



Letter of the Superiors General

Roma, 24 June 2021

DO WE DARE TO CONTINUE TALKING, BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

Dear sisters and brothers,

A joint meeting of the Council of the Congregation (sisters) and the Enlarged General Council (brothers) was held online from 7 to 12 June 2021.

Both General Governments, the general economes, archivists and postulator, the sisters of the zonal governments, the coordinator of initial formation (sisters) and the provincial, regional and delegation superiors took part in the meeting. In all there were 41 people. We thank each and every one for the good preparation they made for the meeting, their active participation and the depth of the exchanges.

The urgency of changing our ways of being and serving in the Church

These were days in which we talked about some of the issues that concern us all. We took time to share and encourage each other in the service of authority. We were also able to drink from the sources of our sscC spirituality, thanks to some testimonies given by brothers and sisters about our Founders and Saint Damien, seen in the light of today's challenges. We noted once again how the internal challenges of the Church, exacerbated by situations of abuse, and those of the various societies, make us feel the great urgency needed to change our ways of being and serving in the Church. We also discussed our finances and economies with a view to making better use of resources and being more supportive in mission. Finally, we received information about the ongoing causes for saints and about our cultural heritage. The exchanges in the groups were rich, stimulating and helped us to feel closer to each other and to feel that we are walking together.

Several times it was said: "Something has to change in us and among us", thus expressing the impact of what we are living as a congregation. At the same time we feel that these issues also need to be discussed and deepened among all brothers and sisters.

Two themes for further dialogue

In the same spirit of a common searching and in the context of a family conversation between sisters and brothers, we propose at least two topics for further and deepening dialogue among the brothers and among the sisters and, hopefully, where possible, between brothers and sisters.



Economy and finances in the congregation. The impact of the pandemic on the global economy has also affected us. In many places, the pandemic has impoverished us and forces us to rethink how we function economically, our lifestyles, our ways of generating resources to continue the mission. This involves everything and everyone, from the Initial Formation of brothers and sisters to the care of the elderly, to our ways of financing missionary projects, especially among the poor. Nor, of course, can we forget the commitment we have to the staff who work with us in our works, houses and communities. We believe that we can all contribute, with imagination, work, with sobriety of life, through generating other forms of resources, administering our goods with greater social responsibility and seeking different kinds of common investment to help us carry out the mission in greater solidarity among ourselves and with humanity.

We believe that sisters and brothers are deeply touched by the poverty we see around us, in the congregation and even in our own families. How do we express that sensitivity? Bursars at all levels can help us to see what is happening. **How does the poverty we see affect us? What can we review in our formation (initial and ongoing) as regards our needs and lifestyles? How can we take on together and in solidarity the costs of some of the essential services to ensure the good health of the body, namely initial formation, care of the elderly, general government, projects among the poorest?**

The other issue is that of abuse in the Church. This is something that has touched us directly because among us, sisters and brothers, there have been abusers and abused. We have experiences of mistreatment, authoritarianism, abuse of power, sexual abuse and abuse of conscience. These experiences hurt us, make us ashamed, cause us indignation, caused us to lose credibility and impoverished us. When we have learned of brothers or sisters involved in abuse, the question arises: **What was my reaction when I learned of situations of abuse involving my sisters or brothers? Where was I that I did not see or did not know about these abuses? And if I did know something, why didn't I act in time? What is wrong with us that we find it difficult to talk openly and transparently about this subject among brothers and sisters?**

Both issues, economy and abuse, undoubtedly require structural and systemic changes: in the way we administer limited resources and in our search for forms of effective solidarity between rich and poor countries; in the ways of understanding pastoral ministry, personal accompaniment and the exercise of power and authority, at all levels. The complexity of these structures can paralyse us, because we do not know which "lever" to use to bring about change. However, change begins in each one of us, in being able to talk with an open heart about its impact on us, and by asking ourselves what I can change in the line of a more human and humanising economy, and a more evangelical experience of pastoral ministry. We can make these two themes places where the Lord speaks to us and challenges us and offers us the grace of the longed-for pastoral and missionary conversion.

Does something have to change among us? Pope Francis in his letter to Cardinal Reinhard Marx (10 June 2021) offers an important key along these lines: "Every reform begins with oneself. The reform in the Church has been made by men and women who were not afraid to enter into crisis and let themselves be reformed by the Lord".



We believe it will do the health of the body of the congregation and the Church good if we dare to talk, openly and frankly, about these issues and others we hold dear to our hearts. Let us not be afraid to cry or to ask for forgiveness. That will prepare us to receive, through our brothers and sisters, the grace of the Lord, which heals wounds and lays the foundation for free and generous relationships in the service of the work He is doing. And we will practice justice, love tenderly and walk humbly with Him, as the prophet Micah asks us to do (cf. Mk 6:8).

An embrace to each of you, with fraternal affection,

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