

COMMON VOCATION AND MISSION

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Identity and Belonging



“Then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind” (Phil 2, 2). These endearing words of St. Paul, can throw light on what I want to share and reflect with you at this time. So that as we read, listen, talk... we can become aware that the Church is constantly asking that we take care of her identity in every form of life or ministry. That each person is what he/she has to be and need not be afraid to appear before others as he/she is.

If we look at our Congregation, and in it the process we are going through, the call is the same, to be what by vocation and mission are called to “be”. We have been called and summoned with other sisters to live together the same SS.CC. vocation and mission. We have received a joyous heritage and spiritual heritage, that is our charism, this means that we have to constantly go back to it, making it part of us, deepening it through reflection, and ongoing conversion.

The whole charism is in every sister... and the whole Congregation is present in each place of mission and living presence

We are members of a congregational body, nourished by a same charism, we are called to live an internal cohesion, a strength of reciprocal links and mutual interdependence; if a sister grows, the Congregation grows, if a sister stagnates, the Congregation also is sclerotic in that part of the body, because as Xavier Quinzá, our general advisor said: *“The whole charism is in every sister, received as a vocational*

gift and the whole Congregation is present in each place of mission and living presence”. Identity is not made once and for all, we must continue to nourish it and to constantly enrich it.

Privileged moment to recreate our identity and sense of belonging to the Congregation

We are going through a process in the Congregation which will lead us into a “new configuration”. This road we are traveling is not only a search for new ways to organize ourselves, to encourage ourselves and to be with ourselves; but also a privileged moment to recreate our identity and sense of

belonging to the Congregation. To achieve this we need to turn our eyes to the sources of the Gospel, of consecrated life and of our charism. If we do not care for and strengthen our identity, the

charism we have inherited and for which we are responsible is lost, and the newness that we bring to the Church and society is weakened.

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF, talking about identity and the sense of belonging says: *“there is no special difficulty in confessing one’s own identification with the charism of the founder and the institute. The difficulty arises when one is confronted with decisions that are not pleasing, with which one disagrees and are not in line with the personal plan itself. Then it detects how fragile is the alliance of group and institutional charismatic “identity”.* Today more than ever we often hear in religious life expressions like: “I do not like that, I do not do that, I did not join religious life to do that, this is not my charism, my project...” and endless justifications. We “settle” so much into the movement of society, that we forget our essence and why we have been called with other sisters to live a vocation and common mission, as we are told in our Constitutions: *“We gather in the name of Jesus for a common mission”* (C 49).

What shapes our identity and belonging as a religious of the SS.CC. is our consecration. We make vows in a congregation with its own charism and spirituality. The Congregation is the channel that God has given us to witness and spread his merciful love in the world. Our great challenge is how we embody evangelical and charismatic values, our way of making them ours, and how to live out and project those values.

Membership is not imposed, it is rooted in the shared vocation and mission and is part of a series of values, criteria and shared commitments. It is an established and mobilizing element in the life of a living and dynamic body. As Cencini says, *“It involves the passage from individualism to communion, from selfishness to love and “from community for me” to “for community”.* It is shared and institutionalized love, it is a love identified with the ideals of the Congregation. When this love reaches all areas of our SS.CC. life, the community becomes family, and this family spirit so dear to our founders, is expressed in a climate of affection, trust, understanding, communion... Although it can appear simple, it is not easy to make the community a space with a flavour of family, it is a demanding disposition and attitude. As we all know, living the family spirit involves cultivating deeply evangelical attitudes: humility, simplicity, joy, forgiveness, reconciliation, fraternal correction, detachment, availability, service... A whole spiritual programme.

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Congregational membership is constitutive of our being consecrated, and has to do: with the charism received and shared, which is the sap that runs through the Congregational body and nourishes each sister, and the history that we are writing to the extent that each sister and community conscious and co-responsibly is involved in the construction of the joint project.

The sense of belonging, strengthens the feeling that we all are and form one body, that we belong to each other mutually and that we gather around ideals and perseverance to achieve them. We care for what we value, we value what is dear to us, and we love what is ours. It is a cycle that nourishes itself.

The sense of belonging, leads us to look at the past with gratitude, recognizing the work of God throughout more than two hundred years of Sacred Hearts history, grateful for the lives of the many sisters who have gone before us and the testimony they have left us, and continue to speak of the strength and conviction with which they experienced their identity and belonging to the Congregation.

Identity and sense of belonging are forged on the way, in walking together, they are not given to us by the fact of having made the vows of consecration or to be registered in the archives of the Congregation; it is more theological and creative; It is stronger and more concrete, it comes from taking responsibility and to continue to take responsibility for it as SS.CC. life and mission where is inserted: Africa, America, Asia and Europe, this is the land for each one of us, this is the vineyard that the Lord has entrusted to us, the vineyard given to us as a shared reality and mission, to live it and to help it bear fruit.

Identity and sense of belonging are forged on the way, in walking together

The identity and sense of belonging that unites us today has been forged on the road, through a long history. We feel Sacred Hearts, with a particular style, a calling, a common mission. We can recognize that the love of the Congregation, of each Province, of each Delegation, of each PPC, is tangible: with names and faces, with common experiences, with shared joys and sorrows. We have a common history and family language with which we identify ourselves.

Today, the “new configuration” asks us to go back to the essentials of our SS.CC. identity and belonging, this will help us expand our store, welcoming and assuming it as our own: other countries, other cultures, other languages, other ministries, etc. We are asked to have a broader outlook and heart without borders to live the shared mission.

On a path of growth and belonging, trust that God has called us to walk with our specific sisters in community and in the Congregation that leads us to form a community of life and spirit with each and all, it leads to make our own the words of Ruth: “*wherever you will go, I will go, and where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God my God ...*” (Ruth 1:16).