

Opening Message

XXII General Chapter

Good afternoon and welcome to this opening celebration of the last phase of the XXII General Chapter.

Other than the 26 Siervas de San Jose who will participate in this last phase, we have with us six sisters whom we have requested to accompany us during this period as a support group. When we were preparing for this last phase of the General Chapter in the Congregational Team, we felt it necessary that a group of sisters could help us in the task which we, as an assembly, will do, so we can spend this time with serenity, with the least possible anxiety and, above all, as an experience of God and in permanent connection with all the other sisters of the Congregation and with everybody. These sisters are: Ma. Paz Ballesteros, assistant to the secretary, Raquel Pereira and Alicia Blanquico, translators into French and English respectively, Ana Ma. Ferradas, in-charge of the spiritual animation, Carmen Soto and Raquel Buiza in-charge of the communication. They have been working for days and even weeks so that everything may run smoothly as we desire. From now on, we want to thank you for your generous availability

We have the joy of having with us four lay Josephines from different countries: Elena Manquemilla from Chile, General Coordinator of the Lay Josephines, Concepcion Sta. Cruz from the Philippines, Elizabeth Carrasco from Bolivia and Rosa Rodriguez from Spain. Your presence here brings us closer to the other men and women in the different parts of the world who are trying to live their lay vocation with fidelity. With them, we feel called to live as a Josephine Family, committing together to give life to the dream of our Founders. Thank you for having accepted our invitation and for your commitment in the living out of the Charism.

Besides, we have with us this afternoon two Hijas de San Jose: Ma. Mendia Ajona y Ma. Angeles Pinto, Superior General and Secretary General, respectively. Your presence fills us with hope and we are deeply grateful for your accompaniment at the opening of the last phase of our General Chapter. Together with you we feel the presence and the closeness of all the Hijas de San Jose with whom we share the Charism and the same Founders. Thank you for being here and for your closeness and support.

We have invited the Lay Josephines as well as the Hijas de San Jose to participate with us during this first week.

In this celebration, the sisters from the three Communities-Taller of Granada are also present. Today, you represent the rest of the Siervas de San Jose. We all have experienced with hope and commitment each of the stages of the General Chapter, and in this final phase, in which we are going to participate, we shall do it in your name with the task of bringing into conclusion the journey which we have made together. Thank you so much for welcoming us in this beautiful city and for your hospitality, specially, to this community of Cajar. Thanks to each Sierva de San Jose for your trust and your fidelity to the congregational thrust. **Today, we who are here know that,**

during this last stretch of the Chapter, your prayers and your presence will not be wanting, help us each day to consider us as one congregational body in interconnection and interdependence. Thank you.

It has been a year since we journeyed together as a Congregation with the theme; “***Walking together towards a global, ecological and solidary conscience, we live the mission as disciples of Jesus in a changing world.***”, and having the Samaritan woman as icon of our Chapter, a valiant and courageous woman whose witnessing, without doubt, has inspired our journey during this period. Allow me, at this point to make a brief summary of our chapter process, a participative and interactive process wherein we have specially felt in communion and interconnection with one another. ***In the first phase***, we started our journey by bringing ourselves to our life and mission, to our own reality with its lights and shadows, with its limitations and possibilities. As a continuation, we brought ourselves closer to our environment, concretely to the religious life, the Church and the world to listen to their cries and their biddings. With a contemplative gaze at our internal and external reality, we discerned over the invitations and the challenges these reality present ***in the second phase*** and to what we feel we are called to give a response. ***In the third phase***, we had the opportunity to discern together, the type of leadership which the congregation needs today and the sisters who have the qualities and the availability to lead the Congregation and face the major challenges in the coming six years. ***In the fourth phase***, we evaluated the implementation of the Organic Model of Governance. We also celebrated within this phase the Cluster and the Provincial Assemblies where the work to be presented to this last phase, were finalized.

Now, we are in the ***fifth and last phase***. Who are we comprising this final assembly? We are a diverse group with regards to nationalities, age and experiences. We came from 7 different countries. With regards to age, the median is 61, the eldest among us is 74 and the youngest is 36. The sisters whose ages range from 61- 70 years comprise 35% of the group followed by those between 51-60 which is 31%. Those who have between 71 and 74 years old, represent the 19%, and those who find themselves between 36 – 50 years is 15%. One of the members of the assembly made her final profession 10 years ago and another made it 51 years ago. There are 7 sisters of this group who are participating for the first time in a chapter assembly. There is therefore, a great diversity but it does need to be an obstacle, instead it has to be converted into riches and strength if we are able to give and to receive, to participate and to accept, to express and to listen, that is to say, if we are capable of dialoguing, of valuing and of respecting what is different, in accepting plurality and in building from who we are and from what we have.

What is the Congregation asking us to do during this last phase? Well, we came to continue and finalize the process which we, the whole Congregation has done from April of last year to the present. Thanks to the serious and responsible work of all the Communities-Taller, Clusters, and Provinces, we have a solid, rich and diverse basis on which to discern, in the light of God's Word, the path the Congregation has to follow these coming six years. The task which, we have to do together during these three weeks, need our looking beyond ourselves because it does not deal with our desires, ideas or proposals but of the plan of all the Siervas de San Jose.

The responsibility which had been confided to us by our sisters is of great transcendence because at the end of the chapter process we shall get ourselves involved, once again and with greater determination and courage, to the mystery of faith and fidelity that animates the Congregation from its foundation and, supported by the life and commitment of all our sisters, we will continue putting words in the history of our salvation.

What atmosphere do we need among us to allow the Spirit to flow, to speak to us and to move in us, through us and in spite of us? and what attitudes are necessary so that we may be at the level of the service and the responsibility which the congregation has entrusted to us? Article 107 of the Constitutions says that we have to live this moment, as we have tried to doing, in the previous stages, “in a climate of discernment, searching for the common good and unity in diversity”. Let us build community among us, an experience of Taller and of interculturality. Each one of us has something to say, the contribution of each one is important and has to be respected and no one possesses the truth. This is a task and a searching together and the Spirit, who is and who has been the protagonist in this chapter year, is with us and therefore, there is nothing to fear. However, we have to cultivate the spirit of discernment and to allow the Spirit to lead us. It is important to be attentive, to know where the Lord wants to call us and to be courageous in or response. Without doubt, there will be difficulties and risks along the way, but we are confident of the presence and kindness of God who never abandons us.

Pope Francis encourages us along this line when he says in *Evangelii Gaudium* “If we allow doubts and fears suffocate all courage, it is possible that instead of being creative, we shall simply be comfortable and we shall not induce any advancement and, in this case, we will not be participants in historical processes with our cooperation but simply spectators of an infecund stagnation in the Church (no. 129). During this time , we are urged, therefore, to listen and to open ourselves to the world, discover where we are needed, to collaborate and to risk ourselves in the building of the kingdom from our Charism.

You have come sent by the sisters of your Clusters and Provinces and have brought their hopes and their anxieties, their vision of the present and of the future of the Congregation, and the wealth and the limitations of the cultures from where they came. However, upon entering this final phase of the Chapter, we are no longer representatives of our respective spheres but we represent all the Siervas d San Jose, we represent the whole Congregation. We are entering a new space, a congregational space, a sacred land where we all fit, wherein each one has her place. To enter into this new space, it is necessary to go beyond the frontiers of our spheres and cultures and break the barriers that separate us to bet for all, for the totality and search for, work for the common good, for the good of each Sierva de San Jose, so that together we may passionately follow Jesus every day in his ordinary and fecund history in Nazaret, commit ourselves more and more in favor of the poor working world, especially women, and get ourselves involved in the care of the earth and the cosmos., “(converting) as a personal suffering what is happening in the world, and to know what is the contribution each one may give “(LS no.19

From here, we are invited to broaden our gaze to see what is emerging in the horizon, in our horizon. For this, we need to be open and to change our mentality and search for new ways of seeing and of doing, from the criteria of Jesus, in short, new wine in new wineskins.

This movements from our respective spheres to the congregational sphere, this moving away from our own local interests and concerns to assume the interests and concerns of the international congregation, we have just ritualized by means of our passing through the door, our “holy door.” Each one of us has been called to this new common space and we have responded “here I am”, sign of our availability and our commitment to live this congregational period which is a moment of grace, giving the best of ourselves. The celebration of the holy week which ends in the resurrection of our Lord will help us live this final phase of the Chapter as a paschal event.

The Samaritan woman, the Icon which has accompanied us in this Chapter, can teach us to do this movement, to change our perspective and to see with the eyes of God. In the explanation of the Icon, Carmen Soto says, “her conversation with Jesus took her beyond what is known, broke the boundaries which has encircled her in her weakness, in her prejudices, took her out from the little walls of her house and the worn out pavement which, until that moment she has passed through, to put her on the way and integrate her in a much wider community, that of the followers of Jesus, who was called to cover other places, and incarnate in other cultures, confront new challenges with new strategies and be agents of transformation along the paths of history”.

We are not alone in this journey. Our sisters in the Congregation accompany us closely with their prayers, interests and love. We will do everything possible so that they may also feel participants of this last phase because, after all, they are also chapter members like us although, physically they may not be here now. I would like to make a special remembrance of the many sisters who, from the foundation, gave the best of themselves so that our Founders’ dream may become a reality and thanks to them, the Congregation today is what it is.

Butinya and Bonifacia welcome all of us and encourage us to be “true Siervas de San Jose” in our time and in this world in which we live. May Joseph in Nazareth be our reference and companion in this last phase of the Chapter and, as Pope Francis, in his homily during the feast of St. Joseph this year, tells us, Joseph gives us the capacity to dream, because when we dream of great things, beautiful things, we get close to God’s dream, to the things God dreams for us”, and may Mary of Nazareth, our companion along the way, transmit to us her dream of a different world, that which she proclaimed in her Magnificat: “He has scattered the proud from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty (Luke1,52-53)

Confident that the Holy Ruah continues to call us to live the Charism in fidelity and creativity and breathes life into our congregational journey, I declare this XXII General Chapter final Assembly open.

Lillian Ocenar Olavere

General Coordinator

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