



**To the whole Congregation**

*Dear sisters,*

An affectionate greeting to each one.

With this circular I wish to communicate the theme of the year that will inspire and guide our reflection, prayer, the life in community and the mission. We continue to deepen the XVII General Chapter, as we have done so far, dedicating each year to its different aspects (year 2018 - Missionary Reform; year 2019 - Accompaniment; year 2020: One Family).

Even in the present context of so many instabilities and uncertainties, thinking at the same time of the assemblies and chapters of some Entities, we want to accompany the 2021 from the deepening on our reason of being in the Church and the world: "Announce the gospel to all creatures." In this fundamental dimension of our charism we will include the commitments of the XVII General Chapter of JPIC and Review of works.

In these months we have all come across an agenda that we had neither expected nor wanted. For us, Claretian women, always on the way out towards the other, it is a hard experience. We are learning to live in new circumstances as an opportunity to discover the footprints of God in these traces of history with apostolic creativity.

Without losing sight placed on our context, my gaze is projecting with a sense of gratitude and hope. I recall that in the forum of the Congregation held on December 6, 2020 with the motto "Mary Immaculate opens us to hope" we have shared the richness that has emerged in this time of limitations and confinement. We have asked ourselves what calls we perceive and what changes the reality asks of us. How much vitality in the communities that energize the mission, seeking new ways that allow us to continue in the evangelical service! The values that give us life have resounded in this context: deep looking, the style of Jesus, caring for relationships. Even proposals emerged ... asking ourselves if, given the ways we are organized, we can really respond to the needs that the current social reality challenges us with.

We were grateful for the ever-new strength of the Spirit that moves from within these new paths of an ever surprising and fresh proclamation of the Gospel because it is Jesus himself who sustains it.

This is the same Spirit that urges us from the beginning. "The spirit of our institute is the expansion of the Holy Law of the Lord, purely and simply." With this phrase, the Mother Foundress motivated the availability of the sisters of Carcaixent before the foundation of Vélez Rubio, (C. 326) since they have all promised "in imitation of the Holy Apostles to work until they die in the Lord, to teach every creature the holy Law of the Lord (Aim and Goal)". We were born in the Church for this mission: as Sisters of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionaries: to live and proclaim the good news of Jesus seeking the Kingdom of God and his justice (DC 2017, 9). Because our life is mission, it is announcement, our community is announcement, any apostolic activity to which we are sent is announcement, no matter how small it is.

The growth and fruitfulness of the charism has led us to carry out this mission **walking with others and as an apostolic body**; it is an essential condition and a way of doing it (DC 2017, 5). This is how one of the urgent apostolic horizons emerges which the "missionary reform" makes fruitful among us. So much has been done and we still have a lot to do.

**How are you with it? How are you living the very reason for our being?** Forgive my daring, but with this question I would like to connect with each one, at the same level of depth, not so much of doing but of being. Let's not respond immediately, automatically; let us allow the question sink in there where our vocational life is reborn.

Let's look at our Founders, examples of passionate people, missionaries and reformers (DC 2017, 5). Maria Antonia Paris discovered her vocation in her encounter with Christ and with the suffering Church. The two loves remained alive and emerged naturally throughout her life, in times of joyful growth of communities and in times of crisis. With a prophetic spirit, she saw the members of the new Order "as a living copy of the first Apostles, considering each other as pilgrims on this earth."<sup>1</sup> Saint Anthony Mary Claret, set out as a missionary because he was enthusiastic about Jesus of the Gospel who becomes Word and the joyful announcement of Salvation. In one of his last letters from Rome he wrote to Mother Antonia: "My occupations have been and currently are in the holy ministry. In Paris... I preached the whole of Lent".<sup>2</sup> The charity of Christ urged him.

Every time we return to inspiring texts we feel a fascination that attracts us and prompts us. We can always return to these readings in a shared way, in the communities, with the laity, because they contain a transforming strength. Let us make use of this time creating a space to share the fire of mission that burns in our hearts. It is a way of caring for each other, of renewing trust in

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<sup>1</sup> Const. 1869, T1. Ch. I, 4. Const. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cartas de los Orígenes. C. 283

God who can do everything, and the trust in ourselves that we bear the seal of courage, audacity and creativity to put it at the service of proclaiming the Word.

The XVII General Chapter gives us a key to put into practice this "proclaiming the Gospel to all creatures" in everyday life. It says: "we bring the words and gestures of Jesus to the hearts of men and women as a way of humanization and hope" (DC 2017, 14). This way of living and proclaiming the Gospel is so universal that no one should feel limited or excluded. It means offering our time to stay with the sister or brother; it is to give ear to listening, eyes to contemplating and so offer consolation and companionship. Bringing the words and gestures of Jesus closer to people is to take charge of the suffering, of the fatigue that a major part of humanity experience in this time and to try to do it in a concrete way, in a Samaritan way of caring for human fragility (FT 79). This gives us life and saves us from self-referentiality, from living as if we were just surviving. Living in this way will keep our hearts joyful. It is of being not a spectator but put within the processes of change, as women of faith, who have also experienced compassion, walking with trust in God and with discernment. The reality is merciless; it is there. It enters our houses and impossible to make our ears deaf or eyes blind. As missionaries we must continue to discern in each place the evangelical gaze and gesture to continue our XVII Chapter's challenge.

There is no doubt that this process demands a constant change in us. But nothing will change if we do not admit the need of it. This change can only come to life if we are able to look at ourselves from within, what we do feel and desire, taking note of what is happening in our hearts. (We have instruments such as examination, mutual listening, community meetings, apostolic evaluations). And we also need a look from the outside, an exercise from time to time to observe ourselves taking a distance, reading the meaning of our presence here and now. Not to judge us but to find the footprints of God that calls. It is a dynamic that never ends. This year, in a special way we will make an effort to do it with all those we walk with. Together, participating, and complementing each other, we will discover the light and strength of the Claretian charism as a present gift, which is enkindling the life of so many people.

With the desire to help each other to live out this year in communion, the proposals and initiatives will be suggested from the different prefectures to continue the reflection and the exchange of experiences.

On this day in which many of us renew our vows, I am sending to each one of you the best wishes of the path of prophetic fidelity. A hug with affection and united in mutual prayer

Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> of February of 2021

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