

OPENING OF THE CONGRESS PHASE 2

– addressed to all the members of the Family



We come here today to begin the second phase of our Congress journey. All of us have already been on the journey in our different countries guided by the booklet “*An Invitation to Participate*” and we were united with one another as we prayed for the Congress and now we come to listen to our experience of that journey so far. Gathered here are representatives of the five vocations, who, sharing the journey made in their particular country, will help us to hear what the Spirit is doing in the hearts of our members worldwide and so enable us to hear the call of the Spirit for us as a Family today. Gathered with us also are all the members of the Family dispersed throughout the world.

Theme : FAMILY ON MISSION GIFT IN A CHANGING WORLD

The overall purposes for the whole Congress are as follows:

- to encourage full participation of all five vocations
- to explore the changing world within the context of God’s dream for the world
- to allow God’s dream for the world to affect all our relationships
- to appreciate and activate our Holy Family gift within and among us, as gift in the world

The **Council of the Family** during the meeting in January 2011 drew up the theme for the Congress and outlined its three phases. The work of preparing and facilitating the Congress was given to a commission composed of members of the five vocations (Anne-Marie Sibille, *lay associate*, Basil Clarke, *priest associate*, Maria Pilar Serrano, *consecrated secular*, Bernadette Taurinya, *contemplative*, Colleen Moore, *apostolic*) And at the beginning of this meeting we express our gratitude for the way they have guided us to this moment.

In the commitment of the Council of the Family we read: *We recognise the urgent need for a change of mindset in line with the new understanding of the world, which demands a new way of relating to God and the whole of creation. We commit ourselves to deepen our understanding of our Charism in the light of this new consciousness, in order to express our specific Holy Family gift in the world.*¹

This is the journey we have set out on and surely it is significant that this phase of the Congress takes place in the eve of the **50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican 11** and of the **year of faith** initiated by Pope Benedict which will begin on October 11.

In his Apostolic Letter “*Porta fidei*” Pope Benedict speaks of *the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ*² Many spiritual writers of today speak of the hunger for spirituality as a sign of our times. This growing awareness of the need for spirituality is expressed in many different ways.

¹ Meeting Point 4, p14, 2011

² Porta Fidei, October 2011, announcing the Year of Faith

As Family on mission, gift in a changing world, we want to explore the changing context of the world and to discern God's way for the world. With our unique gift of being a Family of five vocations – living the **one mission** how can we make an impact, make visible an alternative way of seeing and living in the world, of responding in some way to the thirst for spirituality, the thirst for communion and the invitation to deepen our faith and give visible witness to it?

In the words of the second reading yesterday we heard James emphasising that faith is made visible through “good works” and in the Gospel Jesus reminds his followers that suffering is part of a life of faith. In today's Gospel Jesus praises the faith of the centurion and laments the lack of such faith among his own people. In doing so he showed openness to recognising faith beyond the boundaries of his own religion. In the light of our mission and our understanding of it today how are we being called to purify our faith? What new insights are we gathering together?

We need to live with greater conviction the fact that the gift of the Spirit, given initially to the Pierre Bienvenu Noailles to be shared with others is, by the grace of the same Spirit, given to us, that it is a gift that makes us sensitive to a particular aspect of Jesus' mission, that is needed in the reality of today's world. We are *one Family* united by a common mission of celebrating and promoting the communion that exists in the world. We are invited to hear deep within us personally and as a Family Jesus' prayer, “*that all may be one – as you Father in me and I in you, may they be so completely one in us that the world may believe.*”³ We are called to extend and strengthen the faith in God who is Communion, who invites us into unity in and through our diversity.

The Council of the Family stated: *We recognise the urgent need for a change of mindset in line with the new understanding of the world, which demands a new way of relating to God and the whole of creation.*⁴ There is a call here for us to become more conscious of our place in the universe and our responsibility for the Earth. The living of the mission of Communion, of unity in diversity, with our spirituality of loving seeking and desiring God Alone in all things can be enriched and challenged by the sign of the times, including our new understanding of our universe story. This is something that Sister Nellie McLoughan, RSM, will help us to explore further.

It may be helpful here to remind ourselves that the **Vatican 11** document *Gaudium et Spes*, states that the Church's fidelity to the mission of Christ requires it be open to the signs of the times so as *to continue the work of Christ who came into the world to witness to the truth*” (n3)It goes on to say that: *to discharge this function, the church has the duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel, so that it can offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual questionings on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related. There is a need, then, to be aware of, and to understand, the world in which we live, together with its expectations, its desires and its frequently dramatic character.*⁵

As we gather here in Martillac we will listen deeply to the reality of our world, to what our members are saying in their different countries recognising that this will reflect “*signs of the times*” that we, as a Family, need to hear and respond to in order to live faithfully and creatively our mission today. We invite our members world-wide to unite with us in prayer and reflection.

³ John 17:21

⁴ Meeting Point 4 p.14, 2011

⁵ Gaudium et Spes No 3,4

In the recent Church document **Verbum Domini** we read: *Engagement with the world as demanded by God's word makes us look with new eyes at the entire created cosmos that contains traces of that Word through whom all things were made (cf. Jn.1:2). As men and women who believe in and proclaim the gospel we have a responsibility toward Creation. Revelation makes known God's plan for the cosmos, yet it also leads us to denounce that mistaken attitude that refuses to view all created realities as a reflection of their Creator but instead as raw material to be exploited without scruple... failing to see it [Creation] as the handiwork of the creative word ... We need to be re-educated in wonder and in the ability to recognize the beauty made manifest in created realities.*⁶

Another significant event of this year is the celebration of the **International Eucharistic Congress**. As members of the Holy Family the Eucharist has always had a central place in our lives and as we hear the call to a renewal of faith and commitment to mission, perhaps we are also invited to renew and deepen our understanding and living of the Eucharist as a way of living our mission today. There are many approaches to this and for the purpose of our journey I will briefly highlight a couple of aspects.

When we come to the Eucharist we bring the fruits of creation and we can say the whole of creation to the Altar. Creation is lifted up to God in thanksgiving and we praise God on behalf of all of Earth's creatures. *All creation rightly gives you praise...you give life to all things and make them holy⁷ and with the whole of creation ... may we glorify you⁸.* The Eucharist is a prayer for the transformation of the universe in Christ

Teilhard de Chardin saw the power of God at work in Christ and present in the Eucharist as transforming Earth from within. Because the Word is made flesh, no part of the physical universe is untouched. All matter is the place of God.

*Eucharistic communion is a participation here and now in the divine Communion of the Trinity in which all things will be transfigured and find their eternal meaning and their true home...It is this Communion that is source of all the life on Earth. It is this Communion that enables a community of life to emerge and evolve. And, in ways that are beyond our imagination and comprehension, it is this Communion that will be the fulfilment of all the creatures of our planet, and all the wonders of our universe.*⁹ Entering deeply into the Eucharist will bring us to a greater awareness of the needs of people and of our planet and move us to own our responsibility and to act on behalf of the poor and of the future of the planet. And so as our understanding of the Eucharist develops in the light of emerging theology we begin to open ourselves to the cosmic character of the Eucharist.

John Paul II when reflecting on the many places he had celebrated mass on his various travels said: *This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation.*¹⁰

⁶ Verbum Domini no 108; September 2010

⁷ Eucharistic Prayer 3

⁸ Eucharistic Prayer 4

⁹ Celebrating Eucharist in a Time of Global Climate Change; February 2006, Denis Edwards, theologian

¹⁰ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no 8, 2003

Given the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives can we open ourselves to a new way of living it and of allowing it to draw us deeper into the mission of communion, of allowing it to nourish, inspire and motivate us on our journey together as Family on mission? During our days here let us live the celebration of the Eucharist with a new awareness of being connected with the whole of creation and all God's people and may it influence, inspire and guide our interactions with one another here as we seek to discover how the Spirit is calling us to mission at this time.

During their last General Chapter the sisters of the Institute stated that *they are now convinced that communion embraces not only our brothers and sisters in humanity, but the entire cosmic family. Together we form a sacred community of life whose Source is our Trinitarian God who is Love-Communion*¹¹.

*There has been a paradigm shift in our understanding of the universe. The new paradigm is a continuously evolving universe. In other words we are not talking about a few changes in our understanding of God's creatures, but a totally new perspective, a new framework within which to make sense of any of the things we see, hear, taste, smell, or touch ... we are provided with an unprecedented opportunity for deepening our experience of oneness with the universe and through that our oneness with God. It also provides us with the opportunity to deepen our appreciation of the glory of God manifesting itself in the grandeur and the immensity of this mysteriously unfolding universe.*¹²

We need to have a better common understanding of our **mission** of communion as *One Family on mission*. We need to dialogue together to discern how to live our mission more visibly and fruitfully in the reality of today; we need to be open to discerning new responses and to fostering closer relationships among the five vocations, to respect and honour the equality of each vocation and to find ways of greater collaboration among us.

During the opening of the Council of the Family I suggested that living the spirit of God Alone is intimately linked with our mission of communion and that I felt that today, our Founder would encourage us to live this spirit in a much wider context of a Universe that is sacred and permeated with the Divine. It is this spirit, within our hearts, that motivates us, gives us energy and creates the bond of unity that exists among us. It draws us into a life of faith based on reflection/contemplation and discernment, open to sharing the Gospel with others. It makes us a family which speaks - by our lives of openness to diversity and equality/communion – of God's all-inclusive love. It is like the sap that gives life, which keeps us connected and inspires us to promote and to live consciously the communion that exists in our world. It is this spirit that can help us to be "mystic" to listen deeply to the Spirit at this time¹³ and to discern what it means to be **Family on mission – gift in a changing world** today.

Let us listen openly and deeply to one another, a listening that goes beyond what appears on the surface so as to hear what is trying to emerge and let us trust in the action of the Spirit within and among us and among all our members united with us.

Margaret Muldoon

September 2012

¹¹ Corporate Commitment – General Chapter of the Institute, 2008

¹² Jesus Today –p170-172, Albert Nolan, theologian, 2006

¹³ Opening of the Council of the Family, January 2011