

OPENING ADDRESS OF THE XII GENERAL CHAPTER

Sr. Antonella Tovagliari

Congregation Leader

Dearest Sisters,

With great joy and a cordial and affectionate welcome, we begin the XII General Chapter.

As representatives of our missionary family, we are together, perhaps with a bit of a heartbeat for the days that await us. Some of us are veterans of the General Chapters... others, (more than half) are living this experience for the first time. We hope that these will be days of peace, trust, and hope for all.

As we begin the Chapter work, let us feel deeply in communion with the Church on the synodal journey, which will have its second session right here in Rome, next October. Our Chapter is also an ecclesial event, a moment of special presence of the Lord, who pours out His Spirit on each of us, as He poured it out on the apostles gathered in the Upper Room.

Enlightened and encouraged by the preparatory meetings held last June, we enter the Chapter with a common desire, expressed several times and also reported in the Work Document: *to bring to the attention of the Chapter the reality of the Institute as an “apostolic body”*. *We are one apostolic body and asking ourselves whether we live as an apostolic body is essential for any discernment for the effectiveness of the mission, in the right balance between local needs and global perspectives.*

Each of us enters this Chapter with one's own uniqueness: with one's own personal characteristics, lived experience and expectations, with different visions of religious life, linked to the culture of origin and the one in which we live, to the age, to the Church to which we belong. We are 45 in this “Chapter cenacle”, 23 sisters of Indian nationality, 11 Italians, 6 Brazilians and 2 Bangladeshi. For the first time in the history of our Institute, 2 Cameroonian sisters and 1 Papuan sister are Chapter members: an intercultural reality and richness that is a reason for joy for all of us.

Each of us is here as a member of our own organism and on behalf of the sisters who chose us. However, as Sr. Maia reminded us in the preparatory meetings, we must remember that the point of reference of the General Chapter is the common good of the Institute; for this reason, we ask for the grace not to lose this point of reference in any of the sessions of the Chapter work and in our discussions of sharing and discernment.

Before concluding, I would like to recall some fundamental attitudes to foster a climate of collaboration and discernment, so as to live the General Chapter in a fruitful way.

The first and most fundamental attitude is that of profound listening: let us all listen to each other attentively, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our discernment; let us look at the reality of our missionary family through the eyes of others, allowing them to enrich us and to see, together, something new; let us recognize and celebrate the gifts that God has sown in people, in our cultures and in the cultures of the peoples to whom we are sent. Finally, let us cultivate attitudes of humility and openness to learn from the experience and competence of each one.

Let us begin the Chapter work, convinced that much can change and can be done if we decide *to think together* to obey the one mission.

To Mary, mother of Jesus, woman of faith, open to the Spirit and courageous in fulfilling the Father's mission, we entrust what we are about to experience in the coming weeks, so that the Chapter may be a moment of spiritual growth and renewal for the entire Congregation.

Pray for us, Mother Dones and Mother Igilda,

because inspired like you by Fr Manna and Monsignor Balconi

we can live in obedience to the Gospel and in communion with the Church,

in the joy of fraternity and in the fidelity to our missionary vocation.

Trusting in the Spirit who calls us and guides us, I declare the XII General Chapter open.