



CONGREGAZIONE DI NOSTRA SIGNORA DELLA CARITÀ
DEL BUON PASTORE

2014 CONGREGATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF CONTEMPLATIVE SISTERS

OPENING MESSAGE

Sister Brigid Lawlor, Congregational Leader

Quito, Ecuador – 8th August 2014

Welcome to the Congregational Assembly of Contemplative Sisters!

My contemplative sisters, welcome! You are here because you have been elected by your sisters and Unit Leaders to enter into a process of evaluation of the directives from your 2008 Assembly document *“Focus for Our Future”*. Additionally, you are here to stretch your imagination and go beyond what was proclaimed in 2008 and build upon what has been lived over these past five years. You are here to create a new present and to creatively plan for the future of contemplative life in our Congregation. You are here to discern wisely and elect your delegates to the Congregational Chapter. You are here to consider more fully the role of your Congregational Council. Most importantly, you are here to make known to the whole Congregation, as well as more in depth to yourselves, the response to the question: *What does it mean to be a contemplative sister in an apostolic Congregation?* This is a unique challenge!

Unit Leaders, welcome! Why are you here? You are here to deepen your understanding of contemplative life in our Congregation, to assist by your support its development in the Congregation, as well as to be clear on your role as Unit Leaders with contemplative communities, on how to work with your Contemplative Council and, at times, with both your Apostolic and Contemplative Councils together. You are here to help clarify what pertains to the contemplative way of life and what pertains to the apostolic way of life. What an opportunity!

Congregational Apostolic Councilors and Lay Mission Partners (yet to arrive), our invited guests, welcome! Why are you here? You are here to witness and experience, first hand, the working of the Spirit manifested through the contemplative way of life in the Congregation. Plus, you are in a special position of participating in the mission of our contemplative sisters; to help objectify the way in which our contemplative way of life is made manifest in the world beyond convent walls. We ask you to ponder how the life of prayer of our contemplative members impacts the apostolic service of the Congregation and how it also reaches to the ends of the world, places stricken by turmoil, unrest, lack of justice. You are here to inspire the process of integrating the local, province, and global needs, so that our mission is clear and dynamic.

So, welcome, everyone to this sacred Assembly!

You might remember the poem “The Heart of the Matter” written by Charles Péguy, which we (CLT) used in our message to your Province Chapters and Sector/Regional Assemblies. In it, we highlighted the need for sharing dreams, having a little patience, a little humor, some small courage and a listening heart. Do you remember? It goes on to say: God will do the rest!

Well, our Shepherd God has been working hard – and you have been energized by the Spirit. I challenge you with more reflection on the poem. Charles Péguy goes on to say:

*Then, they will risk,
And wonder at their daring...
Run and marvel at their speed...
Build and stand in awe at the beauty of their building.*

You will risk and reflect on Article One. Were any of you present at the General Assembly of 2003 in which you recommended its approval at the 2003 Congregational Chapter? We have been living Article One for 11 years. I repeat, 11 years. It is not a new reality in the Congregation! Is now the time to stop talking about it and become even more clear about the living of it?

Were any of you present at the Intercontinental Assembly of Contemplative Sisters in 2008, in which we reviewed the integrated Constitutions which were approved at the 2009 Congregational Chapter? Is now the time to understand all the articles and statutes in our Constitutions? Particularly, those aspects which pertain to the contemplative way of life and those which pertain to both ways of life in the Congregation? Is now the time to really know and live them and allow ourselves to comprehend the action of the Spirit contained in those words? In light of our reunification through merger with the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, we have a new task! We will be looking at the revisions to the Prologue as part of this Assembly. I ask you to pay particular attention to those sections which speak directly about you – about the history of contemplative life.

Were any of you present at the sessions that related to contemplative life today? They were held in Colombia, Costa Rica, India and Chile. How have you lived the essential elements since then? I kindly ask you to deepen the contemplative aspect of justice, particularly when you refer to justice being incorporated into the very essence of the contemplative way of life. Sr. Hedwig Jöhl, past presenter at different sessions, has returned to assist us in deepening this aspect. Regarding the many other sessions held in the Congregation in which you participated, what did you take home from these sessions? What did you internalize? What type of experience are you bringing to our Assembly here?

You will wonder at their daring. Let's look at your Congregational Contemplative Council - the pioneer women whom you elected to be the first among you to serve in this role. You will learn more about the work that they have accomplished. They succeeded because of your daring and the input that you gave during the many visits

and Sessions, through your work on committees, and through the theological reflections that you did in your communities. Wonder about your daring and their daring!

In your 2008 document, *"Focus for Our Future"*, you said that you are called to: Promote, celebrate and respond to our missionary call! You have run with this objective and I marvel at your speed! Congratulations to you and to those Unit Leaders who appreciated the call within you and freed you in order to be of service. The same for the international experiences of our temporary and recently perpetually professed sisters. These experiences have enriched the whole Congregation and have allowed you to live more fully another call of your document which is to: live out of an awareness of our global solidarity. All missionary sisters and those who had international experiences, please stand! I thank you and I marvel at your courage and speed!

Risk, daring and speed have been present in your work on spirituality. You have claimed the care of creation as integral to our charism. You have exerted leadership in exploring the Story of the Universe and have worked locally and through committee work to understand cosmology in the context of our spirituality. You have studied the works of Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia with this focus. At the Congregational Spirituality Centre in Angers, you have promised to continue with your mission through your presence and work and, at this Assembly here, you have renewed your promise through your work in collaboration with your guest speaker, Mary Teresa McCormack. Please continue to risk by raising questions that arise from your apostolic incarnational prayer.

I close with a few comments about community life. Community Life is the essential element which has the greatest differentiation in our constitutions between the apostolic and contemplative ways of life. (See Articles 40-43). Pope Francis, in his address to contemplative cloistered nuns at the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi, on 4th October 2013, said: "Build community Life...it is the very Holy Spirit who is in the middle of the community. Always contemplate, always with Jesus... and in community life, always with a big heart. Let things go, do not brag, be patient, smile from the heart. A sign of this is joy. And I ask for you this joy which is born from true contemplation and from the beauty of community life."

So now, I invite you to build and stand in awe at all that has been accomplished and all that will be accomplished and I invite you to be signs of joy as I officially open the 2014 Congregational Assembly of Contemplative Sisters.



Brigid Lawlor
Congregational Leader