

SOWERS OF PROPHETIC HOPE

UISG BULLETIN

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PRESENTATION

From May 6 to 10, 2019, the XXI Plenary Assembly of the UISG was held in Rome, entitled “*Sowers of Prophetic Hope*”. About 850 participating Superior Generals from 80 different countries reflected together on important themes such as Interculturality, the vision of the future of Religious Life, the Integrity of Creation (Laudato Sì), Interreligious Dialogue.

The Superiors General present accepted the challenge launched by Sr. Carmen Sammut in her message announcing the theme of the Plenary:

“This is what we women religious are called to be today: Sowers of Hope. As Superiors we need to ask ourselves how we nurture this hope, above all when we feel that our resources and strength are diminishing. What are the signs of hope that we are gathering in our congregations? Are our intercultural communities perhaps signs of hope in a world of division and war? How are we signs of hope for the many women and children who are suffering?”

The highlight of the Plenary was the audience with Pope Francis on the morning of May 10th which took place in an atmosphere of fraternal and joyful dialogue. Together with the Pope, the UISG officially launched the “Nuns Healing Hearts” campaign marking the 10th anniversary of Talitha Kum—a network of women religious combatting human trafficking on an international level.

In this issue 169 of the UISG Bulletin (and also in the next issue 170) we offer you reflections on the main themes that have been addressed at the Plenary. We invite you to view our website for further information and documents: www.uisg.org/Plenary2019.

Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA and Sr. Pat Murray, IBVM ***Report for Assembly 2019***

How have we lived Assembly 2016 at UISG? The overall theme was: “*Weaving Global Solidarity for Life*”: with the focus on three aspects: (a) Life for the Planet (b) The major social Issues of our times and (c) Religious Life itself.

Our joint report will outline some of the ways in which we have developed these three overlapping dimensions during the past three years. We are grateful for your support as leaders and for your participation and encouragement.

Sr. Teresa Maya, CCVI ***A Vision for the Future of Religious Life***

Movement is all around us. The ground beneath us is shifting. The institutions that have shaped much of our lives are required to enter into a profound examination of conscience. Just beyond the challenges that will transform religious life, just beyond, we will begin to see the dawn. A new smaller, more nimble but global religious life is emerging. Leadership will come from a different hemisphere; new cultures will inspire our charisms. The shift has begun and will probably be

complete in our lifetimes, perhaps even during our tenure as leaders. And, all this is happening in the midst of massive changes in our world, our countries, and hopefully also our Church. We know this! Perhaps this is why we came to this Assembly to find inspiration in one another, to encourage and call forth, to know deeply, and profoundly that this moment must be faced in collaboration and collegiality.

Sr. Judette Gallares, RC

The Responsibility of Religious Life: A Biblical Perspective

In this paper, I would like to address the theme of this talk, which is the responsibility of religious life to be sowers of prophetic hope for the planet from a biblical perspective. In preparing for this talk, several questions came to mind: “What can we learn from the biblical prophets about hope and the contexts of their hoping?” “How do we understand this hope within the framework of the creation texts in the bible?” “What are the important elements and characteristics of prophetic hope?” As coming from the prophetic lineage, how can we as religious live our responsibility to be sowers of prophetic hope before the severity of today’s planetary reality?”

Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM

UISG Campaign for the Planet: Laudato Si and the Way Forward

One major opportunity provided by the campaign is to raise a united voice and develop a collective strength to impact what is happening in our world. What is clear in our world history is that designated power structures usually are given the bigger say in what is happening and, often, the loudest voice. The UISG is a unifying voice for the Sisters around the world. Through this campaign, we have the opportunity to organize the voice of the Sisters in the effort on many levels of structures in order to enhance and recognize our contribution to the care of our Common Home.

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the XXI Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)

Dear sisters, through you I thank all the sisters of your Institutes for the great work they do in the various peripheries in which they live. The periphery of education, where educating is always winning, winning for God; the periphery of healthcare, where you are servants and messengers of life, and of a life of worth; and the periphery of pastoral work in all its different manifestations where, by witnessing to the Gospel with your lives, you are revealing the maternal face of the Church. Thank you for what you are and for what you do in the Church. Never stop being women. “It is not necessary to stop being a woman in order to conform” (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 111).

REPORT FOR ASSEMBLY 2019

President Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA
and Executive Secretary Sr. Pat Murray, IBVM

Original in English

How have we lived Assembly 2016 at UISG? The overall theme was: *"Weaving Global Solidarity for Life"*: with the focus on three aspects: (a) Life for the Planet (b) The major social Issues of our times and (c) Religious Life itself.

Our joint report will outline some of the ways in which we have developed these three overlapping dimensions during the past three years. We are grateful for your support as leaders and for your participation and encouragement. Developing UISG so that we meet the needs of congregations in today's church world and today's world has been achieved because of a very commitment Executive Board and a very generous and well-qualified staff who work for you, way beyond the call of duty. You owe both groups an enormous depth of gratitude and we would like you to show your appreciation to them now and during the days ahead.

1. Weaving Global Solidarity for Religious Life

In this section we are going to describe many different initiatives in relation to enhancing religious life at the worldwide level.

a. Delegates Meetings: There have been two delegates meetings since Assembly 2016. At the first meeting immediately after the Assembly the Executive Board for 2016-2019 was elected. Several members of the previous Board agreed to accept a second mandate and Sr. Carmen Sammut msola was reelected as President and Sr. Sally Hodgdon csj reelected as Vice President. At this meeting an overview was provided with regard to developments at UISG in terms of finances, projects, and the projected future use of a section of Regina Mundi in the UISG complex. From 2008-2016 the whole of the Regina Mundi building had been rented by a US Company which provides courses for US University students. From 2016 onwards they decided to rent two instead of four floors.

The second Delegates Meeting held in Manila in November 2018 had a focus on several important themes - child protection, interculturality and communication as a way of building intercultural community. These and other topics which surfaced have shaped this Assembly's theme and workshops. The Conference of Religious of the Philippines assisted us greatly in organizing this meeting and we are deeply grateful for their support with regard to many practical and organizational matters.

b. A Questionnaire about the needs of Congregational Leaders was circulated in 2016 to determine how best UISG could meet the needs of you as Superiors General and your members. The response rate was very high; thank you for your participation. Since then our various formation programmes and initiatives have been developed as a result of your responses. The results were very clear – ongoing formation was requested across a wide variety of topics to be held in Rome, in regional centres and most especially on-line. In addition the training of formators was identified as an important area, noting that the UISG had offered such a programme in the past. It was clear that such initiatives needed to be offered in various languages and should reach to the ends of the earth. We are grateful to several Foundations who are supporting UISG in order to offer various outreach programmes in canon law, training for anti-trafficking ministry, new approaches to child care and a future international theological seminar where sisters will develop and present papers on different aspects consecrated life, from different cultural perspectives.

c. Formation at the Centre for Religious Life at Regina Mundi

The Executive Board discerned that the best use of the empty floors at Regina Mundi was decided to develop a formation centre for various aspects of religious life. Significant contributions from 4 congregations in late 2016 (2 each from the US and Europe) helped UISG to begin to install the latest technology. This enables UISG to stream meetings or presentation with simultaneous translation enabling a presenter to speak one language, yet be heard on-line in three other languages by those on-line or in the room. It also enables conversations to occur across languages on line across languages.

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and GHR also provided additional funds for this sophisticated technology and the furniture required to equip *The Centre for Religious Life at Regina Mundi*. In addition GHR has enabled the UISG to appoint a programme coordinator for the Centre for these initial years and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has funded the development of a new data base.

We are also fortunate at UISG to have a very competent Communication's Department led by Ms. Patrizia Morgante supported by Sr. Therese Raad, and an electronic engineer Sr. Florence de la Villeon rscj; they together with the Executive Secretary played an important role in identifying the technological needs and to develop the content of the on-line programmes. They also send out regular newsletters and information about various developments within UISG and religious life.

Many of you have expressed thanks for the UISG Bulletin which is published three times a year in 7 languages. Ms. Antonietta Rauti takes great care to select and to commission articles that will be of help to you as leaders. She also archives the past issues of the Bulletin so that you can easily find articles of interest. Sr Cecilia Bayona keeps a meticulous archive of the bulletin and other materials which serves as a useful resource now and will do so into the future. There is an increasing interest in writing about women's religious life and its beginnings in various parts of the world and the archive is consulted periodically, most recently with regard to articles written for Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ, former SG of the Jesuits whose cause for canonization has just begun. Ms Patrizia Balzerani and Svetlana Antonova are part of a team that help to dispatch the bulletin to you in a timely fashion.

Since September 2018 **conferences, meetings, and workshops have been held on a wide variety of topics** including child – protection, interculturality, migration, anti-trafficking initiatives, many different canonical topics, presentation of material to study Laudato Si, leadership training, discernment, communication etc. These various initiatives have often been offered both at the Centre and simultaneously on-line. We see individuals but also whole communities and small groups gathered around the computer or projecting the event using a data projector so that many may participate. This technology has also been used to have conversations with the delegates of UISG. In the future a part of the meetings of the Executive Board of UISG (held in May and November) will include a session on-line with the delegates. This technology has been an invaluable help in shrinking time and space and helping us to connect worldwide. Please alert your sisters to this possibility. If they have a smart phone and an internet line they can participate.

One of the more important initiatives which began this year is the **five month training programme for formators** - those sisters who are preparing for or who are already engaged in formation. There are 33 sister attending this year's programme chosen from 46 applicants. The programme is offered in English and the morning sessions take place at UISG. This year the afternoon programme has taken place at the Mater Dei Institute at Pontifical University of the Angelicum which offers an English programme for the preparation of formators. We are currently evaluating the programme as we plan for next year. During the 5 month programme the sisters receive spiritual accompaniment twice a month and have had an 8 day retreat in Nemi (outside of Rome.) It is envisaged that the programme will continue for as long as there is a demand. The coordinator of the programme is Sr. Cynthia Reyes sra assisted by Ms. Claudia Gianpietro.

Another important initiative has been the **Interculturality Training Programme** which was held for two weeks at the end of January 2019. There were 45 congregational teams (180 sisters in total) participating. The programme was streamed between the upper and lower halls of the Regina Mundi building with translation in 4 languages. The training was led by a team made up of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit and UISG personnel. We are very grateful to both congregations for their generosity in making this

international team available. Both congregations generally have programmes for their own congregations of women and men at that time of year as they have been training their own leadership personnel in the area of interculturality over the past 5 years. This year they opted to support the UISG initiative. They have presenters qualified in the areas of anthropology, missiology, psychology, intercultural studies and theology. Each of the 45 congregational teams had to develop an action plan by the end of the workshop. Half of the participants presented their plan in a Plenary Session and all plans were submitted to the organizing team. Over the next two years UISG will ask for feedback on how these action plans have been implemented, every 6 months. In July 2020 we intend to offer a similar type in Nairobi and perhaps another the following year.

Sr. Gabriella Bottani, cms, of Talitha Kum organized an important **training programme for TK leaders of anti-trafficking networks** over an 18 month period during 2018 and 2019. She is assisted by Ms. Nicoletta Lalla. The Course was organized in conjunction with the Pontifical University at the Antonianum. There three parts:

The first is On-line: This included topics such as communication, fund raising, public speaking, leadership models and their impact, social teaching of the Church, interreligious competences, networking, human rights and protection policies.

The second involved Two Meetings in Rome: One was in June 2018 and the second in 2019. This enables leaders to have workshops and practical experience of collaborating and networking at an international level.

The third part is an Internship / Capstone project : Each participant, will have the the support of a qualified mentor, to address a concrete challenge in their local network.

This programme supported by Porticus was offered by the Talitha Kum office in Rome in conjunction with the Pontifical University of the Antonianum.

d. Relationship Building with the Vatican Dicasteries.

Both the Executive Board and UISG Staff Members have developed very good working relationships with different Vatican Dicasteries during these past years. Let us look at a number of these working relationships.

(i) Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: The Council for 16 (eight SG of men and eight of women) meets twice a year and the focus for the past several years has been on updating the document *Mutuae Relationes* (which details the relationship between Bishops and Religious). Conferences of Religious were asked to provide answers to several questions and the UISG also sent the questions to its members. These collated responses were given to the writing committee. A draft text has now been produced and reviewed recently at the Plenary meeting of the Congregation. Four representatives of UISG participated in that review.

(ii) Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples:

The Council of 18 (9 SGs of women and 9 of men) also meets regularly with members of this Dicastery. The main focus of the last few meetings has been on the Mese Missionario Straordinario (MMS) – the Extraordinary Missionary Month which will be held in October 2019. The whole Church is being asked to reflect on “mission ad gentes.” Many very helpful resources have been developed which can be accessed at www.october2019.va. The website has many different section including theological reflections, witnesses, formation for mission animation, media and a guide on the theme: Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ in Mission to the World. Printed copies of the Guide in several languages are available here at the Assembly. We as sisters are asked to promote this missionary month in all our institutions, projects and programmes and to support the many diocesan and parishes activities.

(iii) Congregation for Integral Human Development:

Many of the UISG staff and especially the staff members of the USG/UISG Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission liaise with this Dicastery about many different themes and topics. Obviously the Care of Creation and the Encyclical Laudato Si is central to its mission. Pope Francis has reminded us that “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.” This Dicastery focuses on poverty, apostolate of the road, apostolate of the sea, stateless people. It also links Catholic Social Teaching with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. During our Assembly we will hear more about the promotion of Laudato Si.

(iv) Migrants and Refugees Section:

This is a special section which is directly under Pope Francis. Obviously Sr. Gabriella Bottani cms (Talitha Kum); Sr. Elisabetta Flick ac (Sicily Project) and Sr. Florence de la Villeon rscj (International Desk – Migrants) liaise regularly with this Section and they are consulted on many different aspects of migration e.g. IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), Unaccompanied Minors and Safe Migration. This sector has been wonderfully supportive of the work of Talitha Kum as you will see during the week.

(v) Pontifical Academy of Science

The Pontifical Academy has had ongoing contact with Talitha Kum. It hosts regular meetings of the Santa Martha group – which was set up by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales led by Cardinal Nichols – who collaborate with Talitha Kum. The Santa Martha group brings together heads of police forces and mayors from different cities in different parts of the world to discuss methods of tackling the trafficking of human beings. Sisters have played an important role in these meetings, especially in detailing what is happening on the ground and the prevention mechanisms that are being developed in various parts of the world.

(vi) Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

During these past months we have had several meetings with the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors. As religious congregations we need to make sure that every institution, project and programme has a child protection policy which is also truly operational with a nominated child protection officer. From past experience we need to learn that our present policies, programmes and behaviors will be judged by future standards. While your country may currently accept the corporal punishment of children, sometime in the future this approach to disciplining children will not be accepted. According to the latest Vatican statistics in 2016 there are 9552 orphanages, 11,758 infant nurseries in the care of the Catholic Church and 35,746 other institutions, many of which probably contain children not to mention, the thousands of schools, hospitals and clinics. The recent GHR-UISG workshop on May 2-3, Sowing Hope for Children in Our Care, focused on new approaches to residential care for children in need.

We need to focus on educating ourselves and the members of our congregations about best practices with regard to child protection and the creation of environments where children can flourish. We can't wait for governments or Bishops conferences to take the initiative. We can share best practice with one another. We will work with the Commission to share samples of child protection policies in various languages with you through our website. It seems timely also to consider the establishment of a UISG-USG Commission for the Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults. We will shortly begin this discussion with USG who have already expressed openness to the idea.

(vii) Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

Each year UISG participates in a formation programme for the Boissey students from the World Council of Churches (WCC) to help explain women's religious life. The participants come from many different Christian denominations from different parts of the world and it is always a mutually enriching exchange. For some this is their first meeting with sisters, brothers and priests who are members of religious congregations.

(viii) Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Sr. Carmen Sammut msola is a member of this Vatican council. The USG/UISG Commission for Dialogue has met with members of the Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. They have requested that we gathered information focusing on different examples of the dialogue – especially in what is called “the dialogue of life” – where in various projects and programmes, Sisters work with members of other religious traditions. So if in your ministry you have such examples, please send the information to UISG. In addition if there are particular difficulties in your context please let us know also.

e. Increased Official Representation at Meetings

- **Attendance at the Synods:** At both the Synods on the Family and on Youth the membership by the UISG representatives was determined by the Synodal Office and therefore only one female Superior General was actually present at each Synod. In the recent Apostolic Constitution of the Holy Father on the Synod of Bishops, *Episcopalis Communio*, presented in Rome on 15 September 2018, the UISG and USG are specifically named in relation:

(a) To being consulted....and through them, their major superiors.

(b) Transmission of contributions from their members to the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

So we foresee that through UISG, you the members will be consulted in preparation for various synods in the future.

- **Attendance at the Vatican Meeting on the Abuse of Minors.** It was very significant that on this occasion the Secretariat of State when inviting UISG to attend the meeting did not prescribe the number of the participants or who might attend. UISG determined that the Executive Board and Executive Secretary would attend - just as the USG had decided. We hope that this may be a pattern for future Synods and other official Vatican meetings.

- **Attendance at the Plenary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.** Unfortunately no sisters have yet been nominated as permanent members of the Plenary Council of the Dicastery. For this and the previous Plenary, 7 sisters were invited to be present. For this we are grateful but we hope that nominations for the next Council will include sisters.

- **Attendance at meetings of the Dicastery on Integral Human Development** e.g. the focus of the most recent meeting was on Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Staff members from UISG and also Sr. Sheila Kinsey and Fr. Felix

- **Attendance at various consultative meetings regarding Trafficking in Persons, Migrants and Refugees**

There are periodic consultative meetings in which UISG project leaders participate and which help to develop the Vatican's policy documents on these important topics.

2. Weaving Global Solidarity in relation to the Social Issues of Our Time

We have already outlined some of our collaborative partnerships in relation to today's global issues. During this Assembly we will be presenting reflections and information concerning UISG three main projects: anti-trafficking, migrants and refugees and the Laudato Si initiative. At this point we will just draw attention to some key aspects of the projects.

(a) Migrants and Refugees: The UISG Sicily Project began a formation period for the sisters who arrived in Sicily in December 2015. Communities were subsequently established in Agrigento, Ramacca and Caltanissetta – each of which has lived in demanding and constantly changing contexts. Currently many of the government funded centres are closing and staff are no longer being paid. Cardinal Montenegro asked UISG: “Are you also going to go away?” pointing out that when times get tough these are the very times when the presence of religious is crucial. We as religious women are being called to be a prophetic presence in many parts of the world as anti-immigrant rhetoric is being used by different political parties.

(b) Anti- Trafficking and the expansion of TK. During these past years TK has extended its network worldwide and has now 43 national networks and 7 regional networks. When we meet Pope Francis later this week he will celebrate with us the 10th anniversary of Talitha Kum with the launch of a campaign called: Nuns Healing Hearts. In addition an international committee has worked with Sr. Gabriella Bottani to develop a long term strategic plan. A key component will be a focus on creating new networks and deepening existing networks in Africa. This work is being supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Conrad. Hilton Fund for Sisters has supported existing networks and SC Ministries has helped Talitha Kum to strengthen its communication capacity. Finally a new programme called “Wells of Hope” focuses on bringing Muslim women and Catholic sisters together in the Mediterranean Basin to work together against human trafficking. This programme is being led by Sr. Marie Claude Naddaf rgs and supported by the GHR Foundation who have a special commitment to inter-faith initiatives.

(c) Accompanying Victims of Sexual Violence During Conflict. The UK Government has established a high level panel and a protocol with regards to accompanying those who have been victims of sexual violence during conflict. They have provided resources to UISG to help organize training workshops for religious sisters, brothers and priests who provide pastoral accompaniment for survivors. Two workshops have been offered – one in DRC and the other in Uganda. These workshops have been led by Sr. Sheila Kinsey from the JPIC Office and they have been a transforming experience for the participants and for those with whom they minister.

(d) Relationship Building with Foundations and Embassies

In your name we would like to thank the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation; the GHR Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters, Porticus, the Sisters of Charity Ministries and the Galileo Foundation who have helped UISG to develop many different initiatives both in Rome and most especially in other locations. Each of these foundations has a special commitment to support sisters and we thank them in the name of women’s religious life on every continent. Many of you also receive grants directly from some of these foundations and we thank them also in your name.

Embassies to the Holy See: We have been developing good relationships with many of the Ambassadors who represent their countries at the Vatican. Many of these ambassadors are women and are very supportive of UISG and its projects and programmes. The following embassies have provided funds and/or visibility for the work of sisters worldwide – UK, Irish, Australian and US Embassies to the Holy See. Other Embassies have attended events at UISG or met with UISG staff members for briefings on various projects or issues. These include the Philippines, Peruvian, Georgian, French and South African Ambassadors to the Holy See. Many Ambassadors ask us to encourage sisters to visit their embassies in different countries throughout the world. As sisters we have a special perspective of life from the perspective of the people who are most in need and we can raise our voices to challenge government policies.

3. Weaving Global Solidarity for Life on this Planet

- Laudato Si Campaign – every congregation is invited to nominate ONE representative linked to the UISG Campaign as soon as possible. This is an important initiative which is growing in importance. UISG is partnering with the Catholic Global Climate Movement (CGCM) and there are various initiatives each year which invite participation all over the world. AS Sr. Sheila Kinsey will be speaking to you later this week, we are not going to take up much time here – except to say that the care of the planet earth and care of its people are so intrinsically linked that we cannot attend to one without attending to the other.

- The Board of the Solidarity with South Sudan project which was established by the two unions, USG and UISG is grateful for your continued interest and support. They are represented here at the Assembly and would like to speak with any congregational leader who would consider sending a sister to work in this inter-congregational project which trains teachers, nurses, midwives, farmers and pastoral workers. This year Solidarity is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its presence in South Sudan and have produced a film to show the work of these past years. Please call in to see the film in the side room on the first floor corridor.

These new Initiatives at UISG have required enhanced financial and other types of administration. Ms. Aileen Montojo has been restructuring the financial department and financial procedures helped by Ms Patrizia Balzerani. This has been a demanding task but the new system is now almost fully operational. Ms. Svetlana Antonova has taken up responsibility for the new data base and during 2019 you will be asked to fill in your statistical information on-line and this will be imported into the data base. Ms. Rosalia Armillotta has been the main contact with congregations through visits, phone, email, text, WhatsApp and any other means available. She makes your connectionj with UISG easeful. Mr. Angelo Spadavecchia works with the leaders of the various UISG projects and initiatives to monitor and evaluate the outcomes from projects. This team is vital for the successful implementation of We thank each staff member on your behalf.

New Areas Emerging:

a. *Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults* – needs to be a worldwide educational initiative for understanding the extent of the problem and also learning how to develop guidelines and good practices. This overall area included the examination of New Approached to Institutional Care for children and young people.

b. *New Synergies: Faith and Praxis (Leadership Training)* and WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women) who have offices in the UISG building.

c. *Seminars outside of Rome: Interculturality* (Nairobi – July 2020); Training to accompany victims of sexual violence in conflict areas (South Sudan); Canon Law (Locations in Africa and Asia).

d. *Theological Seminar in Rome* for sisters who have undertaken doctoral studies in theology and Bible so that they become writers on Religious Life.

Finally we once again express our gratitude to all the members of UISG. Your support and encouragement mean that together we can face the future with hope and courage believing that the Lord “Knows the plans he has to give us all a future and a hope.”

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Sr. Teresa Maya, CCVI

Sister Teresa Maya is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio since 1994. Her ministry has been in education. She has served as teacher, history professor, and administrator. She has passion for the formation of ministers for Hispanics/Latinos in the United States. Sister Teresa got her B.A. at Yale University, her M.A. at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley and the Ph.D. in “El Colegio de Mexico” in Mexico City. She is currently serving as Congregational Leader for her Congregation and as past President of LCWR.

Original in English

Called to Restore!

Sowers of Prophetic Hope, here we are! I am grateful for the invitation to be here today, to the UISG President Sr. Carmen Sammut, MSOLA, and the UISG board, and to Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM, thank you for your trust. As we begin our assembly today, I know hope is in this room simply because we are gathered.

I prayed, struggled, and consulted about this reflection, wondering what gives me hope? What is hope? How do we hope together as women religious? How do we hope in the vision of the emerging future? A few stories came to mind, over and over again, little stories, local stories, simple stories. Pondering them, in my different moments of despair, I began to find hope, and perhaps I am beginning to understand how the vision of the future of our life unfolds around us gently, softly, like my little stories.

The first happened after hurricane Maria had devastated my beloved island of Puerto Rico. My Boricua friends desperately writing on *Facebook* and *Twitter* trying to communicate with loved ones, “*does anyone know if...*”, “*can you communicate.*” During the terrible weeks that ensued, I happened on a story about an organization that was working to restore the magnificent coral reef destroyed by the winds — volunteer divers carrying little buckets, restoring one coral at a

time. My first reaction was a cynical smile, how ridiculous and futile. I just wanted to cry because that beautiful Puerto Rican rainforest and its breathtaking coral reef were gone, and here are these fools; what could they ever achieve?! And, suddenly, gently, I felt it—the hope, the call: simple efforts, the seed of hope. They were restoring the dignity of creation, one coral at a time!

My next story happened during a trip to the Mexico-United States Border with all the sisters from our religious leadership conference's region in Texas. We visited with the agencies and organizations that have been working to welcome the men, women, and children seeking hospitality in our country. Sister Norma Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities for the Rio Grande Valley, shared her story with our group. When the first wave of unaccompanied minors reached the border, she hustled to create a welcome center in a parish. Calls for help went out, volunteers and donations started coming in. Everyone was busy when the local authorities came and asked Sr Norma, "*what is going on here?*" She replied: "*I am restoring human dignity.*" The men left and returned with more volunteers and donations. Again, as I heard Sr. Norma, I thought, thousands of people, thousands of children, overwhelming numbers. How on earth are we going to welcome them all? And, again, simple hospitality, another seed of hope. At the Mexico-U.S. border, they are restoring human dignity, one person at a time!

My third story comes from Colombia. Visiting Cali, I heard about the long and painful peace process after the cartels, the military, and hired paramilitary had left cities and families scourged by their bloody and violent confrontations. A group of women has been breeding butterflies to work for peace in an organization called *Alas Nuevas*. They gave me a beautiful butterfly, and as I looked at it, I wondered, how can breeding butterflies make a difference in such a traumatized place? And again, gently, simply, hope came upon me. They are restoring peace, one butterfly at a time!

We need to hope as they do, standing firmly and humbly in this painful and overwhelming present reality that is ours, with bare feet. This time that has normalized crisis is our holy ground. Among all the different crises we are called to live and hope in, the one close to our hearts must be named from the start of this conference: the crisis in our Church. History will judge how we responded to this crisis. One day, women religious will be either accomplices, or prophets, or victims. We simply cannot sit this one out on the sidelines, even when we are being sidelined!

Here we are called to hope in the vision of God for the future. We need to go through this time together, religious women called to communion, called to the discipleship of Jesus, called to be sacraments of the presence of God in our world, consecrated women. We can only hope as religious; we hope because we are religious.

Sisters, we are gathered here to share our stories. What stories can we tell one another about receiving the gift of hope? For hope is a gift given gently, simply,

in the midst of despair. A gift we must notice, receive and make real for each other in the sharing. Our gift of hope will overcome fear. We must tell these stories of the simple, quiet, gentle prophecy of compassion that restores, that tells the surprising truth of what God is already doing among us!

I suggest with this reflection that the prophecy of compassion will get us to hope provided we hold a VISION, foster our MEMORY, cultivate our NOTICING, and dare to LEAD.

VISION: To See With Prophetic Hope

Our Assembly calls us to be “*Sowers of Prophetic Hope*.” This week we need to reflect with each other, how do we hope as women of the Church? We know “*hope is the gift of communion*,” as I reminded our conference in the United States last year. Hope is the result of the encounter of community. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that “Hope is a gift, a grace, and when we receive a gift, it is not for us; it is for our neighbor.” With faith we must seek the vision of hope found in Jeremiah: God promises a “future with hope” if we seek with all our heart (Jr, 29:11-13, NRSV). LCWR, our conference in the United States, has learned that this vision of the heart can only be found by tapping the spiritual wisdom of our life in contemplation, engaging in communal discernment. Women religious must be women of vision: seers of hope.

This vision of hope for our challenged and suffering present and for a future filled with life requires that we enter deeply into the mystery of our consecrated life. We hold a public commitment to discipleship in communion, as stated in *Vita Consecrata*: “The fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion.”¹ Our exodus journey of renewal that began with *Vatican II* has been a beautiful gift with unyielding challenges; questions about style, ministry, and orthodoxy have fascinated and haunted us. The Plenary Session on the occasion of the 50 years since *Perfectae Caritatis*, held by Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, recognized that:

Even after the wide-ranging and rich process of adaptation and renewal [*accomodata renovatio*] which took place after the Council, the consecrated life may still find itself presented with open challenges that must be faced “with determination and an eye to the future.”²

“*Who are we? Where are we going?*”— are unyielding questions that have divided and haunted us. The renewal debate needs to be left to rest for the sake of the vision of the Reign of God we were called to witness, the people of our time are desperate for hope.

The vision of hope in the promises of Christ requires living into our principles not answers. We are required to live with a nobility of spirit, into the grace and mystery of our consecration. The time for major “undertakings” or apostolic

works is over, remembering Sr. Márian Ambrosio's beautiful loom - three years ago in this very room—"we are to live into the 'power of the how.'" ³ We will journey to the promise of hope by remaining steadfast in our identity. We need to be women of character and virtue now more than ever. To find hope we need to be prophetic, and to be prophetic, our lives need to witness to what we believe and who we are. The way to hope is through prophecy. How do we prophesy as women religious?

The time for words is over, so forgive the ones I am using here! We need a new way of witnessing that will manifest our values, that will be more intelligible and accessible for our time. Gospel news needs to be told in art, symbol and gesture. These are times to share the kind of deep meaning that cannot be found in words. A friend reminded me that the crisis around the world could not be reasoned or problem solved. We need to give our rational minds a sabbatical so that the creative, non-linear, subconscious can help us navigate through story, poetry, art, symbol, and gesture. We have a new apostolic call to offer meaning to a suffering world, with the non-verbal language that our consecrated life can speak with such beauty. We need to offer a prophecy the world can see.

The vision for this kind of prophecy will emerge from the narrative of hope embedded deep in the soul of our charisms. We are a people with a vision, a vision of the love and compassion of God for all creation. Women religious, as we are, young and old, many and sparse, must witness to compassion, like the people in my little stories. Our prophetic vision is in our hearts, hands, and feet. The places we walk, the people we touch, the way we accompany, the prayers we pray, tell the story of compassion embedded in the hope for the Reign of God, where Jesus calls us to follow. We witness restoring dignity to all human beings, to our planet, one simple, loving spiritual act of compassion at a time. José Antonio Pagola writes that "for Jesus, compassion is not just one more virtue, but rather the only way to imitate God, the only way to see the world, to treat people and to react to human beings in a manner most like God's." ⁴ Our way to prophecy is through compassion. Compassion all can see, not read or hear, but simply see. We need not do anything more, or anything less.

Prophecy and hope dance in the endless cycle compassion weaves into the future promised by God. Our small simple acts of compassion offers this vision of creation to every single human being as prophecy because we believe!

MEMORY: To Trust our Prophetic Call

The future of religious life is embedded in our memory! For too long we have been obsessed with the future. I cannot even count how many books I have read about the future of religious life, and I can read only in two languages! We have been asking about the future far too long. And yes, we have been worried about the future; in fact, we have been downright afraid of the future. Something went amiss after the fervor that followed the Vatican Council; this was not supposed to

happen. Our respective responses, enthusiastic or not, were expected to bring about a new heaven and a new earth!⁵ We have played numbers games with statistics and projections. Our questions about size betray our insecurities, our fear of the future: “*we have more, you have less*,” “*how many novices*,” “*how many ministries*”. We have played this game across institutes, conferences, hemispheres, for so many years, I wonder when we will get off the useless merry-go-round that has exhausted our creative and spiritual energy. We need a collective *examen*, as women religious, but also as a Church, to own the demons that have driven our ridiculous quest for numeric significance. I hope to thank Pope Francis one day for saying that our “founders and foundresses never thought they’d be a multitude”⁶ All the time we have spent on numbers reminds me of the mirror in the *Snow White* narrative, “*mirror, mirror on the wall who is the fairest one of them all*.” Pride is unbecoming to our life, but it has been so tempting, so shiny!

I offer a different lens instead: The quest for the future must begin by remembering. To understand the future we need to take time to remember. “Remember” in Spanish comes from *re-cordis*, to run through the heart once more. We need to “*re-cordar*.” Memory is the sacrament of presence. As leaders, we must call our sisters to sacred memory and dialogue with our cloud of witnesses to believe in our future. We need to enter into the mystery of our memory, sometimes selective, sometimes painful, sometimes hidden. We need to tell and retell the stories that made us: our pioneer stories, our founding stories, our stories of renewal and conflict; we will find the seeds of hope we need to sow there. How do we remember as a community?

A historian friend of mine warned me about our utilitarian use of history. We tell stories not to find the way, not because we need to solve a problem; not as a nostalgic view of what is gone; we tell stories to know who we are! She pointed me to Umberto Eco’s reflection about the forest. In a short essay, he wrote that there are two ways to enter the narrative forest:

The first is to try one of several routes (so as to get out of the woods as fast as possible, say, or to reach the house of grandmother, Tom Thumb, or Hansel and Gretel); the second is to walk so as to discover what the woods are like and find out why some paths are accessible and others are not....We enter stories in much the same way; the first kind of reader enters the text seeking to know “how the story ends”... so it is usually enough to read it once. In contrast, to identify the model author, the text needs to be read many times, and certain stories endlessly.⁷

Our most sacred responsibility as leaders of religious institutes lies in symbol and meaning-making. We need to be artisan storytellers so we remember who we are.

When Sister Veronica Openibo, leader of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, addressed the Vatican Summit on abuse, again I was filled with hope. We all stood with her as she witnessed for women the world over. Last month I was in Rome, and thought of her as I stood before every statue of a woman I could find in St.

Peter's Basilica after the celebration of the Eucharist. Wandering from one pillar to the next, I prayed to each of them, and asked what witness got you to this place? How did you hope? And, what will we discover about ourselves in dialogue with your stories?

Listening to Sister Veronica, and reflecting on the history of our Church women, I realized why memory is critical at this time. The story of Sr Juana Ines de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Mexican nun, living in a cloistered convent of the Spanish Colonial period came immediately to mind. Challenged by the Archbishop of Puebla about women and learning, she wrote a defense known as the *Letter to Sister Filotea de la Cruz*. What she did was to remember the story of all the women who had come before her!⁸ Like other learned women of the Church, she found the strength to resist in her stories. Their power allowed her to acknowledge the gifts that God had given her, and to this day her poetry and learning challenges and mystifies historians and critics.

While in Rome, I made a pilgrimage to the tomb of one of those women, St. Catherine of Siena, to pray for guidance, to remember this moment in our Church is not unique, that hundreds of years later, the questions about the role of women in the Church continue to claim our attention. We need to bring forward the names of the resilient women who came before us, just like Sor Juana did. We need to remember them, to make them present to the current situation in the Church, not because we want a place at the table of clericalism, but because we are called to make the Church whole! The litany of the women of the Church that have challenged us and called us forth must be prayed in our institutes. The sacrament of memory will make them a real presence in our world today.

I invite you to consider the women of your traditions we need to invoke at a time such as this. Who are the women in every continent, in your institute, whom you remember, whose names need to be recited and invoked at this time?

But we also need to remember the women who have been resilient in the face of terrible odds, women of the margins, indigenous women, enslaved women, abused women. We must honor their names as well. The images that emerged around the world from the most recent *Women's Day* come to mind.⁹ All of them echo the words of Sojourner Truth, the nineteenth century African American abolitionist who fought against slavery in the United States and challenged white women by saying: "*Ain't I a woman.*"¹⁰ Women the world over are showing this resiliency; they continue to be pillars in the face of incredible adversity and suffering. We need to remember that women everywhere of every culture and faith, in every hemisphere, stand again and again as prophets of compassion. Their story is also our story!

So much has happened since the last UISG meeting. The headlines in country after country have claimed our attention and should challenge us. Recovering our memory should also help us with the divisive and myopic concern about feminism that we frequently hear voiced in society and our Church. Perhaps now we need

to recover the memory of our feminist legacy. Precisely at this time when all institutions around the globe are challenged to ensure the dignity of human beings is always protected, our feminist legacy has a word of integrity to offer. *We should all be feminists, our brothers, and fathers, and priests should be feminists!* Yes, I said it, religious sisters should all be feminists, Christian feminists, who committed to struggle and resist to ensure that women and men, and children are all treated as human beings. We need the feminism of compassion found in the stories that have inspired our courage as women religious over the centuries. These stories began long ago with Jesus and the women he encountered. Women who teach us to treat women like Jesus did, respectfully, lovingly. Women who, like Jesus, teach us to take counsel from Mary, his mother, advising him at the wedding in Cana. Women who, like Jesus, teach us to find wisdom in women like the Samaritan at the well; Women who, like Jesus, teach us to accept the challenges of the Syrophoenician woman; and women who call us to notice suffering like he did when the hemorrhaging woman touched him. Christian feminism calls us to love, trust, and challenge the men who journey with us. . Adopting a feminist perspective will actually make us more faithful to God, our church, our communities, and our families.

We need to remember that Christian feminism finds inspiration in the Genesis story, recognizing that half of all those created in the divine image and likeness of God are undervalued in nearly every social, civic, political – and certainly every ecclesial arena. Christian feminism calls us to notice that women bear the effects of poverty, illness, and violence in disproportionate degrees in nearly every country in the world – and we need to change that reality. We need to embrace the cause of women because we are women religious and this is like Johann Metz said, our “dangerous memory.”¹¹

As women religious, we need to join women around the world in their effort to humanize their lives. I bring to mind the images of women dancing to resist violence, the *One Billion Rising Revolution*.¹² Have we danced with them? Women need us as we are, fewer and older, but present. Memory will remind us, that their cause has been our cause: standing with women who are vulnerable to violence and marginalization is our story. We cannot be absent from the forums where women are in conversation about bringing about the humanization of all peoples, that echoes the touch, friendship and validation of women by Jesus in the Gospels. We have to share with them the stories of our women, our sisters, who fought in the face of adversity as prophets of compassion. We need to return to our storytelling of the women of faith, the women of wisdom, the women of spirit, on whose shoulders we stand. We need to tell the stories of courage of the women in our institutes who journey with other women creating and sowing hope simply, hopefully, and respectfully. Sister Andrea Lee, IHM, President of Alverno College, recently spoke about these women saying:

We respect each other, enjoy each other and support each other, right until the moment we yield each sister to the welcoming arms of the Lord at the moment

of her death. It is that good and that powerful. That very evident strength and what it is capable of accomplishing is part of what drew me to religious life. Watching women teach each other; wanting them to teach me. Seeing joy, goodness, intelligence and commitment coalesce. Slowly coming to see that the power, the boldness we could have together, is power and boldness none of us would have alone. Embarking on a lifelong adventure with like-minded women. Good and wise women taught me that. And that is part of how I came to be where I am today.¹³

Sister Andrea did not say this, but I will: I am sure they were all Christian feminists, like we should be!

Memory will bring out so many stories: the women of the Bible, of our Church, of our institutes, of our time, will speak to us of faith and courage, and resiliency. The call to remember lies beyond the careful narrative of complementarity or even collaboration, this is about the mission of humanization. We need to join our hands, our voices, and our prayer to every cause that restores human dignity because we remember who we are. As leaders, for example, we should be champions of the *Talita Kum* networks in our countries. But humanization also needs to happen within our institutes. We need to honestly share our stories of complicity and silence, because we have them. We need to lead into transparency and accountability in every area of our institute's life. We need to tell our ongoing story of struggle and courage to build up the Reign of God in the midst of our own Church.

Our memory will inspire our courage. Religious women bear a responsibility for the integrity of human life in their DNA. The time for standing as women with other women is now. The time for standing at the foot of the cross of suffering of so many is now, like the women that have come before us. Otherwise, the compassionate humanization that Jesus called us to witness might be lost on a new generation of women who need to know why we remain self-respecting women who are Catholic.

NOTICING: To live our moment fully

We have been called to lead during a time of profound transformation. I do not need to say this to you as leaders of your institutes. Is this transformation more significant or less than others? Historians will remind us that it is not, but this is the one we get to live through! Whether it is the most significant or not matters little. Change is everywhere — big, massive, challenging, often scary. Borders are changing, maps are changing, the world is “moving,” massive migrations of people, ideas and goods are now possible like never before. Even climate and our understanding of gender are changing. And, the Church which I confess I thought would take another century to ask itself some critical questions, is now asking them! Could it be that our Church is also on the brink of change? Movement will describe our time. Leading when everything is moving requires a whole new set of skills, leading a religious institute looks different than it did before or after the

Council. The global south looks different because it is not the same before as after colonial rule, or before and after the missionaries left. No matter what focus or angle we use, these are different times!

We need to be horizon watchers! We keep watch for dawn because we believe, because we know the night will end. “However long the night”¹⁴, we persevere because we believe the gift of God, the gift of hope, will be ours. We need to be spiritual sentinels for all humanity. On the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life offered us the document “*Scrutate*”, *Keep Watch!*, calling us: “To search the horizons of our life and our times, in watchful prayer; to peer into the night in order to recognize the fire that illuminates and guides, to gaze into the heavens, looking for the heralds of blessing for our dryness. To keep awake and watch, and to make intercession, firm in our faith.”¹⁵

To respond to our call to prophesy so we can journey into hope, we must lean into our contemplative identity; we must notice everything! Noticing contemplatively is a new asceticism; noticing with prophetic hope requires a long loving look that holds everything before it, no matter how strange, painful or different. We need to be the advance of the *Iglesia en Salida*, the Church that goes forth, because of who we are. The future of our life as religious will be intimately related to our courage to enter into a spirituality of noticing how God’s spirit is stirring new insights and hope around us.

We need to start by noticing the shifts that are taking place in religious life, overcoming the usual temptations of leadership. The temptation to stay busy with minor tasks that are important but not critical. The temptation to nostalgia, to keep rewinding the videos, when we *used to*, when we *had*, or *were*, or *did*; obsessed with declining numbers and aging, only focused on what is dying. The temptation of our good works! We have done amazing work for our church and the countries we serve: built and staffed healthcare ministries big and small, taught generations of children, but maintaining the “ministries,” however important, can also keep us from noticing the amazing movements taking place before us. The temptations make us shortsighted; they blur the capacity to notice the new.

Overcoming the core temptations of leadership, we might then begin to notice joyfully what is emerging around us — the “shift” of energy for religious life from the global north to the global south. The fourth wave of religious migration currently underway differs from the sixteenth and nineteenth-century missionary migrations, because it is flowing in the opposite direction, or could it be in the right direction today!¹⁶ The entire center of gravity of the Church is moving south, and our noticing is “colored” by our prejudice. How many more times do I have to hear about women seeking entrance to our congregations from countries in the global south that: “*they only want a visa, or an education, or a comfortable life*”? How many times will I hear that “*celibacy is a challenge in their culture*” but clearly not in ours?

We also need to notice how we notice!

We need to be asking the right questions, not because we will find the answers but because questions will guide our noticing. Where is the need? What is ours to do? Who are we today? Who are we globally? How are we globally? Where are we being invited to collaborate, network, build bridges within and across religious life?

A spirituality of noticing will move us to the small meaningful acts of compassion that restore hope. Then we will join the restorers around us, restoring creation, human dignity and peace, one little step at a time!

SOW: To Own our Call as Leaders

The seeds of prophetic hope need to be planted, watered, and tended. This work requires leadership. As UISG convenes the leadership of women religious institutes from the whole world, here we are, the supreme moderators, the general superiors, the leaders of our communities. What is ours to do so we can continue that journey to hope? We have a legacy of leadership. Sisters have been in leadership roles for centuries in institutions, ministries and pastoral work long before women could vote, register in a university, or even own property. This is our legacy; our story is proof that women can lead even in the Church! And when they do, they weave solidarity and sow hope!

We sow hope by doing what is ours to do as leaders elected by our institutes. We are women in the service of leadership, called by our sisters to serve our charism. We need to own this leadership with integrity together with our councils. We lead into a vision of hope by convening, advocating, calling forth, inviting, gathering, inviting to see the whole! We need to dare to lead, as Brené Brown defines a leader as “anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.”¹⁷ Our sisters have called us to lead, someone else can plan a funeral or rearrange the furniture in the motherhouse. Of course, we call forth the gifts of others; we take counsel; we delegate, and we must lead into community. Leadership in our religious institutes must foster, care, nurture, and create the sacred space that will ensure community, collegiality, and collaboration. The future of hope promised in Isaiah is embedded in communion. Hope is the gift of communion!

To sow hope, we need to lead our way out of our version of clericalism. We need to do our work, name it, call it and confess it. We need to work hard to expel the demons around the service of authority, by exercising the kind of prophetic leadership that will sow hope. We must both recognize the authoritarianism and also call out the rogue individualism that breeds around it. The conference celebrating 50 years since *Perfectae Caritatis*, had some serious admonitions about the abuse of authority in our institutes.¹⁸ An honest examination of conscience will identify the shadow side of our exercise of authority found in all our institutes. While respectful of culture, we should never use it to justify abuse

of authority, favoritism, or even the “new tribalism” that is emerging among us, where belonging requires ideological alignment and which is prone to condemnation of the other and polarization. Our turn to lead is now, we are called as custodians of the body which is the congregation. I pray that when it is our turn to hand on the leadership of our respective institutes, we will do so with a healthier understanding of the vulnerability of its power and authority.

We can offer something from our collective wisdom, our years of discussion, our special chapters, our efforts to make the renewal called for by the Vatican Council real and tangible. Our institutes have been slowly, painfully, sometimes even comically moving from vertical models for authority to horizontal, even circular models. We need to lead this shift- to sow hope! Respectful of legitimate authority, we have learned to share our gifts. But none of this can happen if we do not assume the responsibility given to us by our institute, if we are not the ultimate “moderators” of our community.

We are leading a life in motion! We cannot afford the time to dock our respective fleets; instead, we need to sail, and repair as we go. We need to lead into a “both-and” where we continue to encourage the transformation and yet offer our sisters sufficient structural certainty that will hold the movement. Vicki Wuolle, CSA images this by saying: “I often refer to the experience as building the ship while we sail, which is an image that helps us in holding the balance between having enough structure in place to offer support to the mission we serve, while also being fluid enough to allow ourselves to be shaped by the reality.”¹⁹ We need to lead beyond the hierarchical model, where we are still the “reverend mother” surrounded by “obedient daughters”- beyond the “tyranny of consensus”²⁰ where because sometimes when there is a leader in every chair, there is no leader! Hope will not thrive in communities with absolute leaders or in leaderless communities. We need to lead into a new way of exercising authority, not by shying away from it, not by hiding behind the flower arrangements for the next feast, but by daring to be real, daring to lead from our vulnerability. We need to be real and honest about ourselves in leadership, the days we wonder why, the days we cannot see the way forward, the overwhelming and grief filled days.

We need to lead into collegiality, collaboration, and networking like never before! The model of solidarity that UISG represents needs to be owned and cultivated. We have been convened; this assembly is a place of collegiality. I would even dare to say synodality! Both collegiality and collaboration also need leadership. One of the most sacred responsibilities we hold is “connecting/networking” our institutes with other institutes, with our conferences, with religious around the world, with other organizations, and of course with the Church. I pray that when Pat Murray comes to the United States in August, she will challenge us to do just that: weave global solidarity. Leaders have the privilege of seeing the whole; leaders have the privilege of meeting other leaders. Sisters, may this Assembly be more than a photo-op with Pope Francis! May this Assembly motivate us to enter into our role as leaders of collegiality and collaboration.

We lead so we can witness to compassion as a congregational body. We collaborate and network so that this journey of prophetic compassion can lead us to a future filled with hope!

CONCLUSION: Called to Restore Simply, Gently

Movement is all around us. The ground beneath us is shifting. The institutions that have shaped much of our lives are required to enter into a profound examination of conscience. Just beyond the challenges that will transform religious life, just beyond, we will begin to see the dawn. A new smaller, more nimble but global religious life is emerging. Leadership will come from a different hemisphere; new cultures will inspire our charisms. The shift has begun and will probably be complete in our lifetimes, perhaps even during our tenure as leaders. And, all this is happening in the midst of massive changes in our world, our countries, and hopefully also our Church. We know this! Perhaps this is why we came to this Assembly to find inspiration in one another, to encourage and call forth, to know deeply, and profoundly that this moment must be faced in collaboration and collegiality.

Pope Francis offered a TED talk where he said that the future has a name, and the name of the future is hope!²¹ We need to lead our institutes in this faith because we love our charism, our sisters, and those we serve. We lead because we remember, and we lead to create memory. Can we journey into this new time trusting that the core of our stories will be retold in new and creative ways as the new maps emerge and get redrawn? Can we hope as the center of gravity of religious life shifts to the south making a new future possible, less homogenous, less Euro-centric, more diverse, more colorful, more like God's creation?

We are called as leaders by our communities to lead at this time of great movement is. Are we ready and willing? Can we be brave enough to retell our stories of compassion and courage? Can we show our sisters how they are and have been the soil from which new life will emerge? I believe that when we trust our own stories, when we trust our voice as women, when we stand in our faith in the gift of hope— we will join all those quiet men and women who are gently, simply, lovingly restoring creation, restoring peace and restoring human dignity.

We too will breed beautiful, small and frail butterflies!

- 1 *Vita Consecrata*, No. 42.
- 2 Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins: The Consecrated Life and its Ongoing Challenges since Vatican II*, Guidelines, 2018, introduction.
- 3 Márian Ambrosio, IDP, "Weaving Solidarity for Life-Living and Witnessing as Women Religious of Apostolic Life". "Tejiendo una Solidaridad para la Vida – Para vivir y dar testimonio como religiosas de vida apostólica," UISG Plenary Assembly 2016.
- 4 Jose Antonio Pagola, *Recuperar el Proyecto de Jesús*, PPC, 2015, Kindle, Loc. 823. Translation Mine.
- 5 Simon Pedro Arnold has spoken of this in Latin America, during the 80s he says "We assisted to what could be called the loss of illusions. Far from embracing the libertarian proposals, the poor accommodated and adapted to the "pots from Egypt," preferring the security of neoliberal slavery to the unconverted hypothetical freedom," *¿A dónde vamos? Una teología de la vida consagrada para un tiempo de crisis y esperanza*, Paulinas, 2012, p. 49. Translation mine.
- 6 Cindy Wooden, "Spread hope, preach Christ, don't worry about numbers pope says", CNS, 2017, <<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2017/spread-hope-preach-christ-dont-worry-about-numbers-pope-says.cfm>>
- 7 Umberto Eco, "the Woods of Loisy", in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Harvard, 1994.
- 8 Sor Juana Ines writes in defense of her writing by remembering all the learned women from antiquity and then the Christian tradition, *Respuesta a la Carta de Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, 1691. The University of Georgia has her works on line at: <https://www.ensayistas.org/consejo/about.htm>
- 9 An example is the exhibit "Mujeres que no bajan los brazos: Historias de mujeres resilientes y valientes," Médicos sin Fronteras, <https://www.msf.mx/event/exposicion-mujeres-que-no-bajan-los-brazos>
- 10 AINT I A WOMAN, Sojourner Truth, 1851 Women's Convention Akron Ohio
- 11 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All be Feminists*, Vintage Books, 2014. She says in the book published from her TED talk: "Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. I am angry. We should all be angry. Anger has a long history of bringing about positive change. In addition to anger, I am also hopeful, because I believe deeply in the ability of human beings to remake themselves for the better." P. 21.
- 12 "One Billion Rising is the biggest mass action to end violence against women (cisgender, transgender, and those who hold fluid identities that are subject to gender-based violence) in human history. The campaign, which launched on Valentine's Day 2012, began as a call to action based on the staggering statistic that 1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. With the world population at 7 billion, this adds up to more than ONE BILLION WOMEN AND GIRLS." <https://www.onebillionrising.org/about/campaign/one-billion-rising/>
- 13 Andrea Lee, IHM, "Profundo Encuentro: An Adventure of Many Surprises", National Catholic Sisters Week, March 10. 2019.
- 14 LCWR published a book sharing the experience of the conference during the Vatican Investigation, the sisters wrote they learned that: "That the Spirit works in and through groups, not solely through individuals. That contemplation is a powerful gift from God. That God loves not only us, but also those in conflict with us, equally and extravagantly. However long the night, we were made for these times." *However Long the Night: Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis*, LCWR, 2018, p.10
- 15 *Keep Watch!*, Congregation of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2014, No. 1.
- 16 See Mary Johnson's et al new book, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford, 2019.
- 14 LCWR published a book sharing the experience of the conference during the Vatican Investigation, the sisters wrote they learned that: "That the Spirit works in and through groups, not solely through individuals. That contemplation is a powerful gift from God. That God loves not only us, but also those in conflict with us, equally and

¹⁵ *Keep Watch!*, Congregation of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2014, No. 1.

¹⁶ See Mary Johnson's et al new book, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford, 2019.

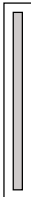
¹⁷ Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead, Brave Work, Tough Conversations*, Whole Hearts, Random House, 2018, p.4.

¹⁸ *New Wine in New Wineskins: The Consecrated Life and its Ongoing Challenges Since Vatican II*, Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2018, see numbers 19-28.

¹⁹ Vicki Wuole, CSA, "Leading: Com(with)passion(suffering)," *LCWR Occasional Papers*, Winder 2019, p. 25

²⁰ Marissa Guerin, "Resisting the Tyranny of Inclusion in Organizations", Blog April 12, 2018, <https://www.guerinconsulting.com/blog/resisting-the-tyranny-of-inclusion>

²¹ Pope Francis, "Why the only future worth building includes everyone", 2017, https://www.ted.com/talks/pope_francois_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone/transcript?language=en



SOWERS OF PROPHETIC HOPE FOR THE PLANET: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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I. Introduction

We are all aware of what is happening to our planet today. It is undeniable that devastating events concerning our planet are accelerating faster than imagined, marring the beauty and goodness of God's creation and hastening changes that threaten life-sustaining eco-systems.

Religious life has long taken on the responsibility of caring for our planet through our efforts in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. However we need to have a more concerted and unified effort to do our part in engaging in prophetic action on behalf of our planet.

In this paper, I would like to address the theme of this talk, which is the responsibility of religious life to be sowers of prophetic hope for the planet from

a biblical perspective. In preparing for this talk, several questions came to mind:

“What can we learn from the biblical prophets about hope and the contexts of their hoping?” “How do we understand this hope within the framework of the creation texts in the bible?” “What are the important elements and characteristics of prophetic hope?” As coming from the prophetic lineage, how can we as religious live our responsibility to be sowers of prophetic hope before the severity of today’s planetary reality?”

I will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the religious concept of hope in prophetic literature and its development in Christian scriptures, connecting this concept with our human responsibility to care for God’s creation and gift of life. We shall place this discussion within the framework of what Christian biblical scholars call the grand “inclusio” in the Christian scriptures which begin and end with stories of God and creation: the creation stories of Genesis 1-2, and the eschatological reflections on the new heaven and earth, and the river and tree of life in Revelations 21-22. In between these two “book-ends” are stories of faith experiences of God’s people, their reflections on who God is based on their interactions with the Divine in the midst of creation. These stories and reflections place us in the larger picture and give us metaphorical concepts of where we come from, where we are going, what is our calling and who we are in relation to all that is created.¹

II. What does Scripture say of Prophetic Hope?

First, we need to locate prophetic hope in the greater context of the biblical prophet’s vocation and one’s understanding of such a vocation.

a. Prophetic Vocation.

In the biblical tradition both in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, God appointed individuals—women and men—and poured out upon them the gift of prophecy to serve the purpose of interpreting the divine will and to speak with divine authority. It also involves acting on behalf of God to build up the community (1 Cor 14:3-5). They were also visionaries, worship-leaders, healers, miracle-workers, conscientizers, counselors, deliverers, etc. In the Christian tradition, the prophets have been regarded as visionaries of the future whose words pointed to the coming of Jesus.²

Let us then glean from the biblical literature some of the salient features of the prophetic vocation.

First, the true vision of Israel’s prophets has permeated the manner of his thoughts so that he sees things from God’s perspective. The Spirit of God enables the prophets to feel with God and to share God’s attitudes, values, feelings and emotions. This enables them to see the events of their time as God sees them and to feel the same way about these events as God feels.

Second, the prophet is also the conscience of a community and a nation. The prophet is out there watching for what might happen to the community, issuing a warning, trying to alert everyone and seeing implications in what is going on if the community does not respond to the “signs of the times.”

Third, the prophet announces darkness and gloom whenever the community is disobedient to God’s word and unfaithful to God’s covenant, but also prepares the community for the renewal of the covenant and to be open to a future full of hope. Thus, fundamental to the prophet’s mission is obedience to God’s word. The prophet always goes forth, albeit reluctantly, bearing a message that is not one’s own. That message is always extended to our world with an urging to return to what is essential, to discover a relationship with God whose love is eternal.

The prophet holds in one’s person the tension between present realities and future possibilities, between temptation to despair and fidelity to God’s promise, between images of terror and glimpses of a new tomorrow. It is within this very tension that prophetic hope is located. What then is prophetic hope and what elements and characteristics can we draw from the insights about how it is perceived and lived by biblical prophets?

b. Prophetic Hope.

Inherent in the prophetic vocation is to be a sower of hope, to be engaged in prophetic action that will eventually bring about a restoration of faith and life. The biblical prophets hold together both critique of their present time and hope for the larger meaning and purposes of God. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the prophet is not only an apocalyptic doomsayer, but also a hope-giver.³ The characteristic atmosphere all throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is that of hope even if there is no Hebrew word which corresponds exactly to “hope,” and no precise concept of hope in the sense of “desire accompanied by expectation.”⁴ The motive of hope remains the same in the prophetic literature: only Yahweh can give Israel a future and a hope (Jer 29:11; 31:17); each prophet may differ from one another in the way the message is presented depending on the historical period and context of the prophetic message.⁵ It is almost commonplace that the living has hope, but when death becomes certain, hope ceases. Hope and life are held in one breath. However, Hebrew prophetic literature shows flashes of hope that the power and covenant love of Yahweh will find a way to exhibit themselves even beyond the grave (Pss 16:16; 73:25), but this hope takes no definite form.⁶

Let us glean from this general description of prophetic hope elements and characteristics that distinguishes it from the hope that people are more familiar with, which is a more passive experience of wishing, desiring, or even optimism.

c. Elements and Characteristics of Prophetic Hope.

1. *Prophetic hope is rooted in contemplation and mysticism.* One thing is clear at the outset: prophetic hope is rooted in the prophetic experience of mysticism, which aligns the prophet with God’s plan and vision. The prophets describe their experience in imagery and symbolism accompanied by an acknowledgement that

the Word comes from Yahweh.⁷ This element is principally a compulsion by a personal external will, which the prophet cannot overcome in spite of his own unwillingness to speak the word of Yahweh, an unwillingness which is manifest in Jeremiah (Je 1:7; 6:11; 20:9; Am 3:8).⁸

The prophet's closeness to God enables him to see the entire creation—the universe, the planet and everything in it from God's perspective.

2. *Prophetic hope is critical hope.* It critiques the internal and external human structures of domination that destroy the original beauty and meaning of God's creation. It is based on the discipline of critical thinking that leads to a discerned action-oriented response to despair and negativism. Unfortunately, many of us still find ourselves longing for the restoration of the old world and its standard modes of operation, however such inclinations do not bode well for what our planet needs today. There is a urgent need for Christians in general and religious in particular to move from a space of uncritical hopefulness into critical hope, where one spurs into action from the place of discernment.

Critical hope involves letting go of the old structures, and old ways of thinking. Critical hope "subverts long-held beliefs, dismantles trusted social structures, and exposes illusions and trivialities."⁹ Instead, it demands wholehearted obedience—a deep listening to God's voice saying to Jeremiah, "Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Je 1:10). It involves telling the present to lament environmental destruction and evoking the memory of God's dream for creation, raising consciousness of the global ecocide that threatens humanity and the entire planet in the here and now.¹⁰

3. *Prophetic hope exists on the margins and is rooted in solidarity with the sufferings of those in the margins.* It is prophetic hope which gives people courage to act faithfully, even in the face of oppression and suffering. The prophets spoke words of hope to God's people when they were in exile and as they returned to their destroyed homeland.

Biblical scholars have contended that prophetic literature may be full of fractures, tensions, and contradictions, but it is firm in the conviction that conventional power structures, settled religious categories, and robust geopolitical systems are the wrong places to look for hope and God's blessings.¹¹ For instance, by the end of the book of the Prophet Jeremiah, it becomes clear that God's place in the world is not in the settled religious and political structures and among the powerful, but among the broken and dispossessed, the captured and conquered, among the vulnerable and innocent victims, thus unmasking for us today's illusions of power and reveals God's solidarity with the exiles of old and the exiles of today.¹²

4. *Prophetic hope encompasses meaning-making in communities of faith.* The biblical prophet urges the community of faith to move forward into a future full of hope by enabling them to make meaning of the situation in order to transcend

their suffering. The prophet does this by engaging people's imaginations so they can adjust the way they look at the present in order to have a broader view of a future beyond their situation of suffering.

According to theologian Cherice Bock, in the biblical books, especially those of prophecy and wisdom, one finds two major types of hope: (1) the relatively easy hope of Proverbs, which is the hope for living faithfully within one's own lifetime and providing a safe and livable future for one's children, and (2) a long-term hope of participating in the community of promise.¹³

I agree with her that it is the second kind of hope, which requires a much broader story, that will make sense of one's life. For instance, during the time of the Israelites' exile from the Promised Land, one would endure exile knowing the deeper meaning of their suffering based on the hope of God's promise of faithfulness to the community. The paschal mystery of Christ's life invites us to hope in the story of suffering, redemption, and liberation God enacted through him. The hope that the paschal mystery carries draws us to participate in that story, making meaning of one's life through the lens of that past, present, and future hope.¹⁴

5. *Prophetic hope is textual.*¹⁵ The written prophecy takes on a life of its own, often independent of the spoken word of the prophet. The text serves as a lasting reminder for future generations that God alone is the "source of our hope" (Ps 62:5). We need to return constantly to God's word and contemplate it lest we forget to hope in times of trial and difficulty.

III. Prophetic Hope within the Framework of the Biblical Texts on Creation

We simply cannot discuss our responsibility towards our planet without considering the biblical texts on creation. These texts serve as a framework in understanding our call as religious to be sowers of prophetic hope for our planet. Within this framework, the message is clear that from the abundance of God's wisdom and love, everything is created, and creation invites us into a covenant, calling forth from us a commitment to and responsibility for creation similar to God's own.

a. The Grand "Inclusio" of Genesis 1-3 and Revelations 20-22.

The theme of creation at the beginning and at the end of the Bible is highlighted as an important element in interpreting everything that falls within.¹⁶ Interpreted this way, the story of creation, sin and the Fall in Gen 1-3 and the cosmic, embodied redemption in Revelation 20-22, as well as the cosmic redemption of creation in Romans 8:18-23, present convincing evidence for the Christian expectation that the redemption offered in Christ will entail a transformation, but not destruction, of the physical and material existence of the universe.

To correct the traditional narrow Christian understanding of eternal life spent

where the “soul” goes in a disembodied existence, there is a greater need to reread creation texts in the Bible in order to appreciate the wisdom of God’s plan in gifting us with a created world and to restore our relationship with our planet.¹⁷ This has become more urgent as we are living in an age when the threat of ecological and nuclear destruction is real and pervasive. Theologians cite the irony that it is our very technological creativity and sophistication that have apparently given us the ability to destroy our planet and humanity as well.¹⁸ The consequences of these advances are making an increasing number of people view the profound holistic sensibility of our biblical ancestors and of the more “primitive” peoples with greater respect, and thus in this context we ought to listen to the biblical stories and texts to get a sense of their vision of our planet.¹⁹

Christian hope is prophetic hope for the future of our world and of our planet which is based on God’s faithful, sustaining, creative power. God’s powerful Word, which brought the world into being is powerful enough to accomplish God’s desire for what God has created.²⁰ God has called us humans to be in partnership in this divine endeavor and creativity. As Christians, we are part of a biblical tradition that asserts this explicitly of God. The world has a future because in Jesus Christ it has been chosen intentionally, labored and sacrificed for by God, as expressed powerfully in John 3:16: “For God so loves the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). The key word here is world,²¹ not just me, certainly not just my soul, not even us or our collective souls. The Christian understanding of salvation must recover its inherent universality and inclusiveness. It is something which involves not just human beings, but the whole of creation.

b. Cosmic Redemption of Creation in Romans 8:18-25

Paul in his Letter to the Romans writes that “*The whole creation is groaning in labor pains until now*” (Rom 8:22). In bondage to decay, creation waits to be set free in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God, who are themselves groaning while waiting in hope for the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:18-25). These words from Romans speak to us of prophetic hope that inspires and sustains the Christian on the journey to God.

Why would creation itself wait with eager longing for redemption? How can we imagine the gracious, compassionate love of God for the created world? Biblical scholars in answering these questions suggest that perhaps creation itself has been affected by human sinfulness as Paul suggests in these following two verses “creation was subjected to futility” (verse 20) and that “creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (verse 21).²² In this section, the text refers to the curse placed upon Adam and Eve as a result of their sin in Genesis 3:17 when God proclaims, “cursed is the ground because of you,” which indicates a curse has been placed upon creation as well.²³ In Paul’s thought, there is no radical separation of the body from the soul, neither of the body and the flesh from the rest of created existence; all of these elements will participate in the redemption offered through Christ.²⁴

It is clear that the world is not as it should be. In prophetic hope, we reread the passage from Romans with critical minds where we look at the reality of our world and realize that things need to change. Suffering and hope are contrasted. We see the system that causes us to suffer anxiety and fear, while at the same time we hold on to hope because we can envision the world as it should be.²⁵ The whole creation participates in this lament as in “groaning” while simultaneously critiquing, suffering, and hoping.²⁶ When we participate with creation in this “groaning and longing” with prophetic and critical hope which is continuous, active and expectant kind of hoping, we receive the benefit of this action in that our act helps us become conscious of our place in this process of hoping.²⁷ Hope engenders hope.

The Book of Revelation states that “the curse of destruction will be abolished” (22:3) as proclaimed in the cosmic redemption in Romans 8 and the undoing of the curse upon creation in Gen 3.

In the final vision in Revelations, the author ends his description of the revelation given to him by leaving his readers with a compelling image of a redeemed world in which the natural elements of creation (light, earth, water) all maintain a significant role within the new and heavenly Jerusalem, established by God. This image is beautifully portrayed in the tree of life, whose leaves “are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2).²⁸

It is clear from our rereading of biblical texts that creation has an intrinsic value to God; it is not merely instrumental. The entire creation, not just humans have roles to play in God’s plan of salvation; the two cannot be separated.²⁹ Neither can God’s justice be conceived of without incorporating a healing care for, and transformation of, creation along with the transformation and redemption of God’s people.³⁰ Therefore because of this interdependence, any harm inflicted upon creation is ultimately harm inflicted upon humans, and a real affront to the plan for all of creation that God has revealed in Christ.³¹

If the reality of the world and our planet as a living, active intentional and self-constituting whole is what God wishes to save, then God’s saving activity is not something that happens outside of the world’s activity, especially in and through human action.³² Therefore, the necessity that salvation comes from God and the necessity that human beings take responsibility for the well-being of the world and the planet are directly proportional—the greater our belief in God’s salvation, the greater is our obedience of faith in acknowledging our active responsibility for the whole of creation.³³

IV. The Responsibility of Religious Life in Sowing Prophetic Hope for our Planet

The impetus to reclaim the prophetic dimensions of biblical narratives arises from the fact that God calls us to think and act in relation to all spheres of human experience—social, geopolitical, economic, technological, ecological and religious. Religious life is precisely situated today where there is tremendous challenge to

live out the call to be sowers of prophetic hope.

Paul, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, affirms that God appointed in the church first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers (1 Cor 12:28). These three branches make up the structure of the church as we know now—with the bishops belonging to the apostles' branch, consecrated life to the prophets, and theologians to the teachers. Although the three branches are not totally exclusive to one another in certain positions, what is essential to the consecrated vocation is its prophetic functions—discerning God's will for the church, presenting new models of following Christ, and playing a corrective role in the church whenever the values of the gospel are forgotten or compromised.³⁴ If one of the primary goals of the prophets was to bring about the repentance of Israel—or, in some cases, the surrounding nations, it therefore implies that religious today must act as the prophets did: to usher people to repentance over the sins humans have committed against the goodness and beauty of God's creation.

Religious congregations all through the ages have given witness to their prophetic vocation in the service of the church and of the world. However, our prophetic vocation is a calling that needs continual renewal lest it becomes rigid, stale and irrelevant before the challenges of our rapidly changing times.

This continual renewal involves the following movements:

Movements of Ongoing Renewal.

1. *From Repentance to Conversion.* To be sowers of prophetic hope, we need to undergo continual conversion, especially conversion to the planet Earth as God's beloved creation. Repentance precedes conversion: a healthy realization that I have contributed somehow to the rapid devastation of the planet by my complacency or unmindful action. This type of awareness leading to repentance can only happen if we have a contemplative stance before God's creation and can see the beauty and goodness of God's creation from God's vision.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson is increasingly convinced that the conversion needed today is "a turning that will impact our whole lives."³⁵ She describes this kind of conversion in the following way:

*"It will expand our understanding of the God we are called to love with all our heart and soul, mind and strength, making clear that the Creator is also the Redeemer who accompanies the whole natural world with saving compassion. It will also expand the neighbor we are called to love as ourselves, since the beaten-up traveler left by the side of the road whose wounds we must tend to, includes needy and poor human beings along with natural ecosystems and all their creatures. Doctrine, ethics, and spirituality now become ecological as we deal with pressing human concerns in a broader planetary perspective."*³⁶

Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, has given us ample motivation and guidance in allowing God's creation to awaken in us the mystic spirit so that we can see through God's perspective his plans and intentions by inviting us to

contemplate on creation. This “contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us,” since “for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice”[LS 85]; and we can understand better the “meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God’s plan: ...Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other”[LS 86].

2. *From the Center to the Periphery.* This is a movement from the security of our established institutions to the vulnerability of being in the periphery. Prophecy necessarily leads religious to the periphery, which for Pope Francis constitutes the privileged setting for religious life. Prophetic hope therefore exists in the margins and is rooted in solidarity with the sufferings of those in the margins. By standing at the margins and not at the center of the church, religious are able to challenge the hierarchy and the entire church to respond to the “signs of the times.” For instance, even before the publication of Pope Francis’ Exhortation, *Laudato Si*, religious women, have already been in the forefront of the ecological issue, raising people’s consciousness in front of devastations brought about by global warming and other forms of manipulation of nature. This prophetic action was a fruit not only of many discussions but also of periods of prayerful consideration on how religious must respond to the challenges of our times.³⁷ This was a way of awakening the people to be more sensitive to the ecological problems of our planet by leading through example and raising people’s consciousness about their responsibility towards the environment.

3. *From critical thinking to discerned prophetic action.* In order to engage in prophetic action, we must engage in critical thinking and discernment, and allow ourselves, as a fruit of contemplation, to be personally transformed. The process of prophetic hope is not easy or comfortable. It is bound up in the essence of what it means to be human and all the capacities God endowed us in our humanity. We have the ability to choose to live with a sense of meaning sustained by hope. Theological reflection must be well-equipped to uncover narratives that advance our critical powers, our capacity to use our knowledge, imagination, intuition to distinguish what leads to death and destruction or to life and wholeness.³⁸ Such reflection offers hope in the midst of fear. Standing between the tension of hope and fear is the location of the biblical prophet who speaks truth in the midst of fear like in the case of the prophet Jeremiah who from the outset names and breaks a surplus of denials and deceptions, and dares to critique social structures, domain assumptions, and prevailing values that anesthetize the community to its true condition.³⁹

Critical thinking must be embodied, spurring us to speak and act against the system of worldly domination that tends to destroy by interpreting the term domination as human appetite for power and wealth, rather than as the providential care God displays in creation and in salvation history. Critical thinking that leads to discerned prophetic action has the audacity to not just envision but also to move toward liberation of the entire community of creation still longing and groaning for

redemption.⁴⁰

4. *From an exclusive human community to an inclusive planetary community of creation.* Constructing a prophetic environment cannot be the work of one individual but of a community of faith where everyone is involved in a communitarian prophetic response. By prophetic response, it means an intentional call to engage in passionate and courageous action to help uplift the plight of and stand in solidarity with those rendered most vulnerable in our planet.⁴¹ We need a vision of consecrated life as something much bigger than ourselves, something that reaches out beyond the here and now. We are about the anticipation of the new heaven and the new earth, of a universal and cosmic communion of a kingdom where “God will be all in all.”⁴² With communities of faith moving towards revisioning the meaning of community, there is an urgent need for religious life to enter into this ongoing reflection and glean insights from biblical exploration into the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation.

A careful rereading of biblical texts on creation will provide a broader context within which to situate the special and distinctive roles of humans in creation, recognizing these without lifting humans out of creation as above God’s other creatures.⁴³ Although biblical writers were not able to plot such interconnections based on the insights of modern science, they offer much more than science can offer in matters of value, ethics, responsibility and, especially creation’s relation with God.⁴⁴

All earthly creatures share the same planet and participate in an interdependent community, orientated above all to God our common Creator. Our prophetic vocation must open us up to others and to the world, to offer ourselves, our communities and our planet earth as a place of inclusive hospitality for humanity and the whole of creation.

In the Christian scriptures, relationships and community are important in finding and maintaining hope. In the community of creation, we need an interdependent network of care. Caring for our planet is becoming an imperative in expressing our love of neighbor. We sow prophetic hope for our planet when our communities understand and live the commandment of “love of neighbor” in the wider context of caring for our vulnerable planet. Loving our neighbors must include doing what we can to enable our planet to sustain the flourishing of our fellow human beings. It requires us to assess our lifestyles and priorities in light of the sustainable life of all our “neighbors”—those who live next door and those on the other side our planet.⁴⁵

V. Conclusions and Implications

Having explored the various biblical dimensions of our prophetic vocation against the background of our planet’s vulnerable condition, we return to the question of what is the responsibility of religious life as sowers of prophetic hope for our vulnerable planet.

Here are some salient points based on our rereading of biblical texts:

1. Like the biblical prophets, religious life must provide encouragement for the people of faith to move forward into a hoped-for future by assisting them to make meaning out of the devastating situations our planet is going through and to challenge them to discern prophetic action. This cannot happen without forming religious develop a capacity for contemplation and critical thinking that leads to discern prophetic actions for the sake of our planet.
2. We saw in the Christian scriptures that relationships and community are important in finding and maintaining prophetic hope. Beginning with ourselves and our institutions as communities of faith we go through the process of repentance towards ecological conversion. We lament for the sins of omission and commission towards God's creation as we move from repentance to conversion. Each individual religious is invited to begin with one's own inner ecological conversion as part of ongoing formation. In fact, we are challenged to integrate the process of ecological conversion in all levels of formation.
3. We are challenged to revision our understanding of consecrated life and the vows within the context of our relationship to all of God's creation. This requires rereading the biblical references in coming to a renewed understanding of our consecrated vocation. This must be integrated into all levels of formation.
4. We are called to enter into greater solidarity with those in the periphery as this is the location of our prophetic vocation. To speak and act on behalf of our suffering brothers and sisters due to the many devastations happening in our planet.
5. Our prophetic vocation calls us to be agents of healing in the broken relationships of humanity and of our vulnerable planet.

Thus, to be true to our prophetic vocation, we can only be sowers of prophetic hope for the planet if we are rooted and immersed in God's word, contemplating it as Jesus did who was deeply connected with everything that came into being as spoken by his Father. With poor, chaste, and obedient Jesus, our prophetic vocation calls us to situate ourselves in the periphery. It demands that we live our vows as a public commitment to remain open to the God of surprises who disrupts our established lifestyles and mindsets, and invites us to ecological conversion in order to help bring wholeness and healing to our broken and vulnerable planet. Like the biblical prophets, we are called to give counter-cultural witness to the pervading culture of domination that is spiraling our planet towards destruction. It is through prophetic hope that we groan with the whole of God's creation as we await the redeeming power of God's love restoring the original goodness and beauty of all there is.

Reflection Question:

Given the particular charism and mission of your Congregation, what do you discern as God's specific invitation(s) for you to live out the call to be "sowers of prophetic hope" in the different insertions in the world where your Congregation is found?

¹ Cherice Bock, "Climatologists, Theologians, and Prophets: Toward an Ecotheology of Critical Hope", *Crosscurrents*, March 2016, p. 8.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen. Ed., *Harper's Biblical Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), p. 826.

³ See Bock, pp. 9-10.

⁴ John McKenzie, SJ, *Dictionary of the Bible*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998. Originally published in UK: Geoffrey Chapman: 1976, pp.368-9.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stulman, Louis, Kim, Hyun Chul Paul.; *You Are My People : An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, EBSCO : eBook Collection Account: ns101917.main.eds. (EBSCOhost) - printed on 1/25/2019 2:08 AM via USJ UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, p.95.

¹⁰ Margaret Scott, "Greening the Vows: *Laudato Si'* and Religious Life, *The Way*, 54/4 (October 2015), p. 85.

¹¹ See Louis Stulman and Hyum Chul Paul Kim,

- p.95.
 12 Ibid.
 13 See Bock, p. 15.
 14 Ibid.
 15 See Louis Stulman and Hyum Chul Paul Kim, p. 95. They assert that hope is enshrined textually in the Bible.
 16 Thomas Bushlack, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Creation in the New Testament" in Tobias Winright, editor. *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, Christian Brothers Publications, 2011, p.106. These texts, according to the author, are referred to as an "*inclusio*," a literary tool used by the authors of Scripture, in which an important theme occurs at the introduction and then again at the end of a text and highlights the theme as an important element in interpreting everything that falls between.
 17 Ibid., p. 103.
 18 John R. Sachs. *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 21. The author cites Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
 19 Ibid.
 20 Ibid., p. 23.
 21 The word "world," as doctrinally defined in the Bible, is NOT referring to other planets in outer space but to defined ages and prevailing conditions during those ages on planet Earth, be they past, present, or future.
 22 See Bushlack, p. 103.
 23 Ibid.
 24 Ibid.
 25 See Bock, pp. 26-7.
 26 Ibid.
 27 Ibid.
 28 See Bushlack, p. 107.
 29 Ibid.
 30 Ibid., p. 108.
 31 Ibid., p. 109.
 32 See Sachs, p. 24
 33 Ibid.
 34 Based on the lecture notes of John Fuellenbach, S.V.D. on the Church, East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1999.
 35 See Johnson, p. 195.
 36 Ibid., pp. 195-6.
 37 UCAnews.com, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2009, <http://www.ucanews.com/2009/10/05/religious-add-green-vow-to-consecrated-life/>. Retrieved 2009-10-18.
 38 Clingerman, Forrest, "Theologians as Interpreters—Not Prophets—in a Changing Climate," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.2 (2015), p. 346.
 39 See Stulman, Louis, Kim, Hyun Chul Paul, p. 95.
 40 See Bock, p. 11.
 41 Angela D. Sims, Douglas Powe Jr., and J. Bernard Hill, "Reclaiming the Prophetic: Toward a Theology of Hope and Justice in a Fragmented World," *Religio-Political Narratives in the United States*, p. 95.
 42 See Scott, p. 84.
 43 See Bauckham, p. 64.
 44 Ibid.
 45 Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo. *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan. ePub Edition©February 2018: ISBN 978-0-3204-1655-5.



UISG CAMPAIGN FOR THE PLANET: "LAUDATO SI" AND THE WAY FORWARD PRESENTATION OF A COMMITMENT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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Original in English

*"When we speak of the 'environment' what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it."
(LS#139)*

Foundation

On June 18, 2018, the UISG Board launched the campaign: *Sowing Hope for the Planet*, sharing efforts of women religious in putting *Laudato Si* into practice. Already, *Laudato Si* was spreading throughout religious communities, becoming a deeply meaningful connection with people and the earth through faith and the words of Pope Francis. This realization led to the awareness of this phenomenon developing into a deeper interconnection, carrying the message to a global network of religious working together to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." (LS #49) This collective listening creates a collective voice and a collective action that carries a powerful potential for making the message a reality rather than doing it as individuals. Emphasizing the fundamental connection that exists between the environmental crisis and the social crisis that we are currently experiencing, Pope Francis asks us for a personal and communal ecological conversion, often reminding us that "everything is interconnected."

History

The timing of the campaign comes with the growing awareness and urgency of climate change and the need to address its impact on the environment and society. *Laudato Si'* offers a spiritual relationship and solutions to a seriously critical situation that are so desperately needed in our world today. It begins with awareness and unfolds with inspiration, giving our Sisters' voice the influential power to make a difference, coordinating experiences that provide them and their connections the opportunities to become fully sensitive to the situation of our common home, so as "to dare to turn what is happening to the world into their own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it." (LS#19)

This provided an opportunity to not only develop a network that could help to spread what is being done, but also to highlight the work of women religious. For a long time, many have actively been working to stop the Earth's devastation and its people, and this gathering, highlights their action and commitments.

The concept note was developed through the collaborative efforts of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Secretariat and the Global Catholic Climate Movement through the initiative of the International Union of Superior Generals (UISG), bringing together the richness and connections of its member congregations, so that the "interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan." (LS#164)

Having a carefully developed plan has enabled us to fold into the framework new ways forward that would emerge from our experience with the webinars and our knowledge of the evolving needs of our care for creation. The structure of the plan was to:

- Coordinate efforts of the members of UISG
- Utilize the best means of communication
- Evaluate the effectiveness
- Find the best way to strengthen coordination
- Partner with organizations
- Develop a statement for the campaign at the Plenary to promote the position of UISG

Original action plans included:

- Webinars to announce the campaign and as an ongoing way to coordinate
- Coordinating prayers in various translations
- Celebrating the Season of Creation
- Observance of World Water Day on March 22
- Celebrating Earth Day on April 22
- Promoting GCCM ongoing opportunities for participation

Developing a timeline by means of the five webinars that have taken place offers a view of the organic development of the campaign. Topics were not initially planned, but rather unfolded as we opened the space and allowed the action to

transform, following the natural passion and creativity of those involved. Thus, as Pope Francis states “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education.” (LS #15)

Webinar #1: Laudato Si’: Everything is Interconnected

- Launching the campaign with objectives, actions, witnessing potential, and beneficiaries
- Developing the foundational relationship that we are all interconnected... with each other, with the earth, with all living beings

Webinar #2: Saving Our Common Home and the Future of Life on Earth

- Developing the awareness of the critical situations our world is in as well as opportunities to meet the challenges presented therein.
- Third anniversary of *Laudato Si*.
- Pope Francis asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”
- Focus on how to create a massive movement to meet the crises in our world.

Webinar #3: Inspiring Action with Love: Stories from Around the Globe

- Developing the Presence of Strategic Plans in Global Action.
- Focus on the promotion that has occurred and hearing for the first time from women religious who are engaged in action.

Webinar #4: In Solidarity: Interconnecting Global and Local Concerns

- Developing the Impact of Major Meetings for the Life of the Planet and Coordinated Action.
- Campaign progress with the upcoming launch of the website.
- Contributions from those who participated in major meetings and who could offer best practices for major concerns.

Webinar #5: Growing Seeds of Hope: Listening to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor

- Developing the Integration of Attending to the Needs of the Earth and the Poor.
- Contributions from speakers whose communities have a process for the action they are engaging in globally.

Guided by the basic flexible framework for the campaign, we became more aware of the situations and the needs expressed by the Sisters and the richness shared with their resources. Expectations became clearer.

We affirmed the work which was already being done. We had a balance of

sharing the work of the Sisters in various countries, in diverse ministries and in different stages of development. We also included information from the major events such as the third anniversary of *Laudato Si*, COP 24, Preparations for the Synod on the Amazon and updates from GCCM which is involved in a number of Catholic Church related experiences. Honoring guidance from *Laudato Si*, indeed, the process was recognizing the work of the Sisters, “to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.” (LS#210)

Events and Resources

With ongoing development from the experience of women religious, the need became clear for an interactive platform that could hold the enormity of all the Sisters have been doing and be entirely dedicated to their works and which could be an interactive tool for them to both share and organize their efforts. A dedicated website would fulfill all of the needs which became apparent as we made our way forward... thus, the website was born.

The website, in six languages, offers various pages of information about the campaign and goals, with interactive and unifying areas which are updated regularly.

- Home page: highlights, news, and an action map which are updated with current information and the map growing a leaf at each location of action a sister has shared.
- Goals page: informational, with the goals of the campaign.
- Events page: updated with both upcoming and past opportunities for participation; this can include international days such as, World Water Day, Earth Day, webinars, Season of Creation, etc.
- Resources page: the heart of the website... it is the joint effort of the sisters and their willingness to share what they are doing and materials they are using in their efforts.
- Contact page: for contacting campaign coordinators.

A newsletter has been created to highlight what is happening, what is coming up, and as a way for congregations to get the big picture of where we are at. Through regular e-mail, a condensed version of what is happening is provided.

Moving to the heart of the campaign with the Sisters listening to the “cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor,” and what they are doing about it, we have prepared a video demonstrating some of the situations which are “both cries of the earth and of the poor.” The second part shows the various works that Sisters have shared with us from their congregational action and missions.

Where We are At

As seen in the video, congregations are engaging in many important works. There is much that we can learn as we network and encourage one another to share resources. These works are occurring all over the world and we have the opportunity to bring them all together here to allow them to grow and spread in a joint effort gathered under a unifying perspective. From a Sister's efforts, certain themes emerged and categories of action determined how their efforts would be organized, with their selection and appropriate placement.

- Local and global communities
- Advocacy
- Parish
- Congregation
- *Laudato Si* study/course materials
- Schools: elementary, middle school, high school, and college

To understand the effect of both the campaign and the work of the Sisters, the following data were gathered:

- Video statistics:
- Season of Creation in 4 languages: Nearly 2000 views
- World Water Day in 5 languages: Nearly 17,000 views
- Webinars participants: for the April 11 session, 359 registration and many of those included groups of Sisters who gathered to view the session together

Interviews were also conducted with important connections:

- Sr. Alaide Deretti, FMA, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians and General Councilor for Missions
- *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology. She will explore the importance of the synod; insights from the preparation process; helpful information for the universal church; and, suggestions for engagement during the synod.*
- Tomás Insua, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) and Collaborator of the UISG Campaign: Sowing Hope for the Planet
- *Discuss the mission of GCCM; programs and events of Season of Creation; Engagement with the synod; COP25; Celebration of Earth Day 50th anniversary; 5th Anniversary of Laudato Sí; efforts to include Sisters in various offerings and in major events.*
- Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, SDB, Coordinator of the sector on Ecology and Creation in the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Develop (DPIHD)

- *Discuss the purpose of the section and describe some of the upcoming program opportunities: 4th anniversary of Laudato Si in Nairobi, Kenya (July); World Water Day (22 March); Celebration of Earth Day 50th anniversary; and, 5th anniversary of Laudato Si.*

Moving Forward: Where are we going? Where do we want to go?

Next steps

One major opportunity provided by the campaign is to raise a united voice and develop a collective strength to impact what is happening in our world. What is clear in our world history is that designated power structures usually are given the bigger say in what is happening and, often, the loudest voice. The UISG is a unifying voice for the Sisters around the world. Through this campaign, we have the opportunity to organize the voice of the Sisters in the effort on many levels of structures in order to enhance and recognize our contribution to the care of our Common Home.

Again, our hope is that the campaign will be a platform that brings these works together in a global movement by banding together in our efforts. The uniqueness of the campaign is that it is a myriad of efforts in many areas which can be brought together under the broad umbrella of “hearing the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor.”

We join our efforts with the universal Church and our partners with local, national and global influence. The next steps include planned events and participation in points of action, and use of the momentum and energy of established days/ events as tools to further spread the message of all. These are opportunities we want to promote and ensure we are participating in.

Future of Campaign

Survey Comments

Some themes that emerged from the survey about the future of the campaign offer us an opportunity to listen to the participants and to allow them to influence the unfolding of the campaign. It is important for their voices to be heard.

There were a number of suggestions for us to consider in the future for the campaign:

- Have the resources available in even more languages
- Provide a practical orientation for those beginning the to be involved in the campaign
- Promote the use of a survey as a guide in helping to develop the spirituality of a congregation for Sowing Hope for the Planet
- Sessions on divestments in fossil fuels and investments in alternative energy resources

- Interest in information on the carbon footprint
- Have a place for sharing ideas
- Affirmation of working in solidarity
- Continue collecting such good resources from our religious communities

Much gratitude is continually expressed for the networking that has taken place because of the campaign. Groups have gathered to hear the webinars in their different languages and to discuss this experience in the common language of the group. The experience has increased the awareness of what the Sisters and their connections are doing to live *Laudato Si*. The live space of the webinars, even at global distances, allows us to come together in a dynamic way and to grow together as religious Sisters. We are seeing what we all are doing and experiencing our pain, we are engaging our efforts in the spiritual contexts of our congregations following of the Gospel and carefully thought through actions. Celebrations have brought joy to our efforts to bring hope.

The campaign needs your support in order for it to thrive and realize its potential. If you have not done so, please submit the name of a contact person from your congregation who would be responsible for sharing the information of the campaign with all of the Sisters. While we send out information to everyone in our contact list, it is still an important aspect to have one person who will be responsible for disseminating any campaign information and opportunities to their congregations, so all sisters are having the opportunity to be involved.

Commitment for the common good in our environment, our common home

After a year of reflecting on the work we have been doing together and taking seriously the call to take into our hearts the pain of the world, we accept the responsibility to determine what is ours to do. As international congregations we need to look at the ways we have been guilty of environmental destruction and disregard for these consequences to one another and especially to the poor. Sisters are present in countries where the lifestyle negatively impacts the rise in temperature, effecting climate change and where they are most affected by climate change. Our communities are both intimate with the cause and effect. With our personal commitment to one another, we are ideally positioned to respond compassionately in an integrated effort. As a community of Sisters living the Gospel, in solidarity with one another, we know that everything is interconnected, and we wish to live our religious life for the common good in our environment, our common home.

Therefore,

*We commit ourselves to both personal and communal conversion and
We wish to move forward together in an orchestrated
and coordinated response in
Listening to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor
As we go forth as instruments of hope
In the heart of the world.*

As Pope Francis reminds us, “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” (LS14)

As a result of our commitment, each General Superior is asked to discern appropriate action in one of the areas:

1. Observing of the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4)
2. Engaging in the experience of the Synod “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology”
3. Following prayerfully the events of the Synod
4. Advocating for the rights of indigenous people
5. Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Earth Day (April 22)
6. Celebrating the 5th Anniversary of *Laudato Si*
7. Supporting youth involvement in the campaign
8. Advocating for the commitment for countries to sustain targets to not exceed of 1.5 Celsius rise in global temperature
9. Deciding to divest from fossil fuels and investments into alternative energy projects
10. Choosing to observe international days
11. Considering other suggestions

Thank you for all you do to make the world a better place!

For information info@sowinghopefortheplanet.org
and the website www.sowinghopefortheplanet.org

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE XXI PLENARY
ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION
OF SUPERIORS GENERAL (UISG)

Paul VI Audience Hall

Friday, 10 May 2019

Original in Italian

Holy Father's speech delivered to the UISG President

Dear Sisters,

I am very pleased to be able to receive you today on the occasion of your General Assembly and to wish you an Easter Season filled with hope, joy and passion in conveying the Gospel to all corners of the earth. Yes, Easter is all this and it invites us to be witnesses to the Risen One, living a new Evangelizing phase marked by joy. No one can rob us of the passion to evangelize. There is no Easter without mission: “Go and preach the Gospel to all mankind” (cf. Mk 16:15-20). The Lord asks his Church to reveal Christ’s triumph over death; he asks us to reveal his life. Go, sisters, and proclaim the Risen Christ as the source of the joy that nothing and no one can take away from us. Constantly renew your encounter with the Risen Jesus Christ and you will be his witnesses, bringing the gentle and comforting joy of the Gospel to all men and women loved by the Lord, in particular those who feel they are victims of the culture of exclusion.

Consecrated life, as Saint John Paul II once stated, like any other reality of the Church, is going through “a difficult and trying period” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 13). Before the declining number that consecrated life is experiencing, particularly of women, the temptation is that of discomfort, of resignation, or of “becoming fossilized” in saying “it’s always been done this way”.

In this context I emphatically repeat to you what I have told you on other occasions: do not be afraid of being few in number, but of being insignificant, of no longer being the light that illuminates those who are immersed in the “darkest night” of history. Nor be afraid of “confessing humbly, with immense confidence in the God who is Love, our own weakness” (*Letter to All Consecrated People*, 21 November 2014). Instead, be afraid: panic if you cease to be the salt that gives flavour to the life of the men and women of our society. Work tirelessly to be sentries who announce the arrival of dawn (cf. Is 21:11-12); to be leaven wherever you are and with whoever you are, even if this appears to bring you no tangible and immediate benefits (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 210).

There are many people who need you and await you. People in need of your friendly smile to give hope back to them; of your hands to support them on their journey; of your words to sow hope in their hearts; of your love in the style of Jesus (cf. Jn 13:1-15) to heal the deepest wounds caused by loneliness, rejection and exclusion. Never give in to the temptation of self-referentiality, of transforming yourself into “closed armies”. Nor take refuge “in work in order to avoid the operative capacity of the charism” (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 56). Instead develop the *creativity of charity* and experience *creative fidelity* to your charism. With them you will be able to propose anew the “creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 37), by opening new paths to bring the encouragement and the light of the Gospel to the diverse cultures in which you live and work in the many spheres of society, as they did in their time. With them you will be able to *reexamine* your charisms, to go to the root, experiencing the present comfortably, without being afraid to journey, “without letting the water stop running [...]. Consecrated life is like water: if it is stagnant, it will become putrid” (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 44-45). In this way, without losing memory — ever necessary to live the present with passion — you will avoid both “restorationism” and ideology, of whatever sign it may be, that do so much harm to consecrated life and to the Church herself.

And [do] all that with your presence and your humble and discreet service, always enlivened by freely given prayer and by the prayer of adoration and praise. To pray, praise and adore is not a waste of time. The more united we are with the Lord, the closer we will be to humanity, in particular to suffering humanity. “Our future will be full of hope”, as the motto of this Plenary states, and our projects will be projects for the future, in the measure in which we will pause each day before the Lord in the gratuitousness of prayer, if we do not want the wine to turn into vinegar and the salt to become flavourless. It will be possible to know projects that the Lord has made for us only if we keep our eyes and our heart turned toward the Lord, contemplating his face and listening to his Word (cf. Ps 34[33]). Only in this way will you be able to reawaken the world with your prophecy, a distinctive trait and priority of your being religious and consecrated women (cf. *Letter to All Consecrated People*, ii, 2). The more urgent it is to *be decentralized* in order to go into the existential peripheries, the more urgent it is to *be centred* on Him and to *concentrate* on the existential values of our charisms.

Among the essential values of religious life there is fraternal life in community. I note with much joy the great results obtained in this dimension: more intense communication, fraternal correction, the search for synodality in leading the community, fraternal welcome with respect for diversity..., but at the same time I am concerned about the fact that there are brothers and sisters who lead their life on the margins of the fraternity; sisters and brothers who have been illegitimately absent from the community for years and for this reason I promulgated a *Motu Proprio*, *Communis Vita*, with very precise norms in order to avoid these cases.

With regard to fraternal life in community, I am also concerned that there are

Institutes in which multiculturalism and internationalism are not seen as a richness but as a threat, and they are experienced as conflict instead of being experienced as new opportunities that reveal the true face of the Church and of religious and consecrated life. I ask those in charge of the Institute to be open to the very newness of the Spirit, who blows where it wills and as it wills (cf. Jn 3:8), and to prepare the generations of other cultures to assume responsibility. Sisters, may you live the internationalism of your Institutes as good news. May you live the changing face of your communities with joy, and not as a necessary evil for preservation. Internationalism and interculturalism do not turn backwards.

I am concerned with the generational conflicts, when young people are not able to bring forward the dreams of the elderly in order to make them bear fruit, and the elderly do not know how to receive the prophecies of the young (cf. Jl 2:28). How I like repeating: young people run a lot, but the elderly know the journey. Both the wisdom of the elderly and the inspiration and strength of the young are necessary in a community.

Dear sisters, through you I thank all the sisters of your Institutes for the great work they do in the various peripheries in which they live. The periphery of education, where educating is always winning, winning for God; the periphery of healthcare, where you are servants and messengers of life, and of a life of worth; and the periphery of pastoral work in all its different manifestations where, by witnessing to the Gospel with your lives, you are revealing the maternal face of the Church. Thank you for what you are and for what you do in the Church. Never stop being women. "It is not necessary to stop being a woman in order to conform" (*The Strength of Vocation*, n. 111).

At the same time, I ask you: cultivate passion for Christ and passion for humanity. Without passion for Christ and for humanity there is no future for religious and consecrated life. Passion will lead you to prophecy, to be the fire that kindles other fires. May you continue to take steps in the mission shared among different charisms and with the laity, inviting them to important works without leaving anyone without due formation and a sense of belonging to the charismatic family. May you work for mutual relationships with pastors, including them in your discernment and integrating them in the selection of participants and ministries.

The journey of consecrated life, both female and male, is a journey of ecclesial discernment. Things do not work outside the Church and parallel to the local Church. May you pay great attention to both the permanent and initial formation and to the formation of formators capable of listening and accompanying, of discerning, going to meet those who knock on our doors. And even amid the trials that we might be going through, may you live your consecration with joy. This is the best vocational propaganda.

May the Virgin accompany you and protect you with her maternal intercession. For my part I wholeheartedly bless you and bless all the sisters whom the Lord has entrusted to you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

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