



## Opening Remarks General Chapter

Ile-Blanche, 3 August, 2018

What a profound joy to welcome each one of you to live together this event so long awaited by the whole Congregation. This morning, I believe that many of us, like Mary at the Annunciation, could say, "How will this be ..." As we enter the Chapter, our hearts are filled with hope, of expectations but there is also perhaps uncertainty and fears ... But let us be without fear ... as the angel reassures Mary who was troubled, as Jesus reassures his distraught disciples after the Resurrection, "Do not be afraid" for we have received the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We know that all our sisters, the elderly and those in formation, our brothers of St. Gabriel, the Montfortian missionaries and all our Friends of Wisdom are accompanying us with their prayers.

Let us believe in the presence of creative Wisdom that accompanies us: "Having then created everything, Eternal Wisdom, continues to "contain all, to sustain all, and to renew all. (Wisdom 1,7, ASE 32) Through the intercession of our founders," Wisdom will continue to work with us and teach us what pleases God." Wisdom 9.10

The Lord entrusts to us, the delegates, an important and demanding mission that we will have to accomplish throughout the Chapter, which is to put ourselves individually and collectively under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to discern according to the heart of Wisdom.

There was the whole preparatory phase of the Chapter which continues to live within us. While the quality of preparation for the Chapter has been impressive and innovative, we owe much of it to the contribution of our facilitator and the preparatory committee. On behalf of the Congregation, I would like to thank our facilitator Sr. Bríd Long and the members of the committee, Srs Antonella del Cuore Immacolato, Mercy Kanyumbu, Maribel Ladino and Marie Turner, as well as the members of the General Team. Collaboration and participation have been excellent throughout our work.

All my gratitude also goes to all of you here present and to all the sisters of your Entities who have responded faithfully to all our requests by contributing to the richness and dynamism of this Chapter. Several sisters expressed their appreciation on reading the various letters received from the different Entities and for taking part in the general consultation for the constitution of the next General Council. Congratulations for the participation that demonstrates once more the spirit of belonging to a common body, the Congregation.

### **Constitution of the Chapter**

We are 43 delegates at the General Chapter of 2018, members by right, elected members and 2

guests. Together we represent 15 of the 17 Entities that make up the Congregation. Following the consultation with the members of the Council of the Congregation, it was decided how to define the composition of the Chapter and by mutual agreement the proposal of the General Council was accepted that the Entities of the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Maria Luisa, elect an indigenous delegate from their country and that we invite 2 sisters: Sr. Angela Kiran Kispotta, Leader of the Sector of Indonesia and Sr. Avilia Inur, Indonesian so that the whole cultural reality of the Congregation is represented.

According to Rule of Life No. 136, the Congregational Leader and her Council accepted the request of Sr. Jacqueline Portefaix, General Councilor, to be excused from participating in the Chapter because of her physical incapacity. The Leaders of the Delegations of Holland and Belgium are also exempt from their presence because of their age and the health status of the sisters. You can imagine Sr. Jacqueline's sacrifice at not being with us, but she assures us of her unwavering affection and prayer. Sr. Maria Pacelli, responsible for Holland and Sr. Marie Suzanne Thielens, responsible for Belgium, also assure us of the affection and prayer of their sisters.

During the opening celebration, I have called by name all the delegates and the guests. Now, I officially declare the list of members closed.

### **Different functions during the Chapter**

Father Luiz Augusto Stefani, SMM Superior General of the Montfort Fathers usually participates during the entire Chapter and presides the election of the Congregational Leader and her councilors. (RV M 42 and N° 140). He will also provide spiritual animation in link with the sister responsible for the liturgy.

Sr Bríd Long, Sister of the Congregation of St. Louis, will be the facilitator of our Chapter. Sr Bríd is a woman of experience who has already facilitated all our Congregational Councils since 2011 and our 2012 Chapter. She knows the Congregation well and has been following its evolution for the last 8 years. She also accompanied the Province of France in its process of reconfiguration and the Province of Canada for their Chapter. She accompanies several General Councils and facilitates many chapters. We have benefited for many years from all the experience and wisdom she has acquired and shared with us.

Following the opening speech, I will have the pleasure of introducing the other sisters and lay people who will graciously offer various services throughout the Chapter.

### **Opening of the Chapter**

I therefore officially open the 59th General Chapter. It will offer the grace, to each one here present, to reflect together on how Wisdom penetrates and crosses all the realities of our

Congregation, without forgetting the ecclesial, political, social, economic and ecological realities in which we are immersed and have a real impact on what we become. These realities must challenge us about our true identity and our mission as Daughter of Wisdom for the future.

The 2012 Chapter invited us to "Widen the space of our tent" by offering a way of liberation and happiness at the crossroads of a multicultural world.

The theme of Chapter 2018 invites us to completely leave our tent and boldly abolish all the walls, all the separations, in order to prophetically move in the space of Wisdom's unconditional love, which is to ***Love without borders!***

By reading the various reports of the Entities, the synthesis of the questionnaire that you studied in your Chapter, listening to the voice of the youngest members of the Congregation and reflecting on the experience of the last 6 years of the General Council, I would like to present some features which seem essential to me and to which we must remain vigilant and attentive throughout the Chapter.

### **Charism and spirituality**

The first one is our charism and our spirituality which must remain the source at which we must drink continuously to nourish our reflections, our sharing and all our decisions throughout the Chapter. The charism that the Holy Spirit gave to Montfort is that of "Apostolic Wisdom". It is this gift of the Spirit that Montfort wanted to transmit to us his disciples, his Daughters, for the Church and the world. Apostolic Wisdom is the foundation of the Montfortian charism because it is the gift of the Spirit that has shaped the deepest soul of the apostolic missionary that Montfort became.<sup>1</sup>

This is the gift he has constantly asked for also asking his first disciple, Marie Louise of Jesus, to pray that he acquire it. Apostolic Wisdom is the way of living by loving men and women like Jesus Christ, eternal and incarnate Wisdom did, by calling and revealing to them, especially the poorest, the ways to be happy.

To live the charism today, to which you and I have been called, we must above all be madly in love with Wisdom: *«I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamored of her beauty.»* Wisdom 8.2

All our discussions, plans and decisions during this Chapter will be meaningless if they are not rooted in the charism and lived by women deeply attached to Christ Wisdom.

So during this Chapter how will each of one of us be attentive to nourish herself from our charism and deepen our relationship to Christ Wisdom? How will this be reflected in the Guidelines and the decisions we will make?

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus Living in Mary – Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, p.139

## Charismatic Inculturation: Ongoing Paths

The Chapter is an opportunity to look at how to inculturate our charism for today. Here I would like to refer to a text by Sr. Simona Brembilla inspired by a proverb of the Chirima people who say that *"The turtle travels with his house. This people apply this proverb to God because God has life in himself, and that is precisely why he has no fixed place of residence. He goes everywhere, he sleeps wherever he is. He is at home anywhere and with everyone. Here is a beautiful icon of charismatic inculturation. The Charism of the Congregation passes to the people but the people in turn give it an original imprint ... there is a relationship of reciprocity."*

*A charism that does not know how to inculturate itself is dead or dying and asphyxiated like a turtle prevented from looking out of its shell. A charism that is not exposed to the provocations of different cultures and that does not know how to "learn the language" of other worlds goes mad, just like a turtle forced to stop walking as it naturally does. This is so because a charism, being ecclesial, is by nature missionary and wants to move, to be a pilgrim, to meet other expressions of the Spirit that dances in the world. The charism comes home from these meetings regenerated, strengthened, enlarged, multiplied, fruitful, colorful, and increasingly itself, vigorous, refined, purified, and able to bring new life and new perspectives to the Congregation.<sup>2</sup>*

During this Chapter, what will we do to inculturate our charism where we are inserted? What wisdom do we learn from the peoples with whom we live?

### Intercultural community

In the 2012 Chapter Orientation, we expressed the desire to establish intercultural communities in all Entities. According to all the answers from the Entities and the voice of the young members of the Congregation, we must continue on this path.

In the current context of evangelization, living in an Intercultural Community is in itself living a mission. The way in which members of different cultures live happily, united in community under one roof, united by the same charism and spirituality is in itself a testimony that evangelizes.

During this Chapter we will build an intercultural community. Sr. Brembilla offers us 6 points to move towards an intercultural community. I propose them as a way of conversion to live together:

1. Growing together
2. Attentiveness to language
3. Learning to receive
4. Going down into the heart
5. Discovering the wisdom of ignorance
6. Eating out of the same pot

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<sup>2</sup> UISG Bulletin, Number 165, 2018 by Sr. Simona Brambilla, MC - Charismatic Inculturation: Ongoing Paths

Are we ready to live the richness of interculturality between us? If not, how can it be proposed to the whole Congregation for the future? For I am convinced that, without implanting these intercultural communities like seeds of life sown all over the Northern Hemisphere or the Southern Hemisphere, in underprivileged areas, we will cease to be prophetic and move towards death.

### **The Reconfiguration of the Congregation**

For several years we have been talking about reconfiguring. In the report of the General Council we will talk about the various steps taken in different Entities. But the time has come to think of the reconfiguration of the whole Congregation for mission. We do not reconfigure only because we are decreasing in number or because we have difficulty finding Leaders in certain Entities.

We must reconfigure the Congregation to work better and collaborate together and with others in the mission to bring forth the Kingdom of God. With Wisdom, we must be creative in shaping new ways of living the radicalism of our apostolic religious life together. The reconfiguration of a Congregation comes from a call, from an intuition of the Holy Spirit that invites us to embark on an unknown path on which we are firmly convinced that Wisdom has already walked.

Are we ready to leave “Poitiers for La Rochelle” for the sake of Wisdom...to do greater things as Montfort said to Marie-Louise of Jesus?

### **Formation**

A number of you have taken up the challenge of both initial and ongoing formation. I believe in vocational awakening, but where will these women, who want to become disciples of Wisdom as followers of Montfort and Marie-Louise, find communities where they can drink of the charism and meet real Daughters of the Wisdom testifying to a life radically given to Christ Wisdom. How many of you have lamented the difficulty of finding a community for women who want to live an experience or a community for temporary vow sisters where they learn to journey with other Daughters of Wisdom to become women more and more dedicated totally to God Alone and dedicated to the mission according to the charism.

During this Chapter, what concrete steps will we take to ensure the initial and ongoing formation of all sisters at different stages of their lives? What steps will we take to approach young people who are eager to be listened to and find meaning in their lives? Are we going to dare to open our hearts and our homes to welcome them?

## **The relational justice of Wisdom**

We cannot remain indifferent to the injustice and indignity we are inflicting on our migrant brothers and sisters. In all our countries, more and more walls are being erected to entrench them in an enclosure of misery and solitude. Does Wisdom not prepare a banquet for all? Does she not go to the crossroads to call people of all cultures to make them a people of God? What will we do for them? Why are we afraid to pitch our tents among them?

It is a special grace to live this Chapter this year as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Beatification of Marie Louise of Jesus. To close, I would like to pick up her words from the first constitutions where Marie Louise says: "God alone must be the object of our desire." Also that, "our love must be an active love, creating within us an ardent desire that God must be known, loved and served. Do not these words of our foundress reflect the theme of our Chapter:

***Love without borders ! Aimez sans frontières ! Amate senza frontiere ! ¡Amen sin fronteras !***

As in the Cenacle, with Mary, during this Chapter, let us form one body to welcome the Holy Spirit and live as disciples of Wisdom following the footsteps of Montfort and Marie Louise.

Sr. Louise Madore, D.W.  
Congregational Leader