

Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

General Chapter 2008

Lima, Peru
16 July – 20 August

Casa Generalizia
Società del Sacro Cuore
Via Tarquinio Vipera, 16
00152 Roma

Contents

Opening Conference

Spirituality and Intercultural Dialogue
Introduction

Dialogue toward Communion: Walking
with Humanity

Contemplation

Community – A Central Value in our Life

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in
Solidarity with Those Who Are Most Vulnerable

Our Priority for Young People

Ways of Organizing and Communicating

To Sacred Heart Friends and Colleagues

Decrees, Decisions and Recommendations

Closing Conference

Opening of the General Chapter

Welcome to Lima! Welcome to this house, where the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts have been working for months to provide all that we need. Lillian has already welcomed us in the name of the Province of Peru and we thank her and the province, not only for all that they have done to prepare for this Chapter, but for all that they will do during the coming weeks to accompany the ongoing work of the Chapter. The whole province welcomes us and already we feel ourselves at home. “Estamos en casa”.

As we come together for the first time, delegates to the 34th General Chapter in the Society’s history, I think it could be helpful to situate ourselves, to become aware of or remember who we are, why we have come here, and the spirit in which we want to live these days.

Who are we? A community of eighty-six delegates representing forty-three countries, grouped in thirty-two provinces, districts and areas. In comparison with the statistics of the whole Society we are a “young” group. Apart from four who are over 70 and one who is under 40, about half are in their sixties, a quarter in their fifties, and a quarter in their forties. The oldest among us was professed just eight months before the opening of Vatican II and all but five were professed after 1970. So we are a group whose whole life as Christians, as Catholics and as religious has been shaped by a Council that opened the Church to listen to “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted.” (Gaudium et Spes, #1)

Why have we come? In fact, what is a General Chapter? Although all of us are familiar with provincial chapters, only about a third of us have ever participated in a General Chapter.

Canon Law says little about General Chapters but what it says is significant. It says “The general chapter, which holds *supreme authority in the institute* according to the norm of the constitutions, is to be so formed that, *representing the entire institute, it should be a true sign of its unity in love.*” (canon #631)

Our own Constitutions echo the canon: “The General Chapter ensures and promotes both *communion and vitality* in the Society of the Sacred Heart in view of its mission. It *represents all the members of the Society* and has *supreme normative authority* within the Congregation, in virtue of the Constitutions.” (§157)

Let us review the Chapter’s specific responsibilities:

- It protects the spiritual heritage of the Society, and, in conformity with it, evaluates the progress of the Society since the last general chapter, in fidelity to the Constitutions.
- It gives orientation to the Society, being aware of the appeals and needs of the Church and the world, and guided by the Gospel and the Constitutions.
- It elects the superior general.
- It proposes to the superior general names of religious from among whom she chooses the members of the general council.
- It proposes modifications to the Constitutions if it is necessary, and submits them for approbation to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.
- It revises the Supplement to the Constitutions.
- It deals with issues which are of major importance to the Congregation.
- It reviews the financial state of the Congregation.

- It establishes the criteria to be followed for determining the number of delegates to the next chapter.
- It ratifies the superior general's choice of secretary general and treasurer general; if the choice is not made during the general chapter, the names are sent to the provincials for ratification. (§162)

So a General Chapter is not just a gathering to have stimulating and enriching conversations (though we hope that will happen!) It IS the government of the Society during the five weeks it is in session, and the decisions it discerns, giving direction to the next period of time, are binding on the whole body of the Society. The great challenge is to make decisions and word them in such a way that they respond to the variety of places and situations where we are, that they can be lived in the variety of cultures that make up the mosaic of the Society.

You are well aware that the theme of this Chapter, **“RSCJ Spirituality: Dialogue around the Fire, Candle, Well, Meal...”**, emerged at the November 2006 Assembly of Provincials in Uganda. Over and over again during these past years RSCJs have expressed the desire to plumb the depths of our Spirituality as it has taken root progressively in each culture. Although sometimes that search has been in terms of “contemporary expression”, finding words and other ways of communicating our spirituality today, one can express only what one has grasped, lived, and loved. Otherwise the words are shallow and will not be helpful in the end. Responding to the challenge expressed in the short section on Spirituality from the 2000 Chapter “to rethink and re-express our spirituality in the years ahead” by attempting to integrate the calls of the Chapter into our lives, has brought us to a new moment, as the provincials in Uganda recognized. These five weeks in Lima are not “the end of the road” as if everything will be clarified once

and for all! We, like our world, are in continual evolution. But this is a moment of pause, a kind of oasis where, if we are open to the Spirit speaking through each one, we will drink fresh water together, be refreshed and given the strength and enthusiasm to set out on the next part of our common journey.

Since the Uganda Assembly, each province, district and area, has reflected on its lived experience, exploring, expressing, and dialoguing amongst ourselves and with others:

- How our context shapes our spirituality which is expressed in all aspects of our life
- How the contemplative dimension of our spirituality leads us to discern and respond to our prophetic call today
- How justice, peace and integrity of creation are at the heart of our spirituality and our educative mission and
- How our spirituality shapes the way we organize ourselves.

The last point, **“how our spirituality shapes the way we organize ourselves”** will be the content of the second part of the Chapter. I want to emphasize its *integral relationship with the dialogue about our spirituality*. How we organize ourselves, the dialogue we have about the means to foster the life in our various groupings, in each geographic part of the Society, in the Society as a body, cannot be simply a logical, intellectual exercise in creating structures. The Society is not an organizational chart. It is made up of human beings, women who have committed their lives to one another in their following of Jesus. It is body and spirit, cultural roots and intertwining branches, cherished tradition and uncharted paths. We will need to remind ourselves of that throughout the Chapter.

Now we bring all that that we have studied, reflected on, dialogued about, prayed over – the reports of the Provincial Chapters, the reports of the Provincials, the report of the General Council, all the documentation we have received – to this General Chapter, described by the provincials in Uganda as “a place of intercultural dialogue, inspiration and new dynamism moving us into the future”.

We come as delegates, representatives of our sisters at home, but **each one comes as herself** with her own thoughts and convictions, desires and hopes. In the introduction of ourselves to one another and to the Society on the website, besides the information on our date of birth and profession, the only thing we were asked to contribute was a comment or reflection on the theme of the Chapter. Some quoted Scripture: Isaiah, Ezekiel, a psalm; Matthew, Mark, and particularly John; Paul’s letters to the Romans, the Ephesians, the Philippians; the book of Revelation. Nearly every chapter of the Constitutions was cited. Several gave a quotation from Sophie; one from Janet Stuart, one from Benedict XVI, as well as Jean Vanier, Pedro Arrupe and Hans Urs van Balthasar. Taken together, along with original expressions of hope and conviction, they are a rich source, demonstrating how our Spirituality is drawn from and resonates with so many expressions, both ancient and contemporary. It is all of this that we bring to the table as well.

At the same time, **our vision must be as wide as the Society**, always keeping in mind the good of the body of the Society. Yes, we come as ourselves. Yes, we come as representing our province, district or area. But our thought, our prayer and our conversations can never lose sight of the whole. If we can always keep the whole in mind *Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesu* will become ever more real. We will live it together.

I can imagine that in each one's heart there may be some fear or anxiety about what the experience of the Chapter will be. We are so aware that the world we are part of, to which we are called to give our lives, is in such a state of turmoil, so full of questions that have no easy answers. You may be asking: What contribution can I make? What are we being called to as a Society? Will we have the wisdom to know and the courage to act? At those moments of feeling overwhelmed let us look around us and realize that we are not alone. Here, as in our everyday life we can trust in the "fidelity of God and the love of our sisters" believing deeply that where two are three are gathered in his name Jesus is in our midst.

In your rooms you found a card with an icon of the Visitation. This icon was recently painted (or "written", as iconographers say) by Patricia Reid, an RSCJ from the US Province. We asked her to do it for the mother house and it arrived just days before the Chapter. I think the three-month dialogue of Mary and Elizabeth is a fitting symbol for our encounter here and a help as we reflect on the **attitudes that we need to bring to our dialogue.**

Each one, Mary and Elizabeth, moves toward the other to embrace her. There is the generous outreach of one and the welcome of the other. Let us **reach out**, especially to those we do not know, whose language we do not speak. And let us **welcome** any gesture indicating a desire to "meet".

In the encounter of Mary and Elizabeth Life encounters life. Both women, from two different generations, bear another life within, just as each one of us comes bearing

the life of her sisters, her people. Let us have a **profound respect for the life that each one carries within her.**

Both women received a son who is pure gift, as is our charism. Let us have an attitude of **deep gratitude** for the gratuitousness of God in choosing to take on a human heart and to dwell among us. Let us **open our eyes to the revelation of God's love** in each one.

Each one is sure of her identity, knows who she is, and can speak from the truth of her being. Let us both **speak from the truth of our being, and welcome the other's truth, refusing to cling to our point of view as absolute.**

Each one has the opportunity to share her hopes and convictions, her fears and joys, and to listen deeply to the hopes and convictions, fears and joys, of the other. May we **listen deeply.** And as we listen to our sisters may we be attentive to what, though perhaps different, resonates with our own experience of God. **Let us discover that deep place where we are one.**

Both women are tempted to think "Impossible!" When we have moments of tension or darkness (which will come) let us believe that when one is committed to loving and giving one's life "**nothing is impossible with God!**"

Each one, Mary and Elizabeth, abandoned herself to God in total trust. When we cannot see an outcome, even the next step, let us **renew our trust that there is wisdom in the group** if we but open ourselves to it and that **the Spirit is present in every moment of our dialogue.**

It is so fitting that we begin these days together around the table of the Eucharist. A Chapter is an “ecclesial event” and, in fact, I think we could look upon it as a great Eucharist in which day after day we:

- listen to the Word of God spoken in Scripture, in gesture and symbol and song, through our sisters, in the events beyond these walls;
- offer ourselves, the Society, and the world as gifts to be transformed;
- invoke the Spirit to come upon us and transform us;
- share the Body and Blood of Christ;
- and go forth to proclaim with our lives the Love we carry within us.

Let us very deliberately pray the words of the Second Eucharistic Prayer:

“Lord, you are holy indeed,
the fountain of all holiness.
*Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them
holy*
so that they may become for us the
body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Now as we sing the Veni Creator Spiritus let us insistently implore the Spirit to “come upon these gifts”... to come upon US. To give us discerning hearts: open, welcoming, humble, listening, that we may be re-created, renewed, filled with new life.

(Taizé chant: Veni Creator Spiritus)

With a heart full of confidence and anticipation as we seat ourselves around the table, with Sophie and Philippine, Rosa de Lima and Martín de Porres, and all our loved ones in the Communion of Saints beside us, with a candle lit, with fire in our hearts, “with joy, drawing deeply from the springs of salvation,” I declare the General Chapter of 2008 open.

Clare Pratt, rscj
16 July 2008

Spirituality and Intercultural Dialogue

Introduction

The General Chapter of 2000 invited us to search for the best way to respond to the call it addressed to us to participate in transformative education, collaboration in reciprocity, and dialogue among cultures. With the presentation of our spirituality, the Chapter challenged us to reinterpret and rearticulate our spirituality, and concluded with the affirmation that: “The journey continues...”

Eight years later, we find ourselves in a world that seems no nearer to solving its problems of poverty and injustice, of racism and war. Instead, we have seen new and greater acts of violence and exclusion that increase the fragmentation of the human community. At the same time, we are aware of the deep thirst for God that lies hidden behind so much striving for a false security. Human beings pursue this search incessantly and in many different and sometimes puzzling ways. Men and women of different cultures, religions and spiritual traditions search for God and work to make of our world a habitable place with a future for humanity and all of creation.

As part of this human search, the Church also seeks for ways to respond to the cries of those who suffer. In its daily activities in local ecclesial communities and in the witness of martyrs, religious, priests, bishops, and so many anonymous brothers and sisters in many continents, it has shown its desire and its commitment in favour of a world in which we can find justice and peace as visible signs of the presence of God in history. In this context, conscious that our charism is a gift of God in the Church for the world, we have sought to deepen our spirituality

through intercultural dialogue, the theme of this General Chapter of 2008.

This dialogue is rooted in the testimony of all the provinces. As General Chapter, we have been inspired and challenged by the lived experience of all of our sisters around the world and everyone with whom we are in communion in life and mission. The reports of the Provincials and of the Provincial Chapters have formed the point of departure for what we have experienced and tried to discern in a joyful experience of our *Cor Unum*.

We participated around the table, the fire, and the well; we welcomed our vulnerability and fragility with reverence in an atmosphere of mutual listening, confidence, and joy, nourished by the symbols from our different cultures and our communal prayer. With a heart that discerns, we asked ourselves: where and when do we live our spirituality in daily life and in our many and varied contexts? We found the key in an intuition from Chapter 2000: “*We are convinced as a Chapter that our lives, given in love, are the strongest expression of our spirituality.*” How do we want to give our lives in a way that continues to respond to the one who has first loved us?

Five priorities emerged in our exchange with surprising unanimity: dialogue, relationships, communication, and networks; contemplation; community life; justice, peace, and integrity of creation in solidarity with those who are most vulnerable; and the focus on young people. We have recognized these five priorities as five doors through which to enter our spirituality. We are convinced that the Spirit makes all things new (Rev 21:5) and when we live them in acts and words of daily life, we experience our spirituality with a new and present strength.

The Chapter experienced a strong call to revitalize the gift that we have received, to discover and reveal the love of God in a life that is wholly contemplative and wholly apostolic. From the contemplation of the open heart of Jesus we draw the power that inspires us to live in communion with all people, to bring others to participate in this communion, and to commit ourselves with our whole being, in the Church and with many others, to work to bring about a world that is more just and more united.

This is the invitation and the challenge that we wish to communicate to the whole Society and to all those with whom we share friendship, work, or community in the spirit of the extended family of the Sacred Heart, so that, little by little, we give life to the desire of Jesus “*that all may be one.*” (Jn 17:11)

The General Chapter has chosen these five priorities that are for us the visible expression of our spirituality. In light of these priorities, we have recognized some intuitions that will help us to find new ways of communication and of organizing ourselves.

In the way in which the results of our dialogue are presented, we see reflected the richness of our diversity and our unity.

Dialogue toward Communion: Walking with Humanity

Gathered around the table of life, where each one offers her bread as nourishment for all, we recognize dialogue as the way to a more human world, a life with Spirit. During the Chapter, we have journeyed together not only as RSCJ, but with all of humanity, searching in communal discernment how to be the Heart of God in the world. We have entered into a rich and deep experience of dialogue, convinced that dialogue is the way for the world today.

The context of our encounter has been especially meaningful: the life of the Peruvian province among the Peruvian people which has spoken to us in dance, music, cultural diversity, and joy in the midst of poverty and exclusion. They have welcomed us. They have shown us their perseverance, joining hands and sharing as sisters and brothers.

Throughout the Chapter we have lived a process of deep intercultural dialogue. Dialogue has given us a way and a process to live each day, sharing beyond words, with laughter and tears, expressions of tenderness and intimacy, care and attentiveness, weaving communion together. Holding the Chapter in Peru has helped us better to understand realities previously unknown to us and now we are more aware that to understand others and journey with them we must enter into their reality and let ourselves be changed by their lives.

For decades the Society has followed Western ways, but in this Chapter we have been more attentive to other cultures, especially those of the East, and to other religions such as Buddhism and Islam. This open dialogue has enriched us and

we have perceived the possibility of communion in a profound experience of God.

Our interculturality has been a richness. Through our different cultures, we have been able to express ourselves with words and in other ways. We have felt heard, welcomed and valued. We have received much from each other and this experience will change us. Also, in this diversity we have once again become aware of the power of language. Language is not only a means of expression, but a way of thinking, which can dominate over minorities. In this sense we wish to grow in sensitivity and creativity to use language as a means of communication, a vehicle for encounter, a medium for each one to express herself and contribute from her cultural identity. Seated around the table, we offer what we have and learn from each other.

We recognize dialogue as dynamic experience, not static theory. That is to say, dialogue invites us to move and discover the context from which we speak and express our ideas, choices and feelings.

We are faithful to the spirit of Sophie, a woman of relationships and dialogue. From her we learn the value of nurturing, intimacy, patience and love as attitudes of the heart which draw us into communion. With a contemplative heart inhabited by the Spirit, we listen to the world as it shares its hopes and suffering. Here we find the Heart of Jesus incarnate in history, which calls us to new relationships with others and with all creation as one body.

This requires of us that we change our way of seeing ourselves and our way of situating ourselves in today's world, as part of the common human search for:

- dialogue that is inter-cultural, inter-religious, inter-generational, as an act of justice which impels us to share life in harmony and peace;
- community as the way to live our humanity at the local, provincial, regional and international levels;
- contemplation as the loving gaze which discovers, welcomes, nourishes, and fosters life;
- the meaning of life that is deeper, more sensitive, more human, especially toward the young.

This commitment to life reminds us that the Spirit is alive in history, and that our vocation to discover and manifest love moves us into an ongoing reciprocity: to live, journey, and share among ourselves and with others. We discover that true communion happens when we touch the heart, and there recognize the presence of the Spirit.

In dialogue, we risk sharing our word and our very self which speaks in gestures, symbols and choices. We bring to the table all that we are, and our charism as a gift for the world. We are renewed in welcoming others. This process implies understanding ourselves in all honesty, reverencing the other, conversion, self-emptying, opening ourselves to being changed and entering into silence.

We realize that dialogue is difficult and we often break it off. From the local level to the world-wide there is abuse of power of some peoples over others and of humanity over nature. Again we are called to choose dialogue as a way to bring new life. This is a deep experience of the Paschal Mystery which inspires us to say with those at Emmaus, *“Don’t go. Stay with us.”* (Lk 24:29)

All of this is happening in a world where the rapid advances of technology have allowed instant and easy communication during this Chapter through the Society website, thus contributing to the participation and enthusiasm of the provinces and others interested in our Chapter process. These media can facilitate communication, participation, dialogue and reciprocity, and are a particular way of bringing us closer to the world of youth. At the same time, we acknowledge that there is inequality of access to and use of these resources. The excessive volume of information available on the web does not guarantee correct analysis and interpretation, and can produce non-communication and isolation.

We believe that networking is a way of participating in structural change with other groups who have formed in response to the cries and hopes of the world. Networks link us in a deep sense of sharing life with others. We have discovered that networks can draw us into relationships beyond functionality. These relationships happen when we let down our defenses, our securities, and our desires for power, recognizing the equality and dignity of each person and culture. We enter into dialogue from our own vulnerability and searching, with a stronger desire for communion and to transform reality from within.

Chapter 2000 invited us to move from meeting to dialogue of cultures. Throughout the intervening years we have been taking steps and discovering that new life is emerging in the world and in the Society. We feel called to continue nurturing these processes of dialogue which give birth to new life, in simplicity and joy.

Contemplation

Today, as women rooted in the heart of Christ, we reaffirm our heritage of contemplation that springs from “*a compelling love written in our hearts by the Spirit*” (§24).

This urgent call challenges us to keep hope alive in a world of violence, fragmentation and woundedness that threaten the survival of our planet. The future of humanity depends on a spiritual rebirth. The beauty and the suffering of our world and of nature, and the wisdom of other religious traditions touch and affect the quality and depth of our contemplation.

The Word of God manifested in the Scriptures and echoed in the cry of people around us resonates within us and we welcome it as a prophetic impulse. Many in our world today are searching for the meaning of life. Together, and especially with people who are poor and most vulnerable, we long for the transformation of reality. This movement calls us to revitalize our spirituality of the heart and to discover the gratuitous presence of the love of God in humanity.

We recognise that activism and dispersion diminish the quality of our life. Instead we are called to stop, to choose silence and to open and let ourselves be opened to our inner depths where the Spirit of God allows us to feel, see and understand life and reality with God’s heart. When we allow our bodies to be silent, our senses awaken and we are able to hear the voice of the Spirit within us. Then in the secret place of the heart the Spirit gradually transforms our feelings and responses, and draws us into an intimate relationship with God. The Spirit attunes us to the heartbeat of our people to discover the presence and love of God in everyday life. We recognise the gratuitousness of this experience. When we contemplate the heart of Christ we enter

into the movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God's reality, with the desire to promote justice, peace and the care of creation.

The life of Madeleine Sophie, who wished to live always by the Spirit, of Philippine, "the woman who prayed always," and the lives of so many of our Sisters remind us that giving time and space to prayer will help us to be the heart of God in our world. From them we learn that contemplation is at the core of our spirituality and leads us to discover the depths of our humanity. Through all stages of our life our prayer invites us to the depths of God. The desire for interior life finds a home in us and draws us to abide in God. When we are united to the Vine (Jn 15) we let ourselves be pruned by the Spirit. Only in this way can we bear fruit. This dynamism purifies us and brings us closer together as sisters. As the grapes are made into wine, our hearts will become more compassionate and understanding. Our personal and community life will be more unified. We will recognise the new life which rises up within us from our thirst for God. Our contemplation allows us to hear the cry for relationships that reflect human dignity. Being contemplative women will give colour and warmth to life.

As communities all over the world seeking to live more deeply our contemplation and discernment, we are all invited:

- to provide welcome in our communities where, with others, especially youth, we can grow in this contemplative attitude;
- to ensure that our formation which continues all through life strengthens our contemplation and interior life;

- to communicate among ourselves and with others our search for and experiences of God during times of prayer and the sharing of our lives from a faith perspective;
- to engage in ways of dialogue with Christian and other religious traditions and cultures with whom we share “the treasures of faith” and from whom we receive new inspiration;
- to cultivate the contemplative attitude with our partners in ministry, in our educative institutions and projects and with groups of persons who strive for greater justice and peace for our people.

The contemplative experience invites us to enter into the Paschal Mystery. In the Eucharist we celebrate the fidelity of God and experience communion with all of creation.

Community – A Central Value in our Life

The reports from Provincial Chapters and from the Provincials preparatory to the General Chapter show honest acknowledgements of the difficulties we have experienced in community. There is also a strong desire to build community. Convinced of the fact that from fragility new life emerges, we continue to search for ways to be sisters, to grow in accepting our vulnerabilities and giftedness and to assist one another to take life giving risks. Community is a place where we are called to continual personal and communal conversion.

As RSCJ we are called to follow Jesus in community, in the manner of Sophie. Deeply rooted in our relationship with Jesus, we reaffirm that life in community is a fundamental expression of our spirituality.

Community is a basic way of organizing ourselves, a space where we take decisions together for our lives and mission. Community on all levels is both mission and for mission.

Recognizing that we are part of the universe, of creation in all its abundance and of a fragmented humanity that yearns for new ways of relating, we are convinced that living in community models an alternative way of being together in this world. We strive to witness that love, hope, justice and peace are possible.

Conscious that the destruction of the environment will have the greatest impact on those who already suffer from poverty, hunger and the lack of water, we know that living in community and sharing our goods in common has the potential to reduce our consumption of the world's resources. In this context we reaffirm our commitment to live more simply.

We desire communities that are open to all, sharing life and faith, dreams and struggles, our goods and resources.

We are invited to weave threads of connectedness, drawing on the richness and challenge of interpersonal, cultural and ethnic diversities, in regions and provinces, and as an international Society.

We sense the urgent invitation to revitalize:

- the quality of our relations which are basic to community
- how we create humanizing spaces for ourselves and others
- how community can be a place of searching, of contemplation and discernment.

Valuing the richness of the material on Apostolic Community in our Constitutions and other Chapter documents, we are encouraged to return to these primary documents in order to let them challenge us to live more radically. Within the realities of our provinces we need to continue to look courageously at:

- how the social context influences our attempts to live community
- whether there is congruence between how we desire to live as expressed in our documents and our lived reality.

Our experience of the joy in living and celebrating together as sisters creates energy within us for building community among ourselves and others wherever we are.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Solidarity with Those Who Are Most Vulnerable

Journeying with peoples of different contexts, races, and cultures, and listening profoundly to the joys and suffering of humanity have allowed us to be touched by the poverty, inequality, exclusion, violence, and environmental destruction that are present in today's world. We recognize with greater clarity the interconnectedness of global realities and the impact that these have on our local situations. We are more aware of the marginalizing effects of globalization and of cultures of dominance and exclusion.

How do I develop a critical awareness of the interconnectedness of the whole of creation with the events which mark our world?

We suffer the pain of our peoples. With them, and from this depth, we enter into the Open Heart of Christ, the wellspring that satisfies our thirst. From our contemplation of the Pierced Heart of Jesus in the heart of wounded humanity flows the desire to commit ourselves with greater passion and compassion to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

How does my prayer urge me to live my commitment to justice, peace, and integrity of creation? In what way does this commitment enrich my prayer?

We are convinced that “to educate is in itself an act of justice”¹. We take the responsibility to orient all our educative endeavors towards creating relationships of equality, inclusion, non-

¹ Letter of the General Council, Feast of the Sacred Heart, June, 2006

violence, and harmony, believing that to have life, and life in abundance, is the deepest desire of God. In whatever apostolic activity we may be engaged, our educative mission makes visible our solidarity with those who are excluded.

How can I deepen my awareness and appreciation that justice is rooted in our spirituality from which flow our various ways of being educators?

The pursuit of justice, peace, and integrity of creation permeates all aspects of our lives. We want to include these in the criteria we use for discerning our relationships, ministries, and commitments. In so doing, all our choices will be marked by Gospel values.

*On behalf of whom do we live, work, and act?
To what new actions or ways of being are we called?*

Taking on this commitment in daily life:

- calls each one of us to a change in our personal and communal lifestyle, in our mentality and attitudes, and in the way we make choices
- offers us new ways of living our vows more congruently
- impels us to search for different ways of living our community of goods, inclusiveness, and communion
- invites us to relate in a new way with ourselves, with others, and with all of creation.

*What do we need to change in our personal and community lifestyles?
How do I live my daily responsibility with regard to non-violence and the environment?*

In whatever may be our apostolic engagement, in our relationships and involvement, the advancement of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation unites and orients us as a Society and energizes us towards the future. This effort provides us with a “common space” for collaboration in dialogue and reciprocity within the Church, with different religions and philosophies, with other cultures, and with organizations and networks in civil society. It is here that we encounter youth whose contribution enriches us. With them, we will discover new ways of expressing and sharing our spirituality.

What is the invitation to establish or participate in new relationships and groups in my immediate locality?

With gratitude, we celebrate the daily efforts of men and women in search of a better world. With them, strengthened by the Spirit, we want to continue finding the face of God in the future towards which we journey. We find hope in initiatives towards solidarity and reconciliation, gestures of sharing goods and of caring for life, and words that console and challenge us. In the beating of these human hearts in accordance with the rhythm of life, with joy we discover the love of the Heart of Jesus.

How do we celebrate and share the gifts of life together with others?

Our internationality is for us a gift and a responsibility. We desire to put it at the service of life, responding to the challenge coming from the birth pangs of humanity and the whole of creation.

How do we allow ourselves to be touched by the needs beyond the borders of our province,

especially in those places where life is most threatened? How are we called to respond?

The following means will be of help. We recommend that we:

- undertake educative processes at personal, community, and provincial levels that transform us and allow us to own our commitment to justice, peace, and integrity of creation.
- integrate justice, peace, and integrity of creation as a priority into our personal and community goals, in our initial and ongoing formation programs, as well as in our plans at the provincial, regional and international levels.
- explore alternative forms of communication and information so as to expand our analysis of reality and its local and global implications.
- make available to persons and groups, especially to youth who want to commit themselves to service among the most poor, educative processes and concrete channels for expressing and deepening commitment to people who are poor.
- identify two or three priorities which could help us to unite our efforts with those of others working for justice, peace and integrity of creation (e.g. hunger, migrants, non-renewable resources).
- explore and pursue, at provincial, regional, and international levels, creative, generous and courageous ways of putting our community of goods at the service of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

Our Priority for Young People

From the depth of our contemplation we are called to see the world through the pierced Heart of Jesus and there we encounter both the strength and the fragility of life. Sophie's vision of 'forming adorers' passionate for life who would change the world touches our own longing. Each province has shared its context with all its complexities, crises and calls, and we recognize that this is a critical moment - for the young, for us, and for the world. This impels us to renew our commitment to young people with a new passion.

We want to continue to walk with young people. Many have a passion for justice and a concern for the future of the planet. Others are marginalized, lost and have no sense of any future for their world or themselves. Some have a desire to give their lives generously in the service of others. We need to be present with them all in their search for God, meaning and the value of life.

As Religious of the Sacred Heart we want to respond with the heart of an educator. We do this with others in a variety of ways: in schools, movements, communities, NGOs, civic associations, colleges and universities, networks, parishes and projects, in cities, villages and barrios, with young people of different classes, ages, religions and cultures. Now we see ourselves called anew with more zeal.

We feel that our spirituality has something important to say to the world today and we want to share this in creative and life-giving ways, conscious that many thirst for an experience of God's love. Young people are the agents of change in their own lives and we can learn from each other. We hear a strong invitation to walk with them, sharing our thirst and aspirations

in a common effort to build a world where the desires of God will become a reality.

Each province, community and RSCJ is urged to look deeply into their context and to find ways to respond, particularly to youth. This means that we may need to make new choices. Some of these may include:

- inter-generational dialogue among ourselves, which is an important step to enter the world of youth. This opens us to new ideas, initiatives and projects.
- being systematic in the planning and evaluation of our projects and discerning how best to accompany youth in every setting, whether formal or informal. Reflection on our educational philosophy will enable us to respond to the calls of youth more effectively.
- using all the means of communication and technology that are available to reach out to young people
 - have a section for youth on the provincial and international web-pages.
- developing networks with other organizations and collaborators in our countries, provinces, regions and internationally.
 - e.g., networks of volunteers, Associates, alumnae, North-South project, schools, educational projects.
- evaluating what is happening regarding vocation ministry in each Province (cf. the whole section on Vocation Ministry in the Chapter 2000 document, p. 42).

- responding to the needs of young people and taking seriously the work of how to accompany them. We emphasize the importance of serious formation in the accompaniment of young people in their human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions, through workshops, formation, educational philosophy, etc.
- evaluating our commitment to youth in 2-3 years at the provincial level, sharing this at the regional and international levels, and assessing if there is a need for a coordinator to promote this work at all levels.

Questions for Reflection

- Are there ways that our communities can be more open and welcoming, places where young people can feel at home? In what ways do we need to change our lifestyle and attitudes?
- How do we learn to share our faith and prayer with young people in new and creative ways?
- How can we enter more deeply into the world and culture of young people?
- How are we empowering young people to take leadership?
- How do we deepen what it means to have the heart of an educator?

Ways of Organizing and Communicating

Entering into our spirituality through these five doors has called us anew to be a community of discernment for the sake of the mission “*to discover and reveal the love of the Heart of Jesus*” in the world.

We realize that relationships are central to the way we organize ourselves. Desiring to follow the Spirit, we continue to search for models of leadership that invite flexibility and inclusiveness, participation, collaboration, and reciprocity. We strive to listen to the prophetic and small voices that call us to widen our circles.

We seek ways of organizing ourselves that facilitate discernment, deepen communication, and foster the sharing of resources and networking.

We are aware that the provincial chapters and the provinces explored and proposed concrete ways of organizing ourselves at the community, provincial, regional, and international levels. During the General Chapter, we were confronted with the diversity and complexity of the issues and proposals. We lived with the tension of desiring new ways and yet not being ready to make decisions. We acknowledge that there was not enough time to discuss sufficiently and resolve all these matters.

Strengthening the Regions

In spite of our struggles, we were clear that we want to strengthen our regions and to support the life that is already there. Respecting each region’s unique processes and rhythms, we encourage greater networking, sharing of personnel and resources, as well as taking responsibility for the needs of the

more fragile places in the Society (e.g., Chad, Cuba, Haiti, Indonesia, Nicaragua).

In response to intuitions from provincial chapters, the General Chapter explored how the General Council could best accompany the regions. We affirm that the main role of the General Council is to be a community of discernment, exercising spiritual leadership and fostering communion and union in the Society. Facilitating this discernment requires that the General Council live together.

To support the regions, the General Chapter reaffirms that the General Council:

- name General Council “links” who will know and understand their region and provinces, and who will take an active role in accompanying them, without intervening in their daily operational concerns;
- challenge the provinces, calling them to accountability for living out the priorities of the General Chapter;
- discern with the provinces the expectations regarding their role as links and the objectives of their visits;
- together as a Council, visit each region once during their mandate;
- gather experiences from the life of the provinces (stories and images, joys and struggles, signs of hope and emerging life) and share these with provinces during their visits;
- ensure frequent and regular communication with the provinces and regions.

Communicating among Ourselves and with Others

We recognize that developments in technology have opened us to new ways of relating.

We desire to deepen communication among ourselves and with others, making use of the means available to us (e.g. the many websites of the Society, technology, inter-provincial and interregional meetings, networks within and outside the Society).

Having experienced the richness of intercultural dialogue, we want to continue to seek opportunities for this exchange. We encourage the sharing of creative and different modes of communication (in word or in silence, in symbols, gestures or other non-verbal expressions).

Aware of the potential of language for strengthening our *Cor Unum*, we call on the provinces to prioritize language study, ensuring that this is done early on in the initial stages of formation.

Moving towards the Future

We learned that the most effective ways of organizing ourselves are those that emerge from the lived experience in our local contexts. Instead of creating new structures, the General Chapter wishes to widen the space for creative initiatives from the grassroots. We recognize the strong impetus for us to go further beyond the boundaries of our provinces and regions and we reaffirm the importance of journeying with others and collaborating in reciprocity.

As we move together towards the future, the General Chapter invites the Society to explore creative ways of organizing and communicating among ourselves and with others in light of the five priorities of Chapter 2008.

From General Chapter 2008 to Sacred Heart Friends and Colleagues

For many years there has been collaboration between the Religious of the Sacred Heart and our colleagues and friends who have shared our spirituality, life and mission. General Chapter 2000 called us live this in reciprocity.

In many countries the collaboration has greatly expanded in the last eight years with a dynamism we might not have been able to foresee. In all our educational undertakings, both formal and popular, our colleagues carry the mission and charism for us, with us. In some provinces, Associates continue to develop. Others have found different ways of sharing our spirituality and life, as alumnae/i volunteers, groups of young people, prayer and reflection groups.

At our General Chapter 2008, we have recognised the many ways in which you are a part of the Society of the Sacred Heart. You encourage us to continue to walk in the way of Sophie. Her heritage belongs to us all. With you we try to listen to the heartbeat of God in the reality of our world. Together let us continue to strive for a world where no one is excluded and each one has a rightful place.

We have been moved to reach out to you in gratitude for all the ways in which you walk with us. With you we embark on the next stage of the history of the Society with courage and confidence.

Decrees

The mandate of the Superior General will be for eight years, non-renewable, *ad experimentum*.

The mandate of the General Councilors will be for eight years, non-renewable, *ad experimentum*, with two conditions:

- that midpoint in the mandate there be an evaluation,
- that should someone think that she cannot continue four more years, the whole Council should, as far as possible, be involved in the discernment.

The General Chapter shall be convoked by the Superior General, with the approval of her Council, every eight years, *ad experimentum*.

Addition to the Constitutions

§153 The young professed are eligible for the provincial chapters as capitulants according to the provisions of the provincial plan of government.

Deletion from the Constitutions:

§174 The general chapter determines the fixed sum which may be disposed of by superiors at the various levels.

Additions to the Supplement

§129 The duration of temporary vows is six years with the possibility that the General Council may allow a province to set the duration at three years plus three years.

§154 The General Council may authorize a province, district or area to prepare for the General Chapter and revise the Plan of Government in an open Assembly. In such a case, the Assembly has the responsibilities and powers of a Chapter.

§167 The newly-elected Superior General and her Council begin on a date to be determined by agreement of the two General Councils before the end of the Chapter. The date is not to exceed six months after the end of the Chapter. (canon #153)

Decisions

Composition of General Chapter of 2016

The Chapter of 2008 delegates to the Assembly of Provincials the decision regarding the composition of General Chapter 2016. The General Council will study the situation (issues, demographics, configuration) of the Society and present a recommendation to the Assembly of Provincials for a decision on the composition of General Chapter 2016.²

Provinces, Districts and Areas

The General Council will study and decide the criteria for constituting and modifying a Province, District, or Area and implement this change prior to the next General Chapter.

ECOSOC Status

The Society of the Sacred Heart will apply for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

² This decision is based on Constitutions, §162

Recommendations

Mandate of Provincials

That the General Council study the duration of the mandate of provincials, in consultation with the provinces and the provincials, and that the results of this study be considered at the Assembly of Provincials.

International Formation Meeting

That the next General Council convoke an International Formation Meeting.

We suggest that:

- we work beforehand on the points in our provinces in order to sensitize and acquaint ourselves better with these challenges,
- the Initial Formation Team from provinces having persons in Initial Formation, as well as a representative for Formation from provinces not having persons in Initial Formation, should attend this meeting.

It is important that the proposals which surface from this Meeting be taken into consideration by the General Council.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

That the General Council discern and implement the best way possible of coordinating JPIC at the international level.

Sacred Heart Educational Institutions

Appreciative of the work done in many places to communicate our spirituality and philosophy of education and recognizing that many of our colleagues are today carrying forward our educational vision, the General Chapter asks that the General Council:

- encourage the provinces and regions to create opportunities for RSCJ and colleagues in our educational institutions to express and deepen our spirituality and pedagogy as Sacred Heart educators;
- call on our educational institutions to continue exploring creative ways to dialogue, communicate, and share resources among themselves, and to support each other in our educative mission.

We affirm their desire to draw from our rich tradition and to move forward together towards the future.

Facilitation of International Volunteers

In order to facilitate and encourage exchange of volunteers internationally, we ask that the General Council name a coordinator of information at the international level. This coordinator would promote communication between the rscj who have responsibility for these projects, with a view to ensuring that there be a match between the conditions required by the countries receiving volunteers and those of the countries sending them.

Closing Conference

We come together at the close of our chapter not just to finish, but to bring closure to this stage of our journey, taking time to remembering the fruits of our time together, touching in to what it is we want to take home and who we are as we return.

As we might do at the end of a retreat, I would like to invite us into a time of gathering the fruits of what we have lived during these days, so that we might name the fruit, the movements of grace, and claim our desire to live these gifts as we share the Chapter with our provinces and move into implementing its priorities.

As we remember with these images some of the moments we have lived together, I would invite you to recall your own images, those vignettes that capture for you the significance of our time here.

Several times during this chapter we have moved together in various forms of a spiral - at the beginning, then as we moved into the section on fire, and again this morning as we leave. Let us remember in our bodies this movement: leading, following; moving awkwardly at first, then creating a rhythm together. Let us remember gazing into the eyes of each of our sisters – on the first day in discovery of who she is; this morning in gratitude for this person I have come to know.

The image of the spiral, a symbol significant to the Inca people, speaks to us of our time together as a Chapter – our journey from our provinces inward, into the heart of the Chapter, and now our journey outward to share the results of our work.

Five weeks ago, Lillian welcomed us to Peru, calling our Chapter one of the important summit meetings taking place here this year. She invited us to take off our hats as a sign of being at home, a gesture that anticipated the journey of disclosing ourselves and our provinces to one another.

Clare, in her opening conference, called us to live the attitudes expressed in the icon of the Visitation; as we look back on our time together, let us recall moments when we

- reached out in gesture, in our hearts, to welcome another;
- felt deep respect for the life that each one carries – her own life and that of her people;
- sensed gratitude for the revelation of God's love in someone else;
- entered into dialogue in a way that respected our own truth and that of the other;
- listened deeply and discovered in some way that at depth we are one;
- confirmed our trust that the Spirit is at work here in the group of our sisters sent by their provinces to this Chapter.

In our first days, we poured out into the common container of our hearts the experiences lived from the base, in our provinces, and we heard a broad overview from the perspective of those in service at the international center.

We were in awe at the honesty of our accountability to one another, at the courage of our sisters in challenging situations, at the life that is clearly flourishing in situations where it might be least expected.

At this stage, and at many others, we were called to listen – to quiet our bodies, our hearts, our minds to listen deeply, carefully, that we might be attuned to notice the Spirit of God in our realities, in our hopes and in our longings, in our passion.

At some point – and this was perhaps a different point for each one – we moved from our individual and provincial journeys and got into the boat together. As we considered the Society as a whole, rich themes emerged, which have filled our conversations for weeks.

During most of this time, we were dancing in a spiral with ease; at times we missed a step, lost a sense of direction. But then we caught the rhythm again, reconnected with one another and moved forward gracefully, touching new depths in our sharing, raising our light as we recognized new calls for our common journey.

Sometime in recent days or perhaps just this morning, we made the turn and are moving outward in the spiral.

We have tried to articulate the insights of these days, the directions we want to give to the life of the Society in the next eight years, with as much clarity and *chispa* (spark) as possible, recognizing that there are areas where the insights are not yet available, have yet to come to birth or maturity.

While we will close the Chapter, neither our work nor our personal journey ends here. We return to our provinces to share the fruit of our labor, to give life to these priorities that others may catch their fire, that in each of our contexts we will give life to these directions with courage and creativity.

We return too to those with whom we live and minister; to the *muchedumbre* of our various contexts. We return in a special way to our friends and colleagues in mission who, like the students at Monterrico, educators for future generations, want to live their mission with the attitudes and rhythm of the heartbeat of God.

We also return to continue the dialogue. From the beginning of our preparation for the Chapter we have conceived of our time in Lima, not as an end in itself, but as a significant, even definitive, moment in an ongoing dialogue, aware that the Spirit will continue to speak among us, call us.

Thanks to the contribution of Lolín and Claude, there has been extraordinary communication about this Chapter. Let us continue to communicate about the implementation of the Chapter, so that our ongoing dialogue may continue to be intercultural.

As we leave today and return to our provinces, we recognize with new gratitude the life of our Society during these past eight years; the ways Clare, Mariado, Jane, Marisa and Son In Sook have poured out their lives in love as they accompanied the life coming to birth among us, ignited new fire in places of cooling embers, responded with the heart of God to the joys, heartaches and calls of the realities of their mandate. Clare, Mariado, Jane, Marisa and Son, we bless you, as we will do again at the transition on December 12th when we send you to your provinces with our gratitude and love.

We began the Chapter with the icon of the Visitation; I would like to conclude with an icon of Sophie and Philippine, the last encounter of these two great women as Sophie blesses and sends Philippine to the new world.

Let us imagine their conversation and hear it as our own at the end of this time together. Sophie confides the life and mission of the Society to Philippine, knowing the inner depth of Philippine's living of the charism, trusting her capacity and creativity to en flesh it in her new situation.

So too she confides to us today the call to live and help others to live the priorities we see for our charism today -- dialogue, contemplation, community, young people, justice, peace and the integrity of creation. She has confidence in our capacity to share these with others so as to implement them with strength and imagination, each in her own context.

I imagine that these two friends also talked about the way of life that they had created in this little Society and that Philippine would create in her communities – life *à la manière de Sophie*. So too Sophie speaks to us today about taking home the ways of living that have helped us build community here: dialogue, prayer together, the sharing of our lives.

And I am sure they talked about their own spiritual lives, encouraging one another to continue on their journeys in God, to live the graces that had been offered to each of them. While our purpose here in Lima has been to act on behalf of the whole Society, each of us has lived it as her own personal journey as well. The grace that has been active in each of our lives these weeks is also a significant fruit of this chapter and is meant to be lived for others.

As at the end of a retreat we might ask, “What is the fruit, the grace that I have experienced during these days?” Perhaps I am in touch with it today; or perhaps it will become apparent later. The grace may be:

- greater trust – in God, in my sisters;
- a new ability to hear and welcome what is different;
- a renewal of energy for my vocation;
- a stronger commitment to living the mission;
- a new perspective on the world, on an issue, on a way I might live;
- a generosity of self that becomes life giving.

Sophie confirms and blesses these graces in us and sends us to live them as we move back into our communities and ministries.

And so the time comes to say goodbye. Philippine is ready, with her traveling hat on. Sophie puts on her traveling hat. As she does, she blesses Philippine and each one of us with the depth of love she has known in God. She sends us to live with passion and compassion the charism and spirituality we have received and to which we have committed ourselves with new vision, depth and conviction these days.

As we come forward to sign the Acts of the Chapter, let us don our traveling hats and pray for one another, that we may each receive the blessing Sophie offers us as she sends us on our journey to live the mission of God's love with the graces of this Chapter.

Safe journey ! Buen viaje ! Bon voyage!

Kathleen Conan RSCJ
August 20, 2008