sisters to prepare for this event, this “privileged moment, this time of grace by being aware in faith of the journey made and of what was opening before us and which needed our clear commitment lest we fall by the wayside”. (Letter of Sr Margarida Maria Gonçalves to all the Sisters of the Institute). The Chapter took place in Rome in August 1975. On August 16 the Chapter elected a new General Superior – Maria de Lourdes Machado, born March 21, 1924, the tenth child of Jovita Teixeira de Syqueira and Christian Machado.

A passenger on the train of life

One day I found a passage which I liked very much from Leonardo Boff’s text: Grace the Liberator of the World. He says:

*A train is going rapidly to its destination at Luzidio. It cuts through the countryside like an arrow. It penetrates the mountains, crosses the rivers and the cities. It glides along like a line in movement. There are no obstacles. It is perfect in shape, colour and speed.*

*Within it, the human drama is unfolding. People of all types: people who are talking, people who are silent, people who are working, people who are resting, and people who are contemplating the countryside. There are preoccupied business people. There are people being born and people dying, people who love and people who hate intensely. There are those who discuss the direction of the train, who oppose the train, who think that the train is in error. The train should never have been made. It pollutes. There are people who are planning faster trains. There are those who accept the train and gratefully enjoy the advantages it provides. There are people who do not question themselves. They know that it will arrive at the right destination. Why afflict one-self? There are nervous people who move to the front carriages. They want to arrive more quickly. Contradictory people go against the direction of the train. They stupidly go to the last carriage. They think about escaping the train. The train relentlessly goes towards its definite destination. It patiently carries everyone...It offers everyone the chance of a splendid and happy journey to reach the city of sun and rest.*

I stay imagining my long journey within history, as one of the passengers of this train. I find myself there among this collection of people, living in contact with the various cultures represented by these “peoples” who travel on the same train.

I imagine that in each carriage of this train, I am being challenged by the events of life:

- I am a Brazilian from the interior of Minas. This shaped me and made me introverted, family loving, closed. Having been surrounded by the mountains of Minas, I moved, at the age of 20, to the infinite horizons of the sea at Rio de Janeiro. The people of

this region are extroverted, easy going and light-hearted. There is much sun. There is Carnival. Going to Rio is my first cultural shock, within my own country.

- Far from my family and the mountains of the interior an infinite horizon awaits me. It is Religious Life. My entry into it was another cultural shock – restrictions, discipline, values, contact with very different people both Brazilian and European. The formation directress is Irish. Some customs,- the language and the way of eating, are French. Our Provincial is American. I adapt well to all this.

So until 1975, when I began to travel to far away places, I stayed in many different places in Brazil, travelling on this non-stop train. After 17 years in Rio, I lived for 5 years in Rio Grande do Sul. I came back from there in 1966 to be the Provincial of Brazil. Once again I am living in Rio.

*So I continue the story of the train:*

*Everyone travels for free. No one can get off or escape. One finds oneself within the train. Freedom is found within it. You can go to the front or the back. You can alter the carriages or keep them the same. You can enjoy the countryside or can be annoyed with your neighbours. You can warmly welcome the train or bitterly reject it. Not even for this, does it stop running on to its infallible destiny, courteously carrying everyone.*

Sometimes I took “the international carriage on this train” to go to meetings in Rome for Formation in 1967 and to the Extraordinary General Chapter in Rome and London (1968 – 1969). This Chapter called at the request of the Pope, to begin

the adaptation to the modern world in the light of our Founder's charism, was a strong experience. Throughout the Chapter, we felt deeply the clash of diverse ideas and cultures. Each delegate defended her Province or her group.

At the beginning of the Chapter, we were not an "International Institute". After three months in Rome and a month in England, we could feel the change. A common language arose and everything improved.

*And the story of the train continues:*

*There are people who welcome the train. They rejoice in its existence. They enjoy its speed. They appreciate the views. They make friends with their fellow travellers. They do their utmost to ensure that all feel well. They struggle against those who wreck the carriages and upset the passengers. But they do not lose the sense of the journey, either because of the quarrels or the delights. How wonderful it is that a train exists and that it can carry us so speedily to the country where everyone is eagerly awaited, where the embraces will be warm and the love without end!*

*The train's stops: Rome, Brazil, Rome*

I moved into another carriage from 1969 – 1972. Elected as a General Councillor at the Chapter, I go to live in Rome in an international group<sup>1</sup>. It is very different there- living closely together the daily round. I learn a lot from each one. It is not

---

<sup>1</sup> The members of the General Government were: General Superior: Sr Margarida Maria Gonçalves , Councillors: Sr Aloisia Fernandes, Sr Pauline Greene, Sr Maria de Lourdes Machado, Ir. Mary Milligan General Secretary: Sr Marjorie Keenan, General Treasurer: Sr M du Carmel Finn.

simple or easy to lead amidst various cultures. Nevertheless we are united by the essentials.

Moreover, many visits to the Provinces help us to be open to the other and to other values. The first Enlarged General Councils in the United States, England and Portugal put me in contact with the First World.

Having remained in a carriage for three years (1972 – 1975) as Provincial in the Brazilian Province with people I knew, I returned to Rome as General Superior (1975 – 1980)<sup>2</sup> It was a very rich time. I got to know other cultures such as Africa which won my heart with its values - its love of life, family and the elderly (=the wise, in some idioms) because “they saw the sun before the youngest people”. For them “the dead are not dead: they continue to live in communion with the living”.

I saw places of conflict such as Northern Ireland, Mozambique soon after its independence, Zimbabwe before independence. I visited Israel in a moment of crisis. I experienced the welcoming of the children from Honduras, the joy of the people of Mexico with their feasts and customs. I travelled on the trains of Europe and the United States where I got to know a cultured and progressive people.

*And the train continues towards its destination*

*Thus the liberating grace of the world is like a train. God is its journey's end. God is also the route because the route is the anticipated destiny being slowly realised, causing the people to journey.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Councillors: Sr Edmund Harvey, Sr Consilio O'Regan, General Secretary: Sr Frances Lane, General Treasurer: Sr Mary Mc Hugh

*Grace carries all. It is given to all, even to the rebels, the plotters, the lazy, as the opportunity for a safe journey. The train does not change because of negativity. Like wise grace, only people change. They can ruin their journey but they are carried the same as everyone else and with the same graciousness. God who is grace, is also 'kind to the ungrateful and the bad' (Lk.6:35).*

Our train continues its journey telling us how to relate to it:

*Welcome the train, rejoice with it on its way, run with it, love your companions on the journey and you are already anticipating the feast of the arrival. To journey is already to be arriving home. It is grace, grace which is 'the glory in exile, glory which is the homecoming grace'. It is heaven.*

*To reject the train, to upset the journey, to run falsely in the other direction, appearing to escape from it, is to experience the utmost frustration. Not even because of this frustration does the train cease to go on its course. It keeps on its course carrying with it the renegade. God does not alter his graciousness. Yes, the person changes. How much greater will the frustration be when he knows, that in spite of everything, he is always carried with total kindness. That is hell.*

*And you reader, in what direction are you travelling?*









## **A) The situation of a suffering world and of the Church 1971-1979**

### ***The call of the world***

Already in December of 1974, we were alerted by the situation of the world which challenged and questioned our RSHM Mission: “The world of today is assaulted by the misery of two thirds of its inhabitants, who are dying of hunger while the other third lives in luxury and is overfed. There is a hunger for peace, joy, love, justice and culture. This world must be part of each of us and must be present in our Chapter. To read this cry for justice in our heart and to respond to it with our life, greatly surpasses the feelings of sympathy which we have when we read about it in the papers and magazines”.<sup>3</sup>

In this summarized description of the world situation, I was able to see the countries which were suffering violence and tensions, in secular struggles

- I saw bombs exploding in various points of the globe, showing the unrest of an oppressed people.
- In the third world, oppressive systems were choking the nations who were crying out for freedom.
- The arms trade in various parts, was making the populations and the people poorer while enriching the powerful, causing continual danger and threatening the life of many.
- In many places, war, discrimination, racism was generating division, hatred and death.

---

<sup>3</sup> Circular Letter of Sr. Marguerite Marie Gonçalves, December 1974

- The strength of advanced technology was favouring the concentration of wealth and decision making power in the hands of a small group.
- Nature was suffering attacks in the elements of air and water that are indispensable for life.
- The opposition to legal abortion and to war were very significant forms of protest from conscientious objectors who reaffirmed the right to life.
- Some countries succeeded in ridding themselves of dictatorial regimes, other got their independence from colonising countries.

Reflecting on some places where we RSHM were, I can remember the situation of Portugal in what is called the “carnation revolution” of April 25, 1975 which ended political domination. The Portuguese people lived the euphoria of a new political socialist regime. It was experiencing another era in which capitalism and fascism which had paralysed the country, were condemned. The people had to be politically educated in order to catch up with the fast changes that were taking place in the country. The African colonies were awakening to the dream of independence and were stirred up to struggle against oppression and colonisation. This represented a serious threat to the economic stability of Portugal.

Mozambique was one of the countries which struggled for independence. It was the age of guerrillas, struggle and danger. FRELIMO ( the Mozambican Liberation Front) came out victorious from the struggle and the danger. Independence was won on June 25 1975. The government organised by FRELIMO and its President, Samora Machel, were following the marxist-leninist line which had serious and drastic consequences for the

Mozambican people, for the foreigners resident there and for the life of the Church.

Zimbabwe – formerly Southern Rhodesia – was experiencing also the struggle for independence. There were terrorist incidents in every area which reflected the unrest of the people. It was the time too of decisions which generated fears and insecurity. The example of Mozambique somewhat preoccupied the people with regard to the future. However, Zimbabwean independence happened in a quieter way.

In Brazil, the military dictatorship begun with the coup of March 1964, was still continuing. It was a time of strong repression, of persecution of the Church, of control, of exile and torture. This situation lasted until 1989, when elections for President of the Republic were held. The economic regime in force was rampant, dependent capitalism creating a society scandalously divided into rich and poor.

When the General Chapter of 1975 took place, in which we reflected on our Mission, we welcomed this moment of death and life. We looked at the reality and we asked ourselves what in this world of divisions and blatant injustices was significant for the RSHM.

### ***The Church's presence in this world***

The universal Church, sensitive to this time of suffering of so many injustices by the poor and of their longing for peace and freedom, studied, reflected on the reality, called meetings and wrote critical documents.

Already in 1971, having had the Second General Synod of Bishops, the Church through its representatives deliberated on the theme of Justice and brought out the document *Justice in the World* in which the Bishops questioned themselves on the mission of the people of God in relation to the promotion of justice. In the introduction, the Bishops “took account of the grave injustices which wrapped the world of the peoples in a web of domination, oppression and abuses, which crushed freedom and prevented the greater part of humanity from participating in the building up and developing of a more equitable and more fraternal world.”<sup>4</sup>

On this occasion, it affirmed the birth of a new awareness arising among groups of people and which was impelling them to seek their own liberation, through assuming responsibility for their own destiny. The hope was growing of attaining a more human and freer world.

The Bishops tried to hear the clamour of those who were suffering violence and of those who were oppressed by situations and unjust and oppressive systems. In this Synod they declared: “It is clear to us that action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world is a constitutive dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel which is the same as saying it is the mission of the Church on behalf of the redemption and liberation of humanity from all oppressive situations<sup>5</sup>”

This realistic, vigorous and courageous document invited the Church to examine itself in relation to its use of material goods so as not to appear rich and powerful thus compromising its credibility. It was a strong call to conversion and to a united effort for a more just world.

---

4 *Justice in the World*, No.3 Editora Vozes – RJ-Brasil - 1972

5 *Ibid* No 6

In 1975 Paul VI wrote an Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, at the request of the Bishops following on the Third Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which studied the theme of Evangelisation. The Apostolic Exhortation was an invitation to the whole Church to reflect seriously and to give a “loyal, humble, courageous response and to act accordingly<sup>67</sup>” in face of the Christian mission to proclaim the Gospel with all its power of Good News, capable of truly transforming the men and women of our time.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* was a strong light for Religious Life. We felt encouraged to continue to act “our role as vanguard of mission<sup>7</sup>”. It was a stimulus to continue being a challenge for the world and for the Church by its quiet witness, its capacity to go to the ends of the earth and even to give our very life for the Gospel.

These two documents were like an inspiring strength to me personally as well as to many religious women.

### ***The calls of the Church in Latin America***

During all these years, the Church in Latin America lived under the influence of the final Document of the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops held at Medellin, Colombia in 1968. It incarnated the spirit of Vatican II in the political and socio-economic reality of the continent. This revolutionary document influenced Religious Life, proclaiming its prophetic mission and showing the need for a greater and bolder incarnation in the world. At this time the Church of Latin America made its “option for the poor”.

6 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) Nos 4, 5.

7 Ibid No.69

As well, the Church in Africa, in the Philippines and in other parts of the world committed themselves to be Churches truly with the people, on the side of the people, making heard prophetic voices which condemned the wrongs suffered.

With its prophetic dimensions, Medellin was an authentic Pentecost for the Church of Latin America. After Medellin, one could speak of a Latin American Church, a Latin American pastoral plan and a Latin American theology. The theologian, Segundo Galilea said that Medellin was “foundational” in a Church which wanted to renew itself, which wanted to be faithful to the Council, to the reality of the Latin American continent and to its historic process. One could say that Medellin was the forerunner of the 1971 Synod of Bishops and of the 1975 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In Medellin, we saw Justice and Evangelization united when the Church made hers the cry of the poor.

The Liberation theologians raised their voices, seeking to raise the questions which anguished the Christian conscience of the people of Latin America: “How can we be Christians in a world of misery?” And they themselves answered: “We can only authentically live our faith in the way of liberation”.

The Medellin Conference made the human person of the continent, who was living a decisive moment in their historical process – namely the struggle for liberation, the centre of its attention. The Bishops recognised that “to know God, it is necessary to know the human person”.

This search to understand this moment in history was in the light of the Word who is Christ. The Church sought to be enlightened by this Word in order to have a deeper awareness of the service incumbent upon it to give at that moment.

Respecting the judgement of history on the lights and darkness which existed in its journey, the Church wanted to take on entirely the historic responsibility which fell upon it at this particular hour.

The Church knew that it was not enough to reflect and talk. Action was needed. The Assembly was invited to “make decisions and to establish projects only on condition that it was prepared to carry them out as a personal commitment (of the Bishops) even at the cost of sacrifices.”

Latin America was under the sign of transformation and development. It was a time full of longings for total emancipation, for freedom in the face of all servitude, for personal growth and collective integration. They were the predictions of a painful birth of a new civilisation.

The Bishops could only interpret this enormous effort towards rapid transformation and development as an evident sign of the Spirit directing the story of men and women, and of peoples towards their vocation.

They also could not fail to discover in this impulse for transformation which daily became more urgent and tenacious, the powerful and dynamic traces of the face of God in men and women.



They could not fail to sense the presence of God who wanted to free the human person totally and completely. The Assembly sought to take the direction of a more intense and renewed presence of the Church in the transformation of Latin America.

The participants gave their careful attention to three great areas related to the process of the transformation of the continent :

1°) Human development of the peoples of the continent in the values of justice, peace, education and conjugal love.

2°) The elite of the continent

3°) The problems related to the MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH, making unity and pastoral action necessary through visible structures adapted to the new conditions of the continent.

# **TABLE I**

---

**The document of Medellin**



**Table I**  
**The document of Medellin**

The document consists of 16 chapters, dealing with various topics: Justice, peace, family and demographics, education, youth, pastoral care of the masses, of the elite, catechesis, liturgy, lay movements, priests, religious, formation of the clergy, poverty in the Church, collegiality, means of social communication. In synthesis it is expressed like this:

<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	See – Situations Judge- Theological criteria Act – Pastoral options
<b>CONDEMNATIONS</b>	Situations of injustice Institutionalised violence Armed politics Consumer culture
<b>OPTIONS</b>	For the poor Education which liberates Justice and freedom – against injustice and oppression A renewed Catechesis Basic Christian Communities (BCC's)
<b>PROPOSITIONS</b>	Simplicity of life-style Insertion with the poor Planned pastoral action Periodic evaluation Theological reflection on the reality

### ***A new call of the Church in Latin American:– the Conference of Puebla***

In 1978, the Church was affected by decisive events: the death of Paul VI, the brief pontificate of John Paul I and the election of John Paul II. The Church now entered a period of great vitality.

In 1979 the third Conference of the Bishops of Latin America was held at Puebla in Mexico. Paul VI called it and it was confirmed by John Paul I and re-confirmed by John Paul II. The latter mentioned it in his inaugural speech on January 28, 1979.

Puebla studied the big questions of the presence and the task of the Church of Latin America from the viewpoint of Evangelization with an eye to the future. Medellin was the starting point for Puebla as John Paul II confirmed. Medellin was re-affirmed by Puebla which made a deep analysis of the reality of the people of Latin America. It included in it the precise, shrewd, relevant cultural and historical dimension and a reflection on the task of the Church in the past ten years.

The Church at that moment analysed the reality, checked its experiences and made decisive options: for the human person, for the defence of their dignity, for the poor and for youth, in an evangelic action which was liberating.

### ***Reaffirmation of the option of Medellin for the poor and for a liberating evangelization***

The Church pointed out the reality of social sin. The fact of recognising the presence of this sin in our midst was a cause of many tensions within the Church and in Religious Life. Puebla called again on the religious to allow themselves to be questioned by this reality, causing them to take up a position in face of it and to make a radical revision of their apostolic action.

The Church hoped that Religious would be attentive to the Spirit and would be courageous and creative. Religious Life had to burst on to new horizons, create new ways of incarnating the Gospel and give new responses to the challenges of the time.

This gave a great impetus towards a more inserted Religious life and a greater commitment to mission. Many Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary resonated with the call of Puebla. And they continued their journey to the periphery, on the side of the poor! We felt ourselves confirmed in our options.

Important efforts in the areas of pastoral, parish and environmental action developed in the Latin American Church. In general they concentrated on the creation of faith communities, on missionaries and on commitments to justice and liberation.

In Latin America, especially in Brazil they established Basic Christian Communities (BCC's) – the new way of being Church. In the BCC's, the people had a voice in times of oppression. They were the place where people could strengthen themselves, help themselves and find their place. In the light of the Word of God, people acted courageously, prayed their life and struggled for transformation.

In some European countries, Basic Communities arose without an ecclesial dimension. They were protest groups, at times on the margin of the Church. Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* expressed it this way : “they claim to love Christ, but without the Church, to hear Christ but not the Church, to be of Christ but outside the Church”. (No. 16). Paul VI classified this attitude as an absurd dichotomy.

When we look again at the Universal Church with its documents and orientations and at the Church of Latin America with its challenges and calls, we see that the preoccupation of the Church is with the marginalized, that its option is for the poor. This option concretises its mission in the world. The “poor” are the starting point from which all pastoral actions should be analysed and articulated. This is not a matter of a special mission: it is the focus which gives value to any evaluation of pastoral action. The preferential love and care for the poor and needy is the proof of authentic evangelisation.

## **B) The world of Religious Life 1975 - 1980**

### ***Situation of the Institute and of Religious Life in general***

This complex panorama of a world in rapid transformation and of a Church called to share “the joys, the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted,<sup>8)</sup>” was the context in which I served the Institute as General Superior.

---

8 Gaudium et Spes, No 1

At the end of the General Chapter of 1975, I thanked Sr Margarida Maria Gonçalves who had finished her 12 years of leading the Institute, for the grace of handing over an “Institute which was unified, open to the needs of the world, attentive to the orientations of the Church and above all docile to the Spirit”<sup>99</sup>

In fact, Religious Life in general and we as RSHM had mainly overcome the great crisis of identity, affirmation and discernment which followed Vatican 11 and the Extraordinary General Chapter of 1968-1969. One could not say that the time was peaceful but that the most crucial crisis seem to have passed. Now there were fewer vocations to Religious Life, and a lot of confusion, with deep questions about Religious Life in the future existed within its heart.

The situation of the world with its misery and oppression, its injustice and sufferings was a painful clamour which many religious heard, and put themselves generously at the service of life where it was most threatened. Nearly all the congregations were in the same state of searching and were engaged in re-writing their Constitutions in order to confront the challenges of a radically different world.

The total Institute shared in the great effort to re-write the Constitutions. The Sisters did their utmost so that the Constitutions might be the fruit of active grass roots participation. This collaboration was a valuable enrichment for the new Constitutions.

---

9 Words of Sr Maria de Lourdes Machado, Rome, 29 August 1975





## **Table II**

---

**Situation of the Institute**



**Table II**

**Situation of the Institute in relation to the number of Sisters  
and their median age  
in the General Chapters of 1975 and 1980**

**A. 1975**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Sisters</b>	<b>Median Age</b>
Brazil	180	47
Eastern American	402	45
English Irish	251	47
French	64	62
Portuguese	463	41
Western American	125	46
Region of Mozambique	64	40
Generalate	6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1555</b>	

**B. 1980**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Sisters</b>	<b>Median Age</b>
Brazil	170	54
Eastern American	355	51
English Irish	226	54
French	57	61
Portuguese	459	49
Western American	127	52
Region of Mozambique	30	41
Generalate	5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1429</b>	

During the Chapter of 1980, we were aware of our poverty as our numbers continued to go down and our median age increased. But we continued trusting and praying with our Founder: “I am very confident O my God, that you will multiply the number of my daughters so that they may make you known and loved everywhere.”

### ***Hope and decisions of the General Chapter in which I was elected***

The 1975 General Chapter Document : Mission – A call to Justice resonated with many RSHM who felt themselves confirmed in their options and threw themselves into courageous work, confident that “to work for Justice is no longer an option<sup>10</sup>” . Many religious sought to give the focus of Justice to their traditional works, re-orientating their mission from this perspective.

The General chapter of 1975 had two important phases:

Preparation which involved the total Institute: “Participation places the total Institute in the state of Chapter from the moment that all and each one accept surrendered, to this spirit of listening, of evaluation of her life and consecration in the light of faith<sup>11</sup>”. Our attention was focussed on the great theme of Mission.

Sr Margarida Maria told us on another occasion, that we must welcome this moment of life, and not block our ability to be renewed always<sup>12</sup>. Truly, in the Chapter of 1975, something stupendously new happened which the final document synthesised.

---

10 General Chapter Document 1975

11 Circular Letter of Sr Margarida Maria Gonçalves, August 1974

12 December 1974

The papers sent out to us alerted us to the need to deepen our Story as RSHM so as to find insights for our Mission, in a world suffering from hunger, violence and energy crises.

The General Chapter from August 1 to August 29, 1975: It was held in a short space of time but we did an intense work of reflection, sharing, prayer and discernment. The facilitator, Brother William Quinn (La Salle Brother) gave us the method that made us centre all our chapter considerations on a Gospel text. The group chose the text from Luke 9, 1-26. As the Chapter progressed, the key words emerged. From the beginning the emphasis was on some points: justice, poverty, insertion, the poor, prayer, community.

Father Arrupe, General Superior of the Company of Jesus spoke to the Chapter on August 2 about: “The experience of faith and the new apostolic orientations from a Chapter”. His confident, wise words coming from experience marked the story of the Chapter of 1975.

Within a few days of work, the topics of the final Chapter Document were outlined:

- Mission – a call to Justice
- Community for Mission
- Spirituality for Mission<sup>13</sup>

The focus Mission a call to Justice was now very clear. Other aspects of our life as RSHM would be in view of Mission, for Mission. The great hope of the Chapter was that the total Institute

---

13 Minutes of August 8, 1975

would enter into a process of “education for a new consciousness” – a new consciousness of mission which would make us understand that “to work for justice is no longer an option”.

The Chapter called us to give “a radical and active response” to the situations “of the world with its poverty and misery, its oppression and war, its loneliness and violence.” It insisted on the transformation and liberation of all the structures of death and sin reigning in the world.

We also affirmed that we had to “experience poverty, live in greater simplicity of life-style and seek more direct contact with the poor”. The Chapter challenged us “to put our talents and resources at the service of this call to Justice”.

To live this Mission with all its demands, we recognised the need for life-giving community and prayer rooted in reality. We had to be able to see Christ acting in the human situations, let ourselves be challenged by the Word of God, in an ongoing confrontation of our lives with the Gospel.

The final Document of this 15th General Chapter affected deeply and decisively the lives of many RSHM sisters who found in it an echo and a response to their longing to give themselves to the cause of Justice.

During the Chapter we sought to hear all the voices of the world: the voice of those crying out for help, the silence of those who did not have a voice with which to plead. In the midst of so many voices, we tried to distinguish the voice of the Spirit calling us to new positions, to the commitment of each one of us to the cause of Justice.

At that time we were aware especially of the anguished voices of our Sister in Mozambique. They were experiencing the final struggles for independence. The Sisters could not foresee the consequences of Independence for their apostolic and community life.

The Sisters in Portugal were also experiencing a post-revolution situation with its rapid changes. One Portuguese delegate found it impossible to attend in view of the gravity of the political and economic situation. The absence of this Sister who was in charge of finances was considered to be dangerous. The country was under a socialist regime which was questioning all expenses and journeys<sup>14</sup>.

### *A challenging Chapter*

This prophetic and challenging Chapter was a bright torch that directed my life. Its Final Document, even to this day, has the force of something new because it is evangelic, it is focussed on the human person, it is life-giving.

At the end of the Chapter, the new General Council declared their commitment to finding ways to implement the Document: Mission – a Call to Justice. The General Council was also concerned about the future of the Institute in the areas of vocations and formation.

At the closing of the Chapter, we recognised: “This Chapter is a challenge for us. It calls us to a serious revision of our personal and community life. It require us to be free of the structures of egoism in order to put ourselves at the service of all

---

14 Minutes of the General Chapter 1975.



those who need us”... “That this Chapter bring about new life for the Institute is the responsibility of each one”... “If in fact we lived what we discovered we would be agents of transformation in the story of the Institute<sup>15</sup>”.

We had also studied models of structures of General Government in the Chapter. On August 14, 1975 after study and debated we unanimously approves a new structure for General Government. Three major modifications were made:

- reduction of the number of Councillors to two
- the mandate of the General Council would be for five years with the possibility of another five
- a new method of electing the General Superior. The method for nomination was to be as follows:
  1. Each capitulant could suggest three names
  2. Based on a sounding, a team, made up of the Chapter President and two scrutineers would receive the suggestions.
  3. They would make a list in alphabetical order of all who were suggested.
  4. The delegates would receive a revised list in alphabetical order with the names of all suggested. The names of those who had withdrawn would not be included on this list<sup>16</sup>.

---

15 Talk of Sr Maria de Lourdes Machado, Rome, August 29, 1975

16 General Chapter minutes August 14, 1975 – morning session

5. The election would follow the norms of the old Constitutions.

From this Chapter, the Institute would begin the preparation of the New Constitutions and Mary Milligan was chosen by the Chapter to be the coordinator of an international team to be set up to carry out this task.

The Institute received the Chapter Document in a variety of ways. Some welcomed it with enthusiasm as if a long desired friend had arrived. Others analysed it fearfully, frightened of the consequences which the living of it would demand. Others did not give it the importance and the seriousness that a chapter document required. The sisters of the Institute lived on different levels of awareness and in distinct rhythms of pastoral engagements.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SITUATION OF THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT AT THAT HISTORICAL MOMENT

For many years previously, I had anguished over the terrible situation of Brazil and Latin America, a situation of dependency so detrimental to the dignity of its people. I had also noted the situation of oppression and injustices in various parts of the world. I was convinced that to take up the cause of the poor is to take up the cause of Jesus Christ “Whatever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me”. (Mt 25:40)

The second conference of the Bishops of Latin America, at Medellin 1968, declared that Latin America was the tragic example of the under-development that prevented the human development of the people. The widespread infirmities and infant mortality, illiteracy and marginalisation were all linked together. This was an historic moment that demanded of all “clarity to see, light to diagnose and solidarity to act”<sup>17</sup>.

They saw the urgency of creating bold actions and new and renewed structures for the birth of a new continent of free and responsible men and women. So Medellin made a courageous “option for the poor” and invited religious “to form

---

<sup>17</sup> Message of the Bishops to the poor of Latin America – September 6, 1968

small communities really inserted in poor neighbourhoods<sup>18</sup>”.

Medellin recognised that *Education* in Latin America revealed dramatic and challenging characteristics. It showed that its teaching methods were concerned more with the transmission of knowledge than with the formation of a critical spirit.

The education systems were geared to the maintenance of the dominant economic and social structures rather than for their transformation. Therefore, a Liberating Education which sought to transform the person being educated into the subject of their own development, was proposed.

The Bishops voted: “that the face which the Church would more clearly present in Latin America would be authentically poor, missionary and pastoral, disengaged from all temporal power and courageously committed to the liberation of the whole person and of every person”<sup>19</sup>.

These loud calls from the Universal Church, from the Church of Latin America, and the diverse documents of the Brazilian Episcopate which denounced this situation, were seeds thrown into my life, into the life of the Province and of the Institute. Documents like *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) *Justice in the World* (1971) *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) were a powerful breath of the Spirit that demanded new forms of community life, a new focus to our RSHM Mission and new and courageous responses. My dreams for a more just and equal world were affirmed.

---

18 Conclusions of Medellin – 14, Poverty in the Church: Pastoral Orientations 9 – Testemunho b. Paulinas Editions – SP - Brazil - 1975

19 Conclusions of Medellin –5 Youth – Recommendations 3.3 IIa – Paulinas Editions – SP –Brazil - 1975

During the time I spent in Rome as a General Councillor (1969-1972) I came in contact with a very enriching Latin American group. I had the opportunity to meet Latin American Bishops, political exiles, priests, religious who in their reunions, seminars, testimonies, convictions, helped me to widen my horizons, open my eyes to see the state of institutionalised injustice reigning in the Latin American continent.

### ***The preparation for the General Chapter of 1975***

On my return from Brazil in 1974, we began the preparation for the General Chapter of 1975. The draft sent out by the General Council – *What does it mean to be an RSHM?* – made me look again at our history with a more attentive eye and there discover that “our Mission is the life-giving Mission of Jesus Christ<sup>20</sup>”.

When I read excerpts from the letters of Gailhac and of the first General Superiors I resonated with a clear option for the poor and marginalized which I felt that they had: [...] “because the poor are the object of our solicitude and of the zeal and dedication of my daughters<sup>21</sup>”. “The poor are the special object of our tender solicitude<sup>22</sup>”.

Gailhac was a man who heard the cry of the poor, of the abandoned children, the prostituted women, the young people and the marginalized. He was a man of active, radical faith who challenged me, called me to transforming action: “*The RSHM mission is to transform the world.*” (Gailhac).

---

20 Mission Statement

21 Letter of Mother St Jean to M. Kelly Ireland - 1868

22 Letter of Mother Sainte Croix to Archbishop Manning of Westminster – September 3, 1870

Sensitive to the situation of the oppressed poor and with a great desire to experience deeply the reality, a large group of RSHM from the Brazilian Province participated in 1974 in an experience of living in contact with the poor in solidarity with them. It was “A Mission during vacation time”, in Vitoria, ES. Each sister spent twenty days living with a family on the periphery, working with the people, sharing in their lives, in their joys and sufferings and organising pastoral action and participating in the life of the Church. All of this had been well prepared with continuous dialogue and evaluations.

I participated in this powerfully enriching experience and I felt challenged and called to live with the poor. It was a significant moment in my life and a good preparation for the General Chapter of 1975.

### ***The implementation of the Final Document***

When the General Chapter was concluded and having the Document emanating from it, I felt that I would have a plan of action which would allow me to “give an active and radical response” to the cry of the people.

Situated within a history, our mission would be defined by its own historic situation. I asked myself many times: How would our Founder have responded to the challenges of this historic moment? As the General Council elected in the Chapter of 1975, we committed ourselves before God and the capitulants, to put all our efforts into transforming the Declaration that we made into life, by seeking means to use our possibilities and riches in the service of our Mission, a call to Justice.

### ***The Puebla Conference***

The Puebla Conference was another significant moment in my journey. As General Superior, I was invited to participate in the third Assembly of the Latin American Bishops. I could feel the Church in Latin America trying to analyse the reality and seeking paths of action.

The Bishops repeated the desperate cry of Medellin: “ a deaf cry coming from millions of people, begging their pastors for a liberation which did not reach them from any other source”.<sup>23</sup> At Puebla, they felt that “the cry could have seemed deaf on that occasion. Now it is clear, increasing, forceful and in some cases menacing”.<sup>24</sup>

Puebla recognised that the situation of poverty was getting worse and denounced the scandal of the growing gap between the rich and the poor in a Christian continent. By means of the participants, they could see the very real faces of the suffering and disfigured people of Latin America: children, young people, indigenous people, rural dwellers, workers, semi-employed and unemployed, the marginalized and the elderly.<sup>25</sup>

---

23 Medellin Conclusions – 14 – Poverty in the Church 2 – Paulinas editions – SP –Brazil -1975

24 Puebla Document – 89 – CELAM – Bogota, Colombia, March 1979

25 cf. Puebla Document (31-39).







## **TABLE III**

---

### **THE PUEBLA DOCUMENT**



### **Table III The Puebla Document**

#### **The Document is divided into five parts:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> part: Pastoral vision of the Latin American reality.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> part: God's plans for the Latin American reality.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> part: Evangelization in the Church of Latin America: communion and participation.
- 4<sup>th</sup> part: The Missionary Church at the service of evangelization in Latin America.
- 5<sup>th</sup> part: Pastoral options under the dynamism of the Spirit.

#### **At Puebla, the Church made clear options:**

*The poor and the youth are the wealth and hope of the Church in Latin America. Therefore their evangelization is the priority (No. 1132).*

Present the situation, reflect on pastoral ways for the whole Church to assume these preferential options.

The Puebla Document dedicates Nos 1134 to 1165 to the option for young people.

“The Church has confidence in the young. They are the hope of the Church.” (P 1186)

“We affirm the need for the conversion of the total Church to a preferential option for the poor in view of their liberation.” (P1134).

**The Puebla Document ends by giving thanks to God for the signs of hope and joy that it sees on the Latin American continent:**

- The Basic Christian communities
- The Lay Apostolate
- The clearer awareness of lay people concerning their identity and mission in the Church
- New ministries and services
- The stronger community action of priests, of religious men and women in the poorer areas.
- The greater and simpler presence of the bishops in the midst of the people.
- Lived Episcopal collegiality
- Thirst for God and the search for God in prayer and contemplation in imitation of Mary who pondered all the word and actions of her Son in her heart.
- The growing awareness of the dignity of the human person in their Christian vision are other signs of hope and joy , for those who are immersed in the Paschal Mystery of Christ and know only that the gospel lived and proclaimed in imitation of Him leads humanity to an authentic liberation. “There is no other name given to humanity by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12). He is the fullness of being. Only in Christ does the human person find perfect joy. (Jn 17:13)

**In the Puebla Document we can emphasise 10 central axes:**

- 1.. Consecration of the method: to think and live the faith from the basis of the social reality
- 2.. Three prophetic condemnations:
  - .... • Capitalism – “system of sin” (P 55 – 1065 – 546 – 1259 – 41)
  - .... • The Doctrine of National Security (P547)
  - .... • Marxism (P543-546)
- 3.. The social and political dimension of faith
- 4.. The preferential option for the poor and against poverty (P1140 – 30 – 1160 –1136 – 1154 – 1149 – 1147 - 1154 – 1156).
- 5.. Defense and promotion of the dignity of the human person
- 6.. Option for integral liberation
- 7.. Option for the BCCs (CEBs)
- 8.. Assumption and purification of popular religiosity
- 9.. Preferential option for young people
10. The liberation and promotion of women

For me, Puebla was an invitation to conversion. It was an invitation from a suffering Church, almost experiencing martyrdom. In the face of these clear and convincing calls from the world and the Church, I took on the call of the Chapter of 1975 sure that we are called to live together the paschal mystery in a radical openness to the Father and to others. (General Chapter 1975).

## CHAPTER III

### **THE LIFE OS THE INSTITUTE: MOST IMPORTANT POINTS AND CHALLENGES FACED**

Very soon after we began work as a new General Council, we sought to find the necessary means to implement the 1975 General Chapter Document. It was a call to justice and in the light of this call, we had to fulfil our Mission, as Institute, becoming communities for mission, being women of deep faith, committed to Christ, in a common search for an apostolic spirituality integrating faith and life. The area of Formation of newer members to internationality presented another challenge. We also had to involve the total Institute in the task of writing the New Constitutions. The General Council would have to keep up to date with the work undertaken by the International Commission on the Constitutions.

The General Chapter Declaration of 1975 permeated all the action of the General Council. As means, we used the visits to the Provinces, the international meetings on formation, on the Constitutions, according to different ages, and other opportunities. We sent circular letters and personal letters. We accompanied the Provinces by studying their minutes and we studied the History of the Institute. We wrote the International Bulletin. We had meetings with other General Councils. Each year we met with the Enlarged General Council. We gave support

and encouragement to the initiatives in the field of mission and in the reorganisation of works. We sought to do all this in the spirit of listening to the Word of God and in dialogue with the Provincials and the sisters.

The greatest difficulty we faced was the promotion of the unity in a fairly diversified Institute. We desired to create a greater awareness of belonging to the whole: one body for mission.

We were very preoccupied with the reduced number of sisters in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. In the time of the struggle for independence, various sisters from Europe, North America or Brazil returned to their countries unable to live in the environments of uncertainty and tensions.

A month after the Independence of Mozambique, all our works were nationalised and we lost our buildings. A new type of life emerged. History despoiled us of many goods and we experienced all the uncertainty of a country which was seeking to make its influence felt and to pursue its destiny. Our professional and apostolic life was greatly altered.

The efforts of the General Council to implement the 1975 General Chapter Document did not resonate with a big number of sisters in the Institute. However the participants in the Chapter and a small number of sisters in the various Provinces were very aware of the world situation and wanted to give fresh responses to a new world. This fact caused a lot of tension among the Sisters and made the welcome and implementation of the 1975 Document difficult.



## CHAPTER IV

### INVOLVEMENT OF THE INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP IN THE TRENDS AND GROUPINGS IN THE CHURCH

When the General Council was in Rome, we participated in fortnightly and monthly meetings with General Superiors and their Councils organised by UISG (International Union of General Superiors). We took part in the various meetings of Language groups, in the Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace and the Latin American group. Every year the UISG organised a General Assembly in which we participated. It dealt with very important issues of Religious Life for women religious.

These groups made a contribution to the life of the Institute as they confirmed our convictions and motivated the General Council in the struggle for Justice. They kept us well within the evolution of the world with its dynamism, its violent transformations and its demands.

The Latin American group had a significant influence in my life. It awakened a feeling of belonging to this continent crushed by so much suffering. I got to know better the role of the Church in Latin America. I was in contact with the Liberation theologians, through reading their books, through meetings with many of them in Rome, and through my participation in Puebla where they met, though they were not allowed in to the Assembly. Even though they

stayed outside it, they gave great help to the participants by their limitless dedication and their rich contribution.

In the decade of the 70's, many countries dreamed of their Liberation. This was nearly always incarnated on a popular level, especially in the BCCs of Latin America, in the inner city movements and in the youth and workers' groups. They tried out a very humble but effective liberation because they changed attitudes, manner of living, relationships, Church and Religious Life.

At this time, Religious Life and the Church were challenged in a more radical direction: "Religious life became less and less a segment of the Church and society and started to become a vanguard in the pastoral development of the local community, an agent of improvement and liberation in the midst of the marginalized."<sup>26</sup> Many religious women were in solidarity with the sufferings and hopes, the struggles and popular practices and identified with the poor, seeking to live their forms of life and their struggles. In this way, Religious Life demonstrated its evangelical and liberating power.

The theologians of the time would say: "The theology of liberation tries to articulate a reading of reality from the perspective of the poor and in the interest of the liberation of the poor. To this end it drives human knowledge and that of society, meditates theologically and postulates actions which help the journey of the oppressed".<sup>27</sup>

---

26 "Life in the Spirit" – Leonardo Boff – Chapter V: The present challenges of consecrated life. 1 – The dynamism of consecrated life between Medellin and Puebla – Editor Vozes – Petropolis – Brasil - 1982

27 "Liberation. The theological sense of socio-historical liberation" – Theology of Liberation: the least of the least – Leonardo Boff – Editora Vozes – Petropolis – Brazil. 1982

“The theology of Liberation aims to realise the vocation which was the original calling of theology: to think about faith in view of and within reality”.<sup>28</sup>

Encountering in the heart of Liberation Theology, a spirituality which is the meeting with the Lord in the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed, many RSHM chose to live according to this theology. One can say that Liberation Theology is the theology of the poor and peripheral Churches of the Third World. In Africa, it takes place in the native cultures which were maintained under the slavery of the dominant cultures of the colonisers and their allies. In Latin America, the challenge is made because of the social injustice from which the majority of the people suffer.

At this period, we saw some countries of the First World, awaken to the situation of the Third World. Gestures of solidarity, the taking up of stances and initiatives together, in search of a more equal and fraternal world, were perceived. This awakening touched groups of our sisters who became involved in movements for the defence of human rights, in demonstrations against armaments, in groups of Justice and Peace and in Amnesty International and in other groups.

---

28 idem – The society and the Kingdom - Leonardo Boff – Editora Vozes – Petropolis – Brazil. 1985

## CHAPTER V

### RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PROVINCES: CHANGES, MINISTERIES, WORK, LIFE STYLE

Between 1975 – 1980, the Institute continued in a situation of changes initiated by Vatican 11. To prepare for the General Chapter of 1980, the General Council prayed and reflected a lot on the state of the Institute at this time. They presented their vision of the Institute to the 1980 Chapter. I now include it here:

#### *Our vision of the Institute*

In these recent years, we, as Institute, have sought to have a clearer idea of our selves and of our identity. We are trying to live its ideal with its specific circumstances in our time. We are trying to read the “signs of the times” and to understand the message. We are attentive to the needs of the times and we are seeking to grow in living out the Gospel. As Institute, we are becoming more realistic, more aware of our vulnerability, which gives us greater openness to God and greater awareness of our dependence on God. The awareness of justice in the world has raised up little groups who share the life of those who suffer and are oppressed. But we are still fearful of risk. Our response to the call to justice has brought tension to the life of the Institute. There is tension between

the new and the old ministries. This tension was painful but maturing. There is evidence of growth in prayer, in the desire to live out our commitment with greater authenticity. Many efforts have been made to revitalise local communities but it seems, that as Institute, we are not yet able to overcome the limits of our comfort. With the preparation of the Constitutions a real renewal of the Institute has taken place. This preparation, the result of the directions of the Enlarged General Councils, programmes done at provincial and general level, showed that we are a community in formation. The work on the Constitutions made us see the need to rediscover our Sources and a new interest in our Founder arose.

Our numbers diminished, not only because of deaths and departures but also the scarcity of vocations. The majority of our sisters are in the forty to fifty five age range. Departures normally occur in the thirty to forty five age bracket. These statistics must influence our ongoing formation. The sisters are participating in and taking more responsibility for decisions and there is greater awareness of service to the province. In spite of having had much discussion and questioning about our mission and a greater awareness of “being sent”, it seems that there is less readiness for mission and few clear ideas about obedience for mission.

In our life as apostolic communities, certain tendencies have arisen. More diversified and individual ministries and a certain deinstitutionalisation of our apostolate are developing within the Institute. This tendency can be due to the greater freedom of choice of ministries based on the needs of our time. We are also less numerous. Because of the variety of ministries, the multiplication of need and less personnel, it is important to establish criteria and priorities in our ministries.

These tendencies make us aware of our inter-dependence and of the need for greater collaboration between the provinces. We are therefore questioned: What does our internationality mean for us? How can we renew our missionary spirit? How are we situated in relation to inculturation?

The number of small communities has increased and the style of life is more personal. This type of community has given opportunity for a greater insertion in the life of the people. At the same time, some sisters were not able to live this life style and fragmentation resulted. How can we take care of the sisters who need to live in bigger communities and in more structured communities? How are we helping communities to integrate life and apostolic mission? With the multiplication of small communities, will we need to rethink the re-structuring and the grouping together of local communities?

In the government of the Institute, we opted for decentralisation that had positive benefits but increased the risk of provincialism. The awareness of this problem made us seek greater balance between unity and diversity.

The nature of our Institute made us seek new types of inter-relationships between the various levels and between the provinces so that interdependence may be a reality in our life. It seems that we need to think again about what should be our attitude in relation to the different units within the Institute. An important question is: How do structures facilitate or hinder our mission?

In Initial Formation more personal programmes were made and inter-congregational collaboration happened. The lack of groups of young people presents new difficulties and we need to find new ways of collaboration between provinces. We feel the need of a common base in our programmes for the Institute. The importance of the formation community was stressed. Does our initial formation prepare for the religious life of the future? How is it inserted in the reality of our time? Does it offer a practical as well as a theoretical preparation? The number of vocations to the Institutes is a serious problem, What are we doing for vocations? Why are there so few vocations? These are questions that we need to face personally and as a Chapter.

Ongoing formation is the great priority of the Institute and in some cases there is need for greater integration of life in the programmes and their orientations. Ways of prayer, study and reflection on Sacred Scripture, directed retreats, helped personal renewal greatly but we are still seeking the means of seeing to it that prayer is transformed into life. We are still seeking a real integration so that we can truly be contemplatives in action.

We are at a crossroads in the history of the Institute and sown into our dyings, we see seeds of life and vitality. We live in a time of great hopes. It is in hope that we are walking towards the future with courage and humility, proclaiming by our lives and our service that God is in our midst and in God we rejoice.<sup>29</sup>

---

29 Report of the General Council to the General Chapter of 1980







## CHAPTER VI

### SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE IN THE LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE

In thinking about people who were significant for the life of the Institute, the two councillors, Srs Edmund Harvey and Consilio O'Regan who worked so closely with me immediately spring to mind.

These two women seriously assumed their Mission in the Institute and especially the 1975 General Chapter Document. They put all their energies and gifts into bringing it into life, encouraging all the sisters of the Institute to take this new direction: Mission - a call to Justice.

Sr Edmund Harvey shared her great talent for organisation, her quick clear thinking, her joy and readiness, her friendship in every need.

Sr Consilio O'Regan shared her vision for the future, her simplicity and unpretentiousness, her prophetic gift and her mature silences, her poetic-dreaming vein, her dedication and her love of justice and truth.

We studied, reflected, prayed and made decisions together. We gave hours and hours to Council meetings,

in which we planned international meetings, visits to the Provinces, shared new world trends relating to Religious Life and to the Institute, prepared the EGCs and the General chapter of 1980, studied our RSHM history and prepared the new Constitutions.

We spent hours in enjoyments, walks, preoccupations, celebrations, difficulties and above all in much searching. All the sisters who lived in the Generalate during this time, especially the Secretary, Francis Lane and the Treasurer, Mary Mc Hugh made their specific contribution to the life of the Institute, giving us support, collaborating fully with the General Council, creating with us a community that left deep bonds.

The General Council began its mission in the Institute at the exact moment in which Cardinal Eduardo Peronio began his mission in Rome as Prefect for the Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes.

For five years he was a great friend who was always ready to receive, direct and support me. With his goodness, his great and sensitive Latin-American heart, his understanding, he was a very significant person in the life of the Institute and a strong influence on Religious Life in general and for us in particular.

He it was who suggested my name to the Holy Father as a participant in the Puebla Conference. John Paul 1 gave me the invitation. Cardinal Peronio celebrated with the young religious in the international meeting on spirituality and with the

delegates of the General Chapter of 1980. He always gave us the joy of his friendly presence and animated us with words of hope.

Fr Pedro Arrupe, General Superior of the Jesuits was also a strong voice in the “Meetings of 16” General Superiors with the Sacred Congregation in an effort at dialogue and communication. I benefited greatly from his experience, in the preparations we had in the Jesuit Curia, before these meetings. He was also present at the opening of the 1975 General Chapter, opening our horizons on new ways of apostolic outreach.

These people whom I have mentioned and many others who acted quietly and in a hidden way gave stimulus and life, collaborating so that the Institute might follow its path of searching in order to give better service to the world and to the Church.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **RAPID CHANGES IN THE VARIOUS SOCIETIES IN WHICH WE ARE INSERTED**

At that period as today, our Institute was inserted in a world of intense complexity, of violent contrasts and of rapid and radical changes. The media constantly showed the growing abyss between the poor and the rich, underlining the inter-dependence of nations. We lived a time in which violence, war, terrorism were everyday happenings. The rapid political changes, the achievement of independence by the African countries, provoked migrations involving millions of peoples. The Church was suffering persecution in some places and in others, Christians were tortured and even put to death.

The developing countries acquired new vitality, increasing the number of vocations. On one hand, there was a great spiritual thirst, movements of young people, with a growing desire for authenticity and a greater awareness of human rights. On the other hand, secularism, materialism, atheism and ongoing lack of respect for human life were prevailing. Various people were suffering from loneliness

and isolation. The disintegration of the family provoked the need to belong to a group and to seek for security. The Church put itself on the side of the poor. We, religious, sought to involve ourselves actively in the difficulties of the world of the poor and those treated unjustly. Lay people, especially women, became more aware of their ministry within the Church and above all, felt the strength of the Spirit in their midst.

Some RSHM sisters were very aware of their call to “continue the life-giving Mission of Jesus Christ”<sup>30</sup> in the circumstances of the world of their time. We frequently asked ourselves: how to live our life as RSHM in this context of the struggle for liberation affirmed by many nations?

In nearly all the Institute, we had a serious revision of works with consequent transformation or suppression of those that were not a response to the moment. Thus some schools were transformed into hostels and crèches. Other works were nationalised, forcing the sisters to adapt themselves to a new way of apostolic living and acting. Urgent needs arose in the rural areas and in the outskirts of the big cities and many sisters went there to be inserted at the front line. There were sisters who were committed to the field workers and with the working class. They entered into the process of analysis of our responsibilities in the face of social sin, seeking their true place in the story and trying to give courageous responses.

The changes in the life of RSHM sisters as a result of the transformations in society were often painful but at other times were full of light and hope. The changes in

---

30 Mission Statement

relation to life style were deep. The new ministries demanded a strong interior structure of the religious. They were exposed to a secular life in having to confront the world of work with its competitiveness, often living in surroundings with values contrary to Gospel values.

The communities had to adapt their rhythm to that of the people and to the rhythm of professional life. The challenges demanded much discernment and many choices and decisions.

We saw that History forced the profound changes, the radical stripping that we had not the courage to undertake for ourselves.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS DURING THE YEARS 1975-1980**

It is important to recall the moments that, I consider, were significant for the Institute at that time.

#### ***Enlarged General Councils***

In the 1977 EGC which took place in England, we studied the theme Authority and Obedience for Mission.

Obedience was the basis of our commitment in an International Apostolic Institute. We looked at authority as service and analysed the concept of “being sent”. In the spirit of obedience to the mission of the Institute in the Church, we tried to discern a concrete call of God to the Institute at that time. After a long discernment, in prayer, we concluded that each Province should send a group of sisters to live and work among the poor. This was a step in faith and concrete obedience to the 1975 Chapter Declaration that until today has guaranteed the presence of RSHM with the poor and in some places as poor.



The EGC of 1978, held in Brazil, gave the participants the opportunity to enter into contact with the Third World and with a new and prophetic Church in many places. It was suggested to the participants that they have an experience of insertion in poor places exposing them to a culture different from their own, during a determined time in a Third world reality. During the EGC, the participants had the opportunity to share their experience with the total group.

The principal topic of this EGC was the study of the prophetic role of Religious Life in the Church today. During the EGC, we visited communities on the outskirts and in the favela in Rio de Janeiro, to understand for ourselves, the life of the poor and the pastoral work of the lay people who acted there. As well, we listened to the authoritative voice of Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida, Auxiliary Bishop of San Paulo then, and of Dom Waldyr Calheiros – the workers’ Bishop – a prophetic and courageous man from the Diocese of Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro. Many other religious active in the Church celebrated with us, such as the theologian João Batista Libânio, SJ. This EGC and these experiences were very valuable for the life of the Institute.

I believe that the presence of Provincial Councillors at the EGC of 1979 in France to study government was also very important.

### ***International meetings***

During this time the General Council continued to promote International Meetings, seeking to reach various groups in the Institute. In December 1978, all the sisters of the Spanish language met in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It was an occasion of rich sharings, discoveries, affirmations, with the Sisters being able to express themselves in their native

language and to have a typically Latin American Christmas with their own songs, dances and costumes. I believe that strong bonds were formed among the sisters, many of whom were living outside the context and the traditions of their people. For the Mexicans and the Colombians it was a moment of deep joy and much richness.

In order to continue with the Age Group International Meetings, the General Council proposed to the Provinces a longer meeting for the newer members. The International Spirituality programme lasted two months and was divided between Béziers and Rome. This gave the younger religious the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about the Founder and the first Sisters of the Institute by entering into contact with our story through visits, studies, researches during two weeks spent in the cradle of the Institute. During a month and a half in Rome, they deepened their study on Religious Life, having the best teachers to accompany them during these days. These two months gave the younger religious the possibility of understanding the value of internationality and of deepening the sense of our Mission as RSHM. During these two months of intensive work, the sisters immersed themselves in our origins and listened attentively to the voice of the Church and to life calling them to go along other roads.

### ***The New Constitutions***

In the period of 1975-1980, the total Institute experienced the challenge of re-writing the Constitutions and we participated in meetings of the International Commission of the Constitutions, meetings with Provincials or inter-provincial meetings in Rome,

France and in New York. These preparatory meetings for the New Constitutions and the study of the Sources were important for a deeper reflection on the Spirit and Mission of the Institute. With this immersion in the Sources, we understood our RSHM history better and the GIFT that Fr. Gailhac is for us and for the life of the Church.

### ***The transfer of the Generalate***

The transfer of the Generalate to Via Lucchesi in the centre of the city of Rome was another relevant happening in this period. This move allowed us to live more simply and to be in the heart of the Rome. In spite of the difficulties such as lack of sufficient space for the Institute Archives, we all believed that this was a concrete step in the search for a greater knowledge of the difficulties of life, for greater contact and solidarity with the people in a simpler style of living, taking on the work of the house, living in more compact surroundings with their limitations and demands.

### ***The General Chapter of 1980***

The 16th General Chapter of the RSHM took place in Rome in August 1980. The new RSHM Constitutions were approved and Sr Mary Milligan was elected as the tenth General Superior. In the last session of the Chapter on the August 29, I handed over the direction of the Institute to my successor with these words:

*This is our final session. The work is ended. Another phase is over. A new stretch of road is beginning. Many of you chose the word "crossroads" to describe the RSHM. I too feel that we are at a "crossroads". Looking back, I remember every moment and every curve of the road. Full of gratitude, I thank every hand that was extended in a gesture of support, every*

*friendly glance which said: "it is worth it to bear the weight and the heat of the day" for the sake of the mission. Looking back, my eyes are filled with remembrances.*

*I remember that in Mali, among the traditions of the older families, there is the "request for the road". Whoever is visiting can only leave the village after "the road is given to them" by the family chief. And he accompanies the visitor to the boundary of the village pouring out blessings on him. At Pentecost, I asked for the road for the Institute and, now at the beginning of the road I feel that the moment for the blessings has arrived and I ask you all to pray for me.*

*New roads have also been given to Mary, Bríd and Lúcia<sup>31</sup> and as the representative of the Institute at this moment, I want to say to them:*

*"May the Lord bless you and keep you! May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you! May the Lord show you his face and give you peace! (Nm. 6:22)*

*"In this new day, go where your heart leads you. Go where you wish since the road is yours. There may be tempests. Each tempest will give you the opportunity to prove that your heart is wise and that the choice made by you was for the best." (M Rider)*

*I know of a congregation in which a ring is passed from one general superior to another. It is a beautiful symbol. I believe that for us what links one general superior to another is this unshakeable faith that the Lord is with us, on our journey,*

---

31 General Superior: Mary Milligan, General Councillors: Bríd Mc Grath and Lúcia Brandão, General Secretary: Catherine Dolan, General Treasurer: Judith Lupo

*as Institute, in the building up of our story. Mary, may faith be your strength as you undertake new paths for the Institute. As we began our Chapter, we placed ourselves securely in the hands of Mary. I entrust you Mary, and the General Council to the Heart of Mary. To Mary, I entrust the destiny of the Institute.*

Having reviewed the story of this five year journey coordinating the Institute and remembering deeply these moments of grace, I am called to celebrate keenly this very simple story with all its slowness. It demanded much patience. I give thanks and praise to God for having been so enriched by the people whom I encountered during that time.

It was a journey in which I followed a path of commitment with the Lord of History, with the Sisters of the Institute, with the Church and with the people.

It was a journey of limits and of getting things right, but I can say like Moses that I journeyed “like someone who could see the Invisible” (Heb. 11:27), sure of God’s strength upholding me, hearing all the time what God was saying to me: “Do not be afraid for I am with you to protect you”. (Jer.1:8)

Integrating all these experiences into my personal history and weaving a synthesis of my life, I say with St Paul: “ I am still pursuing the goal in an attempt to take hold of the prize for which Christ Jesus took hold of me”. “I am straining forward to what lies in front. I am racing towards the finishing point to win the prize of God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12, 13, 14).





# **Annexes**

---





## ANNEX I

**MISSION - A CALL TO JUSTICE**  
**1975 General Chapter Statement**

There is a growing consciousness in the world, in the Church, and in each one of us that God is present at the deepest level of all human history, but that his power for transformation and liberation, in and through Christ, must be released to all, for the benefit of all.

In the light of this, we, as a chapter, have come to realize that the mission of the Institute is, more precisely than ever, a call to justice - to the rightful sharing of this transformation and liberation with all men and women.

As this new consciousness of mission unfolds, we see that:

**To work for justice is no longer an option**

The situation of the world, with its poverty and misery, with its oppression and war, with its loneliness and violence, with its increasing imbalance in the distribution of resources and goods, urges us to an active and radical response.

We are convinced that work for justice is “a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel” (Justice in the Word, Synod of 1971).

The clarity of the gospel message, the repeated call of the Church, the life and spirit of Father Gailhac, and the awareness of the sisters in the Institute have led us to this conviction. We see that this conviction must penetrate every aspect of our personal and community life.

A call to justice is a call to those in the greatest need of human liberation. Who are those in need of liberation?

All who are deprived of the power and freedom to grow, to mature as truly human persons, whether this deprivation is occasioned by themselves, their immediate environments or by systems and structures in society at large.

We recognize that, as an Institute, we have not yet fully faced the call to justice in our lives and in the work we do.

We affirm that living out our mission today requires of each sister and each province education for a new consciousness.

We affirm that, in order to respond to the call of justice, we must experience poverty, live in greater simplicity of lifestyle, and seek more direct contact with the poor.

We affirm that each province must, in a spirit of discernment:

- identify clearly who are the victims of injustice in that province and in each country;
- identify the evils that cause injustice and commit itself to resist those structures and systems, whether local, national or global, which cause oppression and prevent fraternity among people.

We affirm that each province, and the Institute as a whole, must find ways to put our talents and resources at the service of this call to justice.

We are increasingly conscious that working for justice and living in justice means “taking nothing for the journey” and “losing our life”. Lk 9. “The disciple is not above his master.” Jn 13, 16

In face of the challenge of this radical evangelical life, implying risk of the unknown, loss of security, suffering, we need one another as never before.

We therefore re-affirm that community is an integral expression of our call to mission.

We have grown in our understanding that:

**Community is mission and is for mission.**

Our community life must be centered and shared in Christ, rooted in reality, and is an authentic openness to the needs of those around us.

Each sister has the right to expect and the responsibility to create a community:

- of support and challenge;
- of prayer, both personal and community;
- of concrete witness to that liberating love which is the highest expression of justice.

We affirm the need for:

- a simple style of living which will find expression in;
- our manner of relating to others;
- our personal and community possessions;
- our use of material goods;
- discernment, on a personal and community level, which will confront our lived experience with the gospel;
- openness to the local and provincial community, and to the total mission of the Institute.
- a broader concept of community and a continuing search for new community forms which will give adequate support to all our sisters.

Such a visible living for the Gospel will result in our standing in contradiction to certain values of society, and will be a true participation in the death life paradox which is both liberating and a source of liberation.

We are called to live out together the paschal mystery in a radical openness to the Father and to others. This gives rise to a creative tension between our need

- for involvement and withdrawal;
- for solitude and prayer together.

We affirm therefore the urgency of continuing:

**Our search for greater integration in our life**

so that we may be able to recognize Christ's presence and action in the human situation of our life and in the lives of those who touch us.

As a chapter, we have prayed individually and as a community on our lived experience in the light of the Gospel.

We now confidently ask the Lord to let the entire Institute

“act justly,

love tenderly

and Walk humbly with our God”.

(Mich 6,8)

**ANNEX II**

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA  
Curia Generalizia  
Via di Villa Lauchli, 180  
(Via Cassia Antica)  
00191 Roma**

August 22, 1975.

Dear Sisters,

In writing to you for the first time, the words of St. Paul come to my mind: "I know who it is in whom I have trusted, and am confident of his power to keep safe what he has put into my charge". (2 Tim. I, 12.). In response to the charge given to me, I place myself at the service of the Church, in the Institute, like the grain of wheat, which through God's power is transformed into the Body of Christ, like a piece of bread, which through Christ's power is multiplied to satisfy the needs of many.

During these days of reflection, of listening to the Spirit, we tried to hear the many different voices of all those in the world: of those who cry out for help and of those who do not even have a voice with which to plead. We tried to discern the voice of the Spirit who is calling us to new attitudes and to the total commitment of each one of us to the cause of justice. "The situation of the world, with its

poverty and misery, with its wars and oppressions, with its loneliness and violence, with its increasing imbalance in the distribution of resources and goods, urges us to an active and radical response.” (reflection from the actual Chapter)

Situated in history, our mission is defined by the challenges of our own times. How would our Founder have answered them today? We are called upon to transform ourselves and society in an effort to be faithful to Father Gailhac. A critical conscience will give us the necessary inspiration to question world trends and to discern new needs and new calls. It is up to each one of us to give that new response that no one else can give for us. “There are always moments in which man has to make decisions, to choose, to promote or to destroy human and social realities. Man is fulfilled in carrying out his own vocation, and this is a part of a collective destiny of many generations.” (Comblin) As an Institute, we are called to conversion, to a more radical evangelical life and to build a just world.

I wish to thank each Province, each community, each sister for the expressions of their union with me upon receiving a new mission of service to the Institute. With the prayers and encouragement of each sister, I wish to serve as Mary did. Therefore, with the support of the whole Institute, and by the power of The Spirit, I find strength to begin this new mission.

I shall leave for Brazil immediately after the Chapter, so as to be able to return to Rome before October 15.

Affectionately,

Maria de Lourdes Machado, RSCM



**ANNEX III**

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA**  
**Curia Generalizia**  
**Via di Villa Lauchli, 180**  
**(Via Cassia Antica)**  
**00191 Roma**

November 27, 1975.

Dear Sisters,

Now that the entire council is “home” and our meetings have begun, during which we have discussed together our hopes and aspirations in an effort to be at the service of the Church through the Institute, we should like to share our reflections and plans with you.

In trying to determine more precisely what would be our prime objective in the carrying out of the mission that we received during the chapter, we reached the conclusion that it cannot be other than a channelling all our efforts and gifts so that the chapter statement “Mission - a Call to Justice” might become life. To do so, we shall need to work in great harmony with the efforts of the different Provinces so that, through a union of efforts, we may, as an Institute, participate in a common dynamic mission which is both ecclesial and universal.

To attain this objective, we shall have to enter into dialogue with the provinces and find different ways of being present to the life of the sisters. We hope to begin our mission by a visit to Beziers, to pray there, close to our founders, for light on the original inspiration of Father Gailhac and for the grace to be faithful to our charism in today's Church so that we may give a courageous response to the challenges that face us as an Institute.

In an effort to respond to the desire of the Institute as expressed at the Chapter, we should like to visit all the provinces during a 20 month period beginning in March. In July, we shall have an opportunity of meeting all the provincials during the Enlarged General Council meeting which will be held in New York. Through the provincials all the sisters will be present to us.

In trying to organize our work, we are asking all the provincials for their suggestions and telling them of our first plans for visiting the provinces. When the details have been finalized, we shall send you our schedule.

During the Chapter, great importance was placed on constant communication. We are very much convinced of its necessity if we are to grow in internationality, universality, and unity. Whatever happens in the provinces interests us greatly and we feel it important either to increase or to initiate interprovincial communication in order to find mutual support and enrichment through this sharing.

We profit of this opportunity to share some information with you. Since the General Chapter, two new provincials have been named: Sister Maria José Caldas of the Brazilian Province and Sister Columba Kavanagh of the Eastern American Province.

From November 6-13, the annual meeting of superiors general was held in Rome. The different themes presented were of great interest, especially “Religious and the God of Faith”, “Religious in the Church”, and “Religious in the World”. Sister Mary Milligan presented this last subject very well.

We are also busy organizing the annual international meeting. This too will be another opportunity for sharing ideas, for listening to what is happening in the provinces.

We have also asked specialists in the different subjects touched on in the chapter statement to help us deepen our understanding of the text itself as we seek out means to transform its words into life and action.

Everything is just beginning in the generalate and we are going through a phase of organization and of trying to see what personnel we shall need to help us attain our objectives and carry out our work. We also realize how important it is to learn the languages necessary to communicate easily with the sisters of the Institute and we are foreseeing time for language study.

Above all, we are trying to interiorize our chapter statement. We have prayed with Isaiah (50, 4-6), asking the Lord to give us “a disciple’s tongue” and to sharpen our hearing so that we may listen as disciples do. May he open our ears and

may we never resist him nor turn back from what we had the courage to decide and take on during the 1975 chapter.

May the Gospel, and especially Luke 9, continue to be the inspiring light which will make us

“act justly

love tenderly

and walk humbly with our God.”.

(Micah 6,8)

With all our affection and deep union in Christ,

Maria de Lourdes RSCM  
Edmund RSHM  
Consilio RSHM

**ANNEX IV**

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA  
Curia Generalizia  
Via di Villa Lauchli, 180  
(Via Cassia Antica)  
00191 Roma**

January 1976.

Dear Sisters,

In reflecting on the chapter document and in trying to respond to the challenges asked of us, I found myself drawn to its emphasis on a life of total integration in Christ whereby his liberating power, active through each one of us, makes us agents of “transformation” in a world of “poverty and misery, oppression and war, loneliness and violence”. I asked myself the questions: Why is it that with a million religious in the world the signs of his transformation are hardly evident? Do we honestly believe that we have his power? Do we take the Gospel on its face value? In what measure are our lives so totally integrated that we release his power or in what measure do we impede it?

The document, in its reference to a life that is integrated, gives us the ground-work for a deep questioning of our mission “to live out together the Paschal mystery in a radical openness to the Father and to others”. Our desire to live a life deeply committed to God and to our neighbor gives rise to a tension within us. We often feel that we must resolve tensions, choosing one alternative

over another for we see them as mutually exclusive, rather than complementary. Tension, as we experience it, often becomes a source of anxiety, fear and friction rather than a source of creativity and life. The unifying source of creative tension is the Spirit living within us. The more sensitive we are to the call of God in our heart, the more his love urges and impels us to action. Mary's response at the Annunciation was the expression of her life. This moment of grace in which the "power of the Spirit overshadowed her" moved her outward in action for "she went in haste to the hill country" to be with Elizabeth. Our turning toward the Lord implies a turning toward humanity. "Only that commitment to action is genuine which proceeds from the well-spring of contemplation and only that search for God in con-templation is authentic which brings into prayer the anguish of men who are not free to be human." (Clarke, T.; The Way, July '73) The perfect expression of this creative tension is to be found in the mystery of the Incarnation.

In Father Gailhac we also see this same faith in action. It was expressed in his life by a total commitment, disregard for difficulties in face of need and a "love that threw discretion to the wind". The Scripture passage, "I have come to cast fire on the earth and how I wish it was already blazing", (Luke 12:49) is often seen in his writings. The symbol of fire describes for him the force of love. "The soul that undertakes works for God's glory must burn with divine love since zeal is a flame of love. The soul so influenced cannot remain inactive. Zeal must be generous like flames that dart from the fire to consume all within reach. Zeal is generous, it cannot be stifled." (The Religious Live, ch. VI) This faith in action was for him the faith-zeal that he made the characteristic mark of our Institute. It was his understand-ing that Christ's mission was our mission.

How do we as an Institute and as individuals today give evidence of this faith-zeal? Do our lives signify a generosity, wholeheartedness and enthusiasm? Are we aware of the needs of humanity? Are we content with mere awareness? Are we ready and willing to move out of comfortable spheres of activity to respond to those in greatest need?

Let us together pray that this gift of faith-zeal to the Institute will ignite new life in each one of us so that we will become true agents of the liberating and transforming power of Christ.

Be assured of my prayers for each one of you that the Lord may bless you during this coming year.

Affectionately,

Maria de Lourdes

## ANNEX V

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA**  
**Curia Generalizia**  
**Via dei Lucchesi, 3**  
**00187 Roma**

February 24, 1977.

Dear Sisters,

During the course of the Vatican Council the manifestation of the power of the Spirit was clearly active in bestowing gifts of guidance and insight on the Church to open up and to clarify for the people of God ways “to that total interior renewal, that conversion of heart which the Gospel calls *metanoia*”. (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 10) One of the greatest gifts of the Spirit to the Council was a certitude that “from increased veneration of the Word would come a new impulse of spiritual life”. (Dei Verbum, Ch. 6:26) In postconciliar years the Church is constantly encouraging us to a deeper listening to the Word. True, the Church has always venerated the Divine Scriptures, has always given special emphasis to the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, but with the passing of centuries and changing cultures the listening to and communication of Scripture was stifled and not permitted to permeate the lives of the children of God as in earlier ages. It became a formal presence, hidden for the most part, outside the language of life.



We live in the Church at a privileged moment. We must rejoice and be glad, thanking and praising God because of the re-discovery of the Word as life-giving, as active, as healing, there to be communicated for the 'building up' and evangelizing of each other and of all people. As an Institute we must be more alert to the voice of the Spirit moving in the Church in this way. We must believe in the evangelizing power of the Word of God. It must live in the very hearts of our communities, imbuing them with its love and vitality for mission. I say this because it seems to me that it is toward a re-vitalization of our community life that the Lord is pointing now. Our Chapter Documents of 1968 spoke of this at a time when the Church was still breathless from the first impacts of a new message to renewal. The 1975 Chapter Statement emphasized again that we are called as individuals to be a community for mission - free for Christ's mission as he was for his Father's mission. (Luke 4:18-22) In other ways, too, the Lord seems to be speaking the same Word to us, through the deep desires of the Sisters in the different Provinces, through the aspirations of the young people who want to 'come and see' and through the concerns of the Provincials during the Enlarged General Council meeting last July. As we draw near to the anniversary of the foundation of the Institute let us ask our Founder who knew the Scriptures as life-giving and who communicated and spread that life to the early Institute, to join with us and with Our Lady in praying that during this year our Heavenly Father may look on us with special love, causing his Word to 'burn anew' within us, re-kindling the flame as he speaks to us on the way' so that our communities may become for the humanity of our age, centers of that light where only Christ is Lord.

The Church in the decree on Revelation quotes St. Paul's words to the early Christian communities to express the transforming power of the Word: "The Word of God is living and active," (Heb. 4:12) and "is able to build you up". (Acts 20:32) St. Paul speaks a language we understand, the language of familiarity and of experience in which we are grounded. When listening to the Scriptures the very articulation of the words, Word of God, touches us and draws us to him in its mysterious and unitative attraction. Each one knows the significant moments, when in the deep silence of her own life, an encounter with God in his Word moves and transcends her beyond herself in her ability to respond to him, causing her later to 'marvel and wonder' and 'to ponder in her heart' as Our Lady did. These moments become corner-stones of strength holding together the sometimes weary fabric of the "in-between" when all we have is the hard core of faith in the 'everlasting love' of a God we cannot see. Such experiences of God help us to appreciate the anguish of those who have lost the God they knew and who search for him where they cannot find him.

But though as individuals we can speak from experience with St. Paul about the Word of God in building us up, a word of power and love and not of fear - as communities we cannot, in general, speak with the same experience. Do we contemplate the Word together to build us up? Do we encounter the Word together? Do we keep it hidden? The basis of our encountering the Word as communities is our willingness to let each other know in community about the ways God communicates himself to us. It is a willingness to talk as communities about God and the ways we find him in our lives - in prayer, in our reflections, in events, in nature, in his people - his Word being made flesh. It is a willingness to hear him in the ways others find him.

‘I must proclaim the good news’ says the Lord of his mission. “All that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you”, he says to those closest to him. (John 15:15) The Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* repeats this call to evangelize. “It is unthinkable that a person would accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who in his turn bears witness to it and proclaims it.” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24)

The life of the Gospel is full of people proclaiming Christ. We have the examples of Our Lady with Elizabeth and Elizabeth with Our Lady praying the Magnificat together, the shepherds making known to all in Bethlehem the ‘saying’ which had been told them, John recognizing and proclaiming him. We have Andrew urging Simon Peter to come to his newly-found Messiah and Philip urging Nathanel. We have the Samaritan Woman at the well running to her village with the news, the apostles watching Christ praying and asking him to tell them how he prayed. And he did. We have the Magdalen, when he was risen, obeying his command to tell ‘Peter and the others’ what to do. And we have the disciples ‘on the way’, still in faith but weary, experiencing a significant moment of encounter for them in the ‘breaking of bread’, that moved them beyond themselves to the radicality of a new life, and the dangers already foreshadowing Jerusalem. All these met Christ and it was because it was Christ they met that their eagerness - not just their willingness - compelled them to communicate his life in them to others. So, too, when we encounter the Word as a community it is not just an experience that we want to share, but an experience of God. It is a sharing that comes from and moves us into prayer reaching its

time of deepest significance when we listen to the Word at the celebration of the Eucharist. It is not discussion as discussion, techniques as techniques, or an interchange of ideas and thoughts, however interesting and fulfilling this may be, “for the kingdom of God is not in talk, but in power”. (I Cor. 4:20) All these have a place in our community living but the sharing we are thinking about now is that daily or frequent sustenance which gives life. This life, with all its exigence, moves us in joy and hope to the concretization of the vision of the Gospel in the quality of our lives and in our ministries to people. It is a sharing that makes us ‘doers of the Word and not hearers only’. The Word of God can be a very attractive resting place of spiritual security. But contemplation, to be true, must always lead to others. Service, to be true, must always lead to contemplation. By sharing we mean a community of faith contemplating the Word.

A sharing of the Word may sometimes bring apprehension and a feeling that such a way demands extraordinary qualities. But the people we met encountering Christ in the Gospel - the prophets we met - are not people with extraordinary qualities. They are people who see and look to Christ as we are trying to do, each with her own uniqueness to offer. A hesitation to share will come when in measuring our own powerlessness we lose view of the One who speaks. Like those invited ‘to the supper’ we will begin to make excuses. (Luke 14:18) The Word of God has had many protestors. In Exodus 4, Moses concludes his list of objections with: “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech and tongue”. Jeremiah (1:6) had less opportunity to object before the Lord took over: “to all to

whom I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak". But all these protests surrendered before the love and capture of God in his urgent need of the service of some for others of his people. They moved on the history of salvation. There are times when the presence of the Lord in the depths of one's life is beyond expression and participation becomes an active silence that communicates and builds. But whether our participation is in the silence that builds, or in the protest that has surrendered, or in the gift of "utterance", we are all inspired by the same Spirit. It is in this rootedness that our sharing of the Word has meaning and from which new vitality will continue to spring.

In the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Matt. 13:1-23) Christ talks about what the quality of the Christian life must be for the seed to spread and multiply. As we confront the message of the parable let us pray that we, Christians called to radicalize the fundamentals of the Gospel, will have 'eyes to see', 'ears to hear', 'hearts to understand', Christ talks about different types of ground, the ground of the pathways, the rocky ground, ground where thorns flourish, and ground with good soil. The parable raises many questions. Is the climate of our community living conducive to a growing personal relationship with Christ in prayer, without which we could have no Word to share, or is it closer to the bustle and excitement of the pathways of the world? The rocky ground that embraces the seed and then rejects it? Is our joy short-lived, carried on the wave of enthusiasm, the retreat, the meeting? Or do we really continue truly disciples in his Word? Are our desires to follow Christ poor 'choked' by our riches, as the seed that promised fruitfulness was suffocated by thorns? Are our cares for the proclamation of

the kingdom 'even to the ends of the earth', or are they too often in service of ourselves and of each other in community? Do our communities nurture the thirty yield to the sixty and the sixty to the hundred and the hundred to the ideals Christ has for us - to the metanoia of the parable? Adulthood in Christ is not an over-night process - it is a waiting process. It is not easy to keep the soil good soil. Self-sacrifice is never easy. Its symbol is the cross. It can never be removed from a community trying to find life in the Gospel and the Gospel in life. But we know the Sower and the Sower knows us. Isn't it by his love that we have been seized? And isn't it because of his love that we hand over every facet of our life to him? The handing over is our response and that has to be there if we are to see in our lives the transforming and vivifying power of his Word.

Affectionately in Christ,

M. Lourdes

**ANNEX VI**

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA**  
**Curia Generalizia**  
**Via dei Lucchesi, 3**  
**00187 Roma**

February 24, 1978.

Dear Sisters,,

This letter comes to you soon after we have completed our visits to the Institute and that makes a difference when one is writing. We feel now that the Institute is close and personal to us, personal in the sisters whose lives make up its life, participating in its hopes and aspirations, in its anguish and in its joy, each in the uniqueness of her own journey, known fully only to that loving and understanding Lord activating from within in her circumstances and history. I often turn to God in gratitude and humility for the ways I have been helped during this visit to know him better through our sisters - through the fidelity of years that I have met, through the aspirations and idealism, the suffering and patience, the weaknesses, the human poverty made great in faith, through the praying and devoted service, through the different faces of the Lord as I found him in our Institute. I remember, too, the young and not so young who have died since our visit.

I think I am right in saying that the sisters in each province are aware, from their own experience, that the Lord is very present to the Institute at this time, present in the renewal that is taking place and in the conversion of heart that is coming to us. This gives us cause for great joy and gladness, hope and thanks. True, we have our difficulties and our moments of a feeling of the impossible and we make our mistakes and often our desires fear to “launch out” from our words. But, like St. Paul, we must encourage ourselves and one another to “press on” with perseverance - looking to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith”. (Heb.12:2) As I was reading this passage from Hebrews, I could not help wishing for St. Paul’s optimism and daring and his belief in his capacity to grow because of Jesus. He does not rest satisfied with the little by little approach that we, Christians of today, sometimes have. We know we are filled with the power of the Spirit, yet we tend to cut the Lord down to our highest expectations of ourselves or to other people’s expectations of us, instead of believing in the “upward call” (Phil.3:14) of Him who is ready to bring to life in us more than we could ever dream of. (Eph.3:20) One is reminded here of Father Gailhac’s great vision for the Institute – ‘that it would transform the world’.

“In those who are close to me I show my holiness”. (Lev.10). I would like to share with you at this time in the Institute some reflections on our call to be close to God in holiness. I remember when we went to the communities during our visit, we talked together sometimes about this but we rarely pursued it very far. Somehow, we all seemed to cope better in wording other aspects of our lives, radicality, poverty. Perhaps it is because holiness can be touched and



known rather than defined. In the Enlarged General Council of this year, the phrase “obedience for holiness” was often used when we were talking about our mission. This was especially so in the context of the early Institute and of the spirit of our Founder. For him holiness is synonymous with imitation of Christ, “to be holy is to copy Jesus Christ”. When speaking about holiness he emphasizes constantly the qualities of truth and authenticity. Holiness is hard to define but I don’t think we need to be able to define it but we do need to be holy. “Be holy as I am holy” says the Lord our God. It is simply said. This is the message that was brought to life again in the council of Vatican II. The Church rediscovered or seemed to rediscover what holiness in her very being meant and that her vocation was “to be holy” by reason of her union with Christ, her head. This led her to proclaim that all the people of God were called to participate in the holiness of God through her, in accord “with each one’s state of life”. (L. G.) The Church, always in need of conversion and renewal, is still on its search. It is a pilgrim Church. The world found it hard in many ways to receive the Christ emerging from the council. There were those who walked with him no more. In the aftermath of the council it was as though “the earth shook and the rocks were split and the curtain of the temple was torn in two”. The Church suffered. Our Institute did. Through this suffering is coming the awareness that the Christ revealed to the council is “truly the Son of God”. (Matt. 27:51)

In the centuries preceding the council, holiness had come to be identified with mysticism, with priests, sometimes with religious life and often with certain types of religious life. It was identified with monastic observances

and, at times, with holy intellectualism, with individualism. We had made a great departure from the concept of the “holy people” that Isaiah had envisaged (62:12), and a far greater departure from the holiness that is the fullness of the Christian life, proclaimed to all people by the life of the Son of Man, as he, himself, grew in holiness, in union with the Father “according to the mystery of his will”. It was a union that reached the climax of its glory when “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit”. “Be holy for I am holy” - for Christ the way had not been easy. The Church, in her universal call to holiness, while being fully conscious of the eschatological destiny of man, never isolates it from the hardship and reality of the human condition. The Christian way to holiness not only assumes the inevitable, when it is outside one’s possibility to control, but goes beyond it to choice, to choice of Christ as one’s way, one’s truth and one’s life.

At the council the Church seems to “take delight” in coming to see herself again as the community of the people of God in celebration, a “holy people”. It is as a person among people that she calls me to holiness and she calls the people to holiness as a union of individual minds and hearts, each an expression of a common song of praise of the one and triune God. It is here that we bow in faith and in awesome wonder at the mystery of the presence of God in the depths of each human being and in the communion of the divine living in each other. This presence of the divine is a relationship with God through the Spirit dwelling in each person. It is the seed of personal growth. For the seed to grow to maturity there has to be a continual response of christian faith, a response that cannot be made without

prayer. Indeed, such faith is prayer. For religious the focus and warp of whose lives is faith, and without which their way of life would have no meaning, prayer takes on a dimension of greater and deeper significance. The call to holiness is in accord “with each one’s state of life”. Each of us can from her own experience, verify this need for constant encounter with her Lord in prayer if she is to continue to live in the heart of her vocation and if her hidden self is to grow strong. (Eph.3:20) We are strengthened in our purpose to pray when we contemplate Jesus, the beloved Son, facing the Father not only in the more momentous moments but in his ordinary day. We are confirmed in our belief that prayer is an essential part of our search for holiness when we see him take such definite steps to pray – “in the morning, long before dawn, he got up, and went off, to a lonely place, and there he prayed”. (Mk.1:35) It was with the revelation of herself as “the community of the people of God” that the Church was “led by the Spirit” to see that the point of integration in all christian life is where the search for holiness and the search for justice meet. It was the point of integration on Calvary when her head, Christ, died. It is for this fullness of the christian life that the Church prays when she asks the Lord each morning to let us “serve him in holiness and justice all the days of our life”. Those who want to worship God must worship him not only in spirit but in truth, explained Jesus to the woman from Samaria as he drew her on the way to holiness. It was this illumination of the Spirit at the council, the integration of justice and holiness, as the fullness of the christian life, that more than any other caused the earth to shake and the rocks to split and the curtain of the temple to be torn in two.

Holiness is in the being of the Church, in her nature, therefore to participate in her holiness, to be a “holy people” we must reach her being, her unction and nourishment. We reach it in her sacramental life, in the sacrament of reconciliation, in her life of prayer, her life in the Word, above all in that supreme life that is union with God and his people, in the Eucharist. Today the Church wants to draw out to its fullness the sign and symbolism of the sacramental and eucharistic life of her liturgy, in order to help her people to be truly a “holy people”. To the same degree in which we live in this dimension of the christian life in the Church, do we live in the heart of the Church, the great pulsating heart of Christ. Without this dimension we are living in the shell of the Church but not in its kernel and the Church we bring to others is its form, perhaps, but not its presence. This aspect of bringing the holiness of the Church to others is one to which must be given profound attention by religious. We could say our vocation is essentially ecclesial. It is an aspect of our vocation the responsibility for which can never be minimized. It raises big far-flung questions for religious congregations and for individual religious.

To participate in the holiness of the Church we must love her as Christ loved her. Today, perhaps more than in any other era, she is covered with the wounds and scars of her own making and of her own weakness and sinfulness, there for all to see. As the people of God we are part of her wounds and scars. We must ask ourselves what wounds and scars are of our making, what injuries do we inflict on her and remember them when we condemn her or when we hear her condemned. In confronting her mutilated body we can “bind up” her wounds or we can “pass her by” or we can

“remain standing and looking from afar”. As religious what option have we? But we are also living in one of the greatest moments in the life of the Church and we must rejoice with her in her rising. We can feel the assuring touches of Christ’s hand everywhere guiding it onwards - in the prophetic figures of our times, in the thirst for the absolute evident especially in our youth, in those who urge us to release the Gospel to be itself, in the torn and beautiful countenance of Christ emerging from the poor and oppressed of the “people of God”, still faint but deepening and slowly spreading, in the lives and indeed deaths of those who in fidelity to the Church calling to holiness and justice, stand in solidarity with them. Here we think and we pray, in union with them, of our own sisters. Here we think too of the Institute in faith and in poverty standing before the Lord in readiness to send sisters to bring the love of Christ, poor and meek, to new places and to receive him there. We feel the touch of Christ in the Institute. Let us turn to him and constrain him to stay with us longer on our way. Let us turn to Our Lady and listen to her Magnificat, that beautiful spectrum of holiness, anticipating as it does, the song of blessedness of her Son.

In Christ,

M. Lourdes

## ANNEX VII

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA**  
**Curia Generalizia**  
**Via dei Lucchesi, 180**  
**00187 Roma**

February 24, 1979.

Dear Sisters,

This year when the whole Institute is involved in the formulation of our new Constitutions, when we as an Institute are reflecting on our identity and mission in the world as an apostolic Congregation, I thought we might take time together to discover anew the gift of our calling and what it really asks of us. Our documents say: "Vocation is not a call given once and for all, but it is reiterated daily, demanding a daily response. The formation which should sustain this response should be a life-long process." (1968 General Chapter)

The following of Christ as seen in the call of the disciples gives us some in-sights into the meaning of our own call to religious life. Christ's first 'Come and see' expresses a real meeting with the person of Christ, an encounter in faith. It is an invitation to be in communion with him. He then asks the disciples to follow him and he will make them fishers of men. Here he indicates that the life of a disciple will be one of service. Their response to this is: "They immediately abandoned everything and

followed him” (Mt.4:20) - their commitment was a total one. Christ’s call to follow him is a call to mobility – “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20); to live a life that is dependent on him, not on things – “Sell your possessions and then follow me” (Mt.19:21); to enter into his Paschal Mystery – “Deny yourself and take up your cross daily.” (Mt.16:24) A contemporary writer, Santaner, sees in the words ‘deny yourself’ the adoption of attitudes and choices that leave us exposed to being rejected by others. The following of Christ can cause us to be excluded from the society to which we belong. It is clear from the Gospel texts that each subsequent call asks from us a deepening of the radicality of our original call. The following passage from John seems to me to give particular evidence of this: “I say to you, when you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and lead you where you do not wish to go....follow me.” (Jn. 21:18) It is a following of Christ in fidelity and self-surrender and tested by time. It is perhaps particularly pertinent to our times.

When we responded to the call of Christ, we chose to do so in a religious community. We therefore follow Christ as a community, as well as individuals. Once a community is founded it is its own reality and the vocation of the community forms, both in terms of weakness and strength, the call of each of the individuals who follow it. The call to be a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary has been heard by each one of us and we have supported one another in that call. It is also a call that will be heard by others. What does our life as Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary say to young people? As a community, what image do we project

today? Are we enthusiastic and joyful in our life together; do we believe in it? How challenging are our apostolic endeavors? Do we lead an authentic spiritual life and do we articulate our faith vision? These are questions we might ask ourselves regarding the witness of our life. Always realizing that vocation is a gift, we must pray for vocations to ask the Lord to send laborers into his harvest.” (Mt. 9:38) In our contact with youth, in the people we work with and meet in our various ministries, how sensitive are we to this whole area of vocations? What opportunities do we take to make known and to share this gift of vocation with those around us? Young people today wish to live a life of deep personal relationship with the Lord, to respond to the Gospel call, to attend to the needs of society and to serve the Church. What do we offer them?

In being faithful to the Lord of history we must see our call and the call of those yet to come, in the light of the world in which we live; for it is for this world that we are called, and it is to this world that we are sent. It is in this world that the Church has chosen to reinsert itself to respond with a new vitality to the challenges of our time and to recreate all things in Christ. The Church today is aware of the many structures of injustice and raises its voice to speak out against them. It sees the need to revitalize itself in many parts of the world and to nurture and support its birth in the ‘young third Church’. It is a time when it is very aware of the Spirit speaking within it. The Church today is struggling to witness in its life what it announces in its words.

It seems that we are in a period of transition preparing to ‘serve a new humanity’ and the decisions of today are already the beginnings of tomorrow. It is a creative time in history and it is in many dyings that we shall bring forth



new life. For our call to be true to Christ and the reality of our times we need, more than ever:

- a deep experience of God - the continual discovery that God is present at the very heart of my life, intervening in its events and in the events of those around me - to be sensitive to his callings and to ever deepen my personal relationship with him - to be conscious of my dependence on him and to be convinced of his power within me;
- simplicity - as was already mentioned in my letter from the Enlarged General Council;
- apostolic availability - the interiorization in my life of an apostolic stance - to be open without conditions to the calls of the Institute in order to facilitate and fulfill our mission in the Church - a quality of our calling that was particularly stressed by our Holy Founder;
- collaboration - to be inserted into the pastoral planning of the local Church - to work with other congregations in the service of the Church - to join with other groups to alleviate the suffering in the world - to be agents of reconciliation;
- to be people of great joy, hope and compassion - to witness to the presence of God among us.

We live in a demanding time and the Church calls us to move beyond ourselves. It is because of this that I ask each of you to seriously reflect on the role of formation in your life and with an open mind and heart take advantage of the opportunities presented to you so that you will be ever more able “to grasp the purpose for which Christ grasped you.” (Phil. 3:12)

Let us together on this our special feast day, pray for a greater fidelity to our call, taking Mary as our model.

M. Lourdes

**ANNEX VIII**

**ISTITUTO DEL SACRO CUORE DI MARIA  
Curia Generalizia  
Via dei Lucchesi, 3  
00187 Roma**

February 24, 1980.

Dear Sisters,

“The heavens proclaimed the glory of God,  
And the firmament shows forth the work of his hands.  
Day unto day takes up the story  
And night unto night makes known his message.”

(Ps. 18:1).

In this psalm, as in many others familiar to us in the Church's liturgy, the psalmist celebrates the revelation of God in his creation. We are asked to raise our minds to the wonder of the sky and to see the beauty of its majesty in a harmony of movement. Each day and each night receives from its predecessor the message of glory and hands it on to its successor to proclaim in continual newness. When we pray these psalms, we feel we are with people who moved with ease into the mystery of their God, dwelling with him wherever he chose to dwell. People who resonated to the rhythm of his timelessness giving him freedom to trace the design of their history. We feel we are with people of events, events that have been passed on, in unbroken tradition since

that 'hour' so precious to them, when God walked with their forebears. (Gen.12). We know that because they are people of events, they are alert to the 'acceptable time', seeing beyond the sign into the purpose of its creator-King. We may be tempted to envy the psalmists their capacity to seek and find God everywhere. But the story continues into New Testament times - into our times, we can say, because we are of the Messianic people. We hear the Son of Man constantly looking to his 'hour', using each opportunity as it comes, to teach the twelve that for an event to reach its fullness, it must be identified with its moment in the plan of God for their times. 'My hour has not yet come', he said to Our Lady at Cana. And she understood his concern.

Today, we feel we are in a different world, one in which the timelessness of God has become boxed-in, in man-made measurements. It has become the oppressor of the rhythm of nature, rather than its creature passing on a message. It has become the asset and despair of the wealthy and the asset and despair of the poor. We talk of time being too short and we talk of time being too long. For some there is too much time, for others, too little. The passage of time is straining to outdo time itself. It is growing into a possession of alarming significance.

Therefore, let us look to time and see how we can best keep it in its timelessness. It is our possession too. It raises many questions for us, questions as to which category of time we should identify and to which we do identify; questions as to our closeness or otherwise to the harsh realities of a world earning its bread; questions as to our demands from time, as to whether we situate our time within

our profession or within our mission and calling. In a word, we are asking ourselves, “Are we becoming people growing in familiarity with eternity in our particular vocation?” “He has put eternity into man’s mind.” (Eccl. 3)

The tensions that any such questioning evoke, if they have the quality of growth in them, can only be answered by a truth, that has in turn, the quality of timelessness. It is for always. I have to be someone struggling to respond to God, in the full acceptance of the present moment-at one with God and with myself. Struggle is what marks me. Someone, who ‘with eyes on the city of promise’, puts her hand into the hand of God and with him ‘seeks what has been driven away’. (Eccl. 3) I must be someone who assumes and grasps a past and who, free from the weight of desires and expectations, opens out in hope and trust to a future. To be that someone, I must let myself be formed in the Lord of the Hour and by the Lord of the Hour, in the dynamism of a growing relationship with him and in the ideals and experiences of his way. For it is only in the power and love of his spirit, that I have the capacity to live out my commitment in the exigencies and demand of time.

“To everything there is a season - a time to cast stones away, and a time to gather stones together.” (Eccl. 3) For I, too, am a person of events. Though we are living in the ‘worst of times’ we are also living in the ‘best of times’. Rejoice and be glad! Coupled with the phenomenal acceleration of change and movement today - perhaps because of them - is a profound yearning of the human spirit for its own, for its roots, its identity. Where did I come from? Who am I? Where is God? How can I reach him? “Send me a handful

of dust from our earth”, anguishes a recent immigrant to her people back home, “to remind me of who I am”. “May my praise go to you from the depths of my African soul”, ends the prayer of a Sister in the heart of that emerging continent. And when they spoke - the immigrant and the African Sister - they spoke from the hearts of the millions they represent. It was the ‘wind in the upper room’ of Vatican II, rather than the ‘rowing on the lake’ through the years, that caught up the Church in a like yearning. It called to the Church from her roots in the cave, from her source, from where her life began in a valiant woman, Mary, when Christ was born and God came to pitch his tent among us. It was a call for compassion from a world that had felt forsaken by her. The message in the wind was clear. The Church must leave behind ‘the staff and bag and bread and money and tunics’ (Lk. 9) of the weight of years. It must take anew to the road that leads to the Kingdom, making it ‘a place of springs’ ‘with face set for Jerusalem’, light of step, alert to the signs, lest she miss the purpose of the way.

It is within this call from her roots, from her people calling for compassion, that we must hear and understand the initiative of the Church, when it asked religious congregations to return to their original inspiration, to the charism that brought them to life. It was needed, if the full beauty of her mission, was to be restored in all the exquisiteness of its detail - if she were to be ‘equipped again for the service of her people’. (2 Tim. 3:17). And religious congregations - let us boast in the Lord - responded with that fidelity to the Church that has always been theirs when ‘storms arose’. Experience has shown that this initiative of the Church asked for renunciation, deep faith, and great

suffering. Congregations found that long distances had come between the 'today' of religious life and the 'yesterday' of its beginnings.

Our own institute was no foreigner to such suffering. But now dawn has come again and 'joy comes with the morning'. (Ps. 30:5) We are an Institute in event. The event? The writing of our new constitutions. The moment? The specific call of the Church in the modern world. Let us ask the Lord to 'stay with us' during these months, so that we will be able to bring this event to its fullness.; in the plan of God for the institute. Let us pray that we may grow in love for the Institute. We cannot presume it, because the basis of such love is faith. We are asking for a love that will make us want nothing for the Institute, but the will of him who sent it. Such love will make us own it, regardless of the 'seasons'. It will give us the courage and wisdom and discernment, to burrow through the web of time, to the options and inspirations of those from whom our life came, and draw our roots through to now, and even yonder. It is such love on the part of each one, that will enable the Institute to 'complete the work' given it to do.

Let us pray in a special way for those intentions during our celebration of the Eucharist on Foundation Day, wherever we are, when the wholeness of what is past and the wholeness of what is to come, is drawn together and implicated in the mystery and reality of a moment.

May Our Lady take you to her heart to share with you her part in the Hour of her Son.

And may Jesus Christ continue to possess you - he who is yesterday, today and the same forever.

M. Lourdes





# Index

---



General Introduction.....	05
---------------------------	----

## **Chapter I**

A World and a Church in Transition - 1975-1980.....	08
-----------------------------------------------------	----

A) The Situation of a suffering world and of the Church 1971-1979.....	17
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Table I - The document of Medellin .....	27
------------------------------------------	----

B) The world of Religious Life -1975-1980.....	30
------------------------------------------------	----

Table II - Situation of the Institute.....	35
--------------------------------------------	----

## **Chapter II**

The Situation of the General Government at that Historical Moment .....	42
----------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Table III - The Puebla Document.....	51
--------------------------------------	----

## **Chapter III**

The life of the Institute: Most important points and challenges faced.....	54
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## **Chapter IV**

Involvement of the Institute Leadership in the Trends and Groupings in the Church.....	56
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

**Chapter V**

Relationship With the Provinces:  
Changes, Ministeries, Work, Life Style.....59

**Chapter VI**

Significant people in the life of the Institute.....65

**Chapter VII**

Rapid changes in the various societies in which we are  
inserted..... 68

**Chapter VIII**

Significant moments during the years 1975 - 1980.....71

# **Annexes**

---



## Annexes

<b>Annex I</b>	
Mission - A Call to Justice.....	81
<b>Annex II</b>	
Circular Letter - 22/08/1975.....	86
<b>Annex III</b>	
Circular Letter - 27/11/1975.....	88
<b>Annex IV</b>	
Circular Letter - January 1976.....	92
<b>Annex V</b>	
Circular Letter - 24/02/1977.....	95
<b>Annex VI</b>	
Circular Letter - 24/02/1978.....	102
<b>Annex VII</b>	
Circular Letter - 24/02/1979.....	109
<b>Annex VIII</b>	
Circular Letter - 24/02/1980.....	114





Institute of the Sacred Heart of Mary - Brazilian Province  
[www.rscmb.com.br](http://www.rscmb.com.br) - [cfontes@rscmb.com.br](mailto:cfontes@rscmb.com.br)