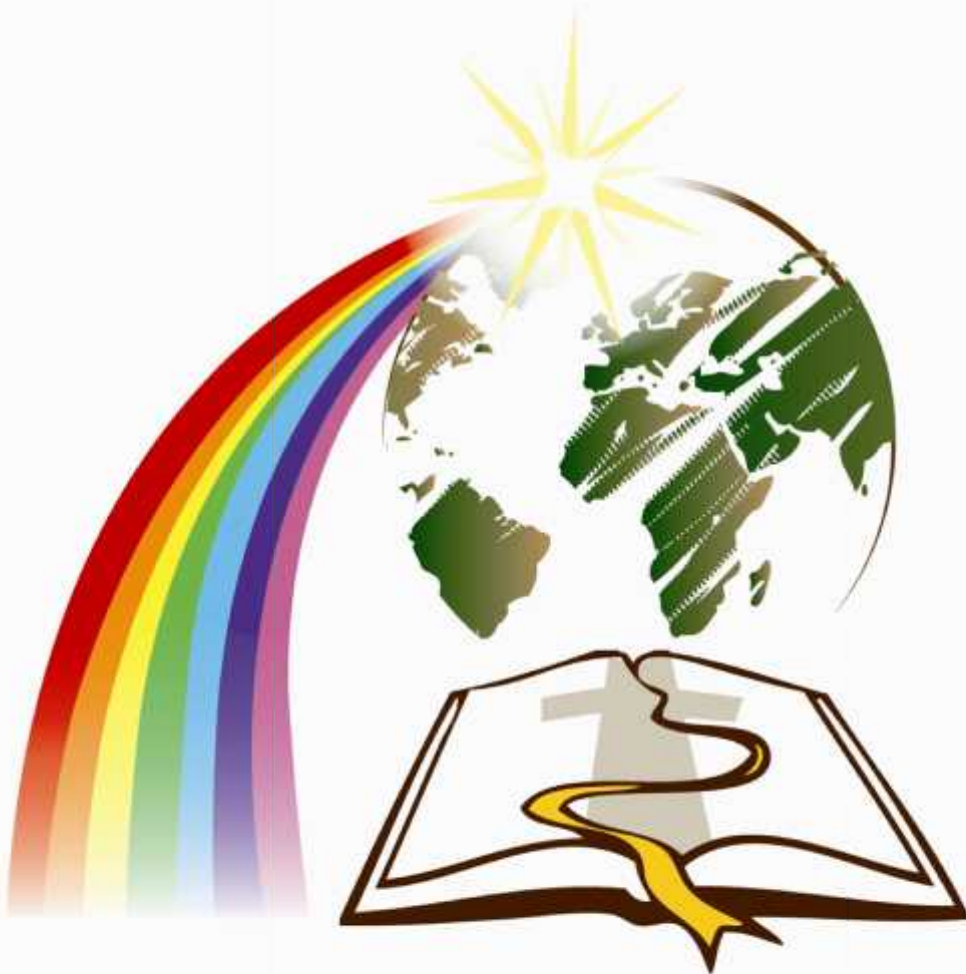


## Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

**WOMEN APOSTLES,  
ROOTED IN THE WORD OF GOD,  
DARE TO BE SEEDS OF COMMUNION AND HOPE**



***"Live in unity... and they will believe..." Jn 17:21***

***Acts of the General Chapter 2013***



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## **THE 16<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF APOSTLES**

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### ***Introduction***

#### ***WOMEN APOSTLES, ROOTED IN THE WORD OF GOD, DARE TO BE SEEDS OF COMMUNION AND HOPE***

In July 2013, we OLA sisters from all Provinces and Districts gathered together as one family in Monte Cucco, Rome to celebrate the life force of our Institute and evaluate our experiences during the past five years. At the beginning of our 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, we were all invited to reflect on the questions:

- 1. Where have we come from?** - our history, through a look into some aspects of our beginnings;
- 2. Who are we?** - our present reality, statistics, our apostolic activities in all the places where we are;
- 3. Where are we going?** - our future in the next five years.

The greater part of the Chapter period was spent discerning together the answer to the question **where are we going** using the information we had gathered from the first two questions as guidelines.

During the Chapter, we felt called to a religious life that is authentic as well as prophetic. There was a strong desire to do our mission differently, committing ourselves concretely to the poor and the marginalized at the periphery of our society, paying particular attention to women and children in difficulty in our different entities. Our Chapter Logo and the input we had on topic ***Prophetic Religious Life in Our World Today***, challenged us to move towards being prophetic religious women who are not only rooted in the Word of God but are ready to take the risk to go to the broken of this world and share what we have received. We were challenged to get off our high horses and help the wounded in our world today, bringing the compassionate face of Christ to all especially women in difficulty and children in distress.

In these Acts of the General Chapter 2013, we have put together proposals, recommendations and decisions we hope will help us live a life of prophetic religious women, trying to make a difference in a world that is broken almost beyond recognition. These proposals, recommendations and decisions include the following:

- ***CHARISM AND MISSION***

The Chapter recognizes the great needs of our world today including violence, the plight of refugees and immigrants, the growing number of the marginalized in our society, women and children in distress, and inter-religious dialogue. We have identified three priority areas on which to concentrate for the next five years. In this document, proposals have been

made to help us deepen our commitment to mission **ad extra** and live our internationality and inter-culturality to the full.

- **COLLABORATION WITH THE LAITY AND SMA**

We affirm the positive contribution this can bring to our mission of Evangelisation. We are called to be open to this collaboration and study how this can be done effectively.

- **BOTSWANA, ALGERIA, ARGENTINA**

The Chapter recognizes the importance but fragile situation of these mission territories and calls for a strengthening of our presence in Algeria and Argentina and the opening of a second community in Botswana.

- **COMMUNITY LIFE**

***Live in Unity and they will believe***

In order to be authentic and prophetic religious women, our communities should be a sign of the love of God for all humanity. “ **our apostolic effectiveness derives its strength from the authenticity of our communal relationships**” (Const. 43). Our communities marked by racial and ethnic diversity, proclaim by their very life, that God makes no difference between persons. We are all members of one and the same family. (cf. **Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, Proposal 42**). In our document, the Chapter has made proposals to help all communities live in harmony and in peace, listening to and forgiving one another, for it is in living this community of love that we will draw people to the love of God that we witness to.

- **FORMATION**

The Chapter affirms the various steps the Institute has taken over the years to ensure the OLA One Body in the area of Formation and has proposed deeper commitment to formation at all levels. This will enable the whole Institute live a prophetic religious life capable of making visible the presence of God in our multicultural world.

- **STRUCTURES**

As Institute, we continue to review our structures. This Chapter has made decision to change the juridical entities of Francophone African Province and Tanzania. We pray for a smooth organization and transitional period for all.

Other proposals and recommendations made include those on **Mission and Vocation Animation; Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation; Child Safeguarding and Finance.**

In our Provinces/Districts, whatever our options are, whatever activities we are engaged in as we try to make concrete these proposals, recommendations and decisions, prayer should be our mainstay. “***Our prayer life should change our own hearts and lives so as to make us more centred in God,... prayer should be the beginning and end of all our activities, for with God at the helm of our affairs, we have everything***” (Gen. Chapter 2013, Opening Address, p. 4)

Let us endeavor to bring to fruition the proposals and recommendations of our General Chapter 2013, and He the Master Builder, will enter and do the rest.



## OPENING ADDRESS

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Good afternoon, Sisters.

I am happy and feel privileged to welcome you all to the 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Institute of Our Lady of Apostles. Looking round the hall, I see some sisters who are not new to the proceedings of General Chapters but then there are also many of you who are here in a Chapter for the first time; I say a special welcome to you. I know you will bring all your rich experiences, your different skills and your expertise to bear on our deliberations here together. Some of you have travelled long distances and may be tired from your journeys; there may be others who have come away from burning issues that need attention and may be a bit stressed by them. Whatever situations you may be in at this point in time, we ask the Spirit to give us the grace to let go of them in order to be present to one another, sharing our gifts, our strengths, our challenges and our difficulties as one family.

The General Chapter is an assembly which collegially and directly represents the Institute. It is **convened for reflective evaluation** of what we have lived since the preceding Chapter; it is a special period set aside to research and discern the way forward **under the guidance of the Spirit who is continually at work in our history. The General Chapter is a celebration of the life force of the Institute and its aim is to give to all the sisters new impetus and dynamism in a fuller consciousness of their mission in the Church.** (Constitutions Art.99).

The period of the General Chapter is also a time when we give thanks to God for the life shared in the Institute, the graces bestowed on us and for the gift of the mission entrusted to us as Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles.

During the General Chapter of 2008, we committed ourselves to doing everything possible to make going on mission ad extra the norm in the Institute, and we, as Congregation, have taken some steps in that direction. However, our efforts have involved mainly newly professed sisters. There is a group of young sisters who are waiting to go out, to contribute their quota in our effort at evangelizing the peoples. As missionary Institute, we have to continue what our early Sisters began and contribute to the Church's mission of evangelization. When we have received the Word, we cannot but share it. **The woman at the well ran back and told the people of her village what Jesus had told her – proclaiming Him to all who would listen. Mary of Magdala ran back to tell the brethren what she had seen and what the Lord had said to her.** There is always the zeal, the haste to proclaim and let others share in the good news. As a missionary Institute, let us not be seen as inhibiting the enthusiasm and zeal our young sisters who want to go out beyond their geographical boundaries to proclaim the good news and witness to the reign of God by their way of life.

**Our Logo** for this General Chapter depicts a world that is fragmented almost beyond recognition. Our world is in a state of contradictions. While international meetings and peace talks are going on, we maintain armed conflicts; while people are dying of hunger and illness, there are nations who enjoy over-production and flourishing multi-national companies continue to exploit the poor and the vulnerable. A few months ago, in Bangladesh, the collapse of a building, housing garment factories, apartments and several shops, killed more than a thousand people. The garment workers

had been ordered to go and work in the same building that was showing signs of collapse and warnings had been issued. These poor workers, mostly women, who received less than \$50.00 a month for the work they did had been in the employ of multi-national clothing companies in the West who prefer to use cheap labour in the poorer countries rather than that in their own countries where they would be required to pay just wages.

Raging wars with uncountable number of deaths and their concomitant refugee situations continue; a threat of nuclear war looms over the world; socio-economic and political disturbances which sometimes lead to armed conflicts between citizens and their governments; terrorist attacks – religious and political; poverty and misery in certain situations. The young people who find themselves in this situation are always fleeing, fleeing to greener pastures that may not be that green and as a result, find themselves in all kinds of difficult situations (drugs, prostitution, trafficking in humans), thus creating more hardships and suffering. It is one big vicious circle that is difficult to break. Some of us here have had direct or indirect experience of these situations – Egypt, Lebanon, Nigeria, Chad, Ivory Coast, to name but a few places. It is in these global hardships and difficult situations that we OLAs and indeed the Church as a whole, have an important role to play. Our mission is to the people of today living in our world that is so fragmented almost without recognition.

**How do we do our mission? How do we make a difference in our world today?** Concerning mission and evangelization in the Church and in the world today, Pope John Paul II said the world needs

**“... heralds of the gospel who are experts in humanity, who know the depths of their human hearts, who can share the joys, hopes, agonies and distress of people today, and who are at the same time contemplatives who have fallen in love with God.”**

In other words, the world and the Church need evangelisers who are very human and understand human needs, who know the meaning of and can share in the joys and sufferings of others. As religious and Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, in the daily activities entrusted to us, we bring knowledge to children, we help the sick, we bring help to orphans and the needy; we do many good things to help alleviate poverty and misery in the larger communities where we live and work. **What is the object of all the wonderful activities we are engaged in? Do they remain only activities that fulfill our ego as high achievers? Do we do them because they put us in a position of power since we are the ones who have something to give others? Or through our activities we are trying to be heralds of the good news of Jesus Christ?** I believe it is the latter that we are called to and therefore as people who bring the good news to others, our lives must radiate the good news that we carry in us. We have to know the depths of our own human hearts; we have to be people who **“can share the joys, hopes, agonies and distress of people”** in our world today. We have to be compassionate as our heavenly Father, with whom we have fallen in love, is compassionate for as Karen Armstrong says in her book, **Twelve Steps to Compassionate life:**

**Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of the world and put another there ... treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.**  
(Twelve Steps to Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong, 2010)

Compassion should be inseparable from our everyday life – in our communities with our sisters, as leaders of our entities, as teachers, nurses, doctors – in whatever activities we do. We should be



contemplative, prayerful people, who not only have fallen in love with God but radiate this wonderful love and offer it to all with whom we come in contact each day.

As missionary sisters, our mission is not to bring God to the places where we think He is not present, but as Michael Amaladoss SJ says, it is to help

**people to discover and listen to God who is there perhaps hidden or dimly perceived or seen differently, but who is calling them all the time for a dialogue leading them to fuller life.** (Mission Today, Michael Amaladoss, SJ. 1988)

We do not bring God to places where we are sent because God is already there before us. He created the world and all its peoples. In trying to help people and cultures, we go to rediscover and listen to God who is already there with them in their situation always beckoning to them to come closer. We therefore have to get accustomed to the concept of collaboration in the mission of the Church which we are a part of. We should collaborate with other groups, congregations and lay people in the local Church. In so doing, the universality of the Church will be made manifest in her communion in mission and our missionary activities will not end with our departure.

Again in our Chapter Logo, we have the bible and the cross that bring our focus unto God's Word and prayer. As women contemplatives in action, who have fallen in love with God, prayer should be our mainstay in the life God has called us to. Joan Chittister, in her book **The Monastery of the Heart**, beautifully sums up the essence of prayer in our lives as follows:

- **Prayer restores the soul that is dry and dulled by years of trying to create a world that never completely comes**
- **It heals the wounds of the day and reminds us who we want to be at the deepest, truest part of us.**
- **Prayer lightens the load. It gives fresh direction and new energy. It fixes the eye of the soul on the real ends of life, when the real goals of real time seem unattainable.**

Our prayer life should change our own hearts and lives so as to make us more centred in God, and aware of our own limitations. Prayer should be the beginning and end of all our activities for God is our refuge and our strength and is present in every part of our life.

Sharing the Word of God and living the gospel values in community should be our main focus, for the psalmist tells us that those who trust in **Chariot and horses will collapse and fall but we who call on the name of the Lord will hold and stand firm.** (Ps. 19)

With God at the helm of our affairs, we have everything. Our prayers and spiritual exercises should therefore not be regarded as chores but they should be our life, lived with joy. Remember, we are contemplatives who have fallen in love with Him who strengthens us. Our Venerable Founder had this to say to a sister in 1885:

**Having Jesus Christ in our heart is the secret of happiness, the way to perfection, the interior life. If any other thought wants to dominate the thought of Jesus, quickly put it in its place, after Jesus.** (Père Planque, 1885).

He asks us to "always seek Our Lord Jesus Christ ..." He will teach us how to behave in all circumstances. Let us keep God in view all the time and work diligently as we endeavor to spread His reign and proclaim His glory. We are in this world only for a short period of time; we must work on our personal sanctification and do the little things we have to do very well and leave the rest to God.

Perhaps this little prayer attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero but which in fact was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw will resonate with us as we go about our apostolates and doing mightily well at winning souls for God.

**A Step Along The Way**

***It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.***

***The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.***

***We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.***

***No statement says all that could be said.***

***No prayer fully expresses our faith.***

***No confession brings perfection***

***No pastoral visit brings wholeness.***

***No program accomplishes the Church's mission.***

***No set of goals and objectives includes everything.***

***This is what we are about.***

***We plant the seeds that one day will grow.***

***We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.***

***We lay foundations that will need further development***

***We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.***

***We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.***

***This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.***

***It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.***

***We may never see the results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.***

***We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.***

***We are prophets of a future not our own.***

**(Bishop Ken Untener)**

Sisters, as prophets of a future we do not own, as workers of projects whose end results we may not see, let us continue to work diligently in God's vineyard trusting that He, the Master Builder will enter and do the rest.

On this note, I declare the 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Institute of Our Lady of Apostles open.

Sr Felicia HARRY  
OLA Superior General  
July 3rd 2013

# *FINAL DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER*



## **CHARISM AND MISSION**

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In fidelity to our charism for evangelization, we the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, wish to live a prophetic religious life in our world today, always going to the periphery.

***“With the audacity of the Apostles, we commit our lives to the service of the Gospel, ready to risk all for the Lord.” (Const. 7).***

The chapter recognizes the immensity of the needs of our world today, which include:

- The thirst for the Word of God and personal encounter with Jesus Christ.
- The voices of women in distress in their diverse realities.
- The growing number of the marginalized in our society.
- Youth and children in distress.
- The increasing violence, injustice and lack of respect for the environment.
- Inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism.
- The suffering of the people living with HIV and AIDS.
- The plight of refugees and immigrants.

and highlights **three areas of priority**:

- Greater attention to women, youth and children in distress.
- More openness in our traditional ministries, in order to respond to the needs of the marginalized
- A greater commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation to include Inter-Religious Dialogue, Ecumenism and non-violent communication.

***“... rooted in faith, and like Christ seeking the will of the Father, we carry out together the mission of the Church entrusted to the Institute.” (Const. 8)***

**The Chapter recommends** the following steps:

- The entire Congregation prays to the Holy Spirit to help us interiorize our apostolic option for the marginalized. The General Council will fix the time for this prayer.
- Each entity carries out an assessment of their reality and listen to the new calls within their Province/District. This assessment will be shared at a Plenary Council for further action.
- We continue to seek ways of collaborating with other Congregations or Institutions in areas of common interest.
- Provinces/Districts examine existing traditional apostolates and find new ways of responding to the needs of the vulnerable and those on the periphery.
- Provinces/Districts train Sisters for social and pastoral work to answer specific needs.
- The General Council in collaboration with the Plenary Council, revisit and update the method of evaluation of insertions throughout the Congregation.

***The Chapter recognizes the witness of our older Sisters who continue to live their mission with unwavering love and fidelity. Their way of living the contemplative dimension of our Cenacle Spirituality is a rich resource and strength for the entire Institute.***

*‘May the whole of ministry be in a missionary key.*

*We must come out of ourselves to all  
the existential peripheries and grow in audacity.*

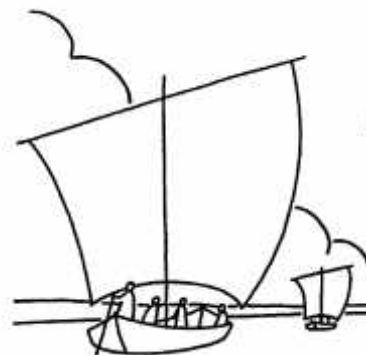
*The Holy Spirit draws us into the mystery of the Living God  
and saves us from the threat of a Church, closed in on herself;*

*He impels us to open the doors and go forth  
to proclaim and bear witness to the Good News of the Gospel,  
to communicate the joy of faith and the encounter with Christ.*

*The Holy Spirit is the soul of ‘mission.’*

***Homily of Pope Francis: Pentecost, 2013***

***Together, let us move forward, knowing that God’s Spirit is with us!***



## ***MISSION AD EXTRA***

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We continue to strengthen our mission *ad extra*, which enables us to live international and intercultural community life fully according to our charism.

Today, our desire is that every Sister revitalize her missionary identity.

We also recognize that each Sister has personal responsibility to nurture and be attentive to what God has chosen to do within her, through her life and personal history. It is only when we are attentive to the presence of Christ in our lives that we can begin to witness to that presence.

### **The Chapter recommends that:**

- Mission *ad extra* become a way of life for every OLA sister.
- We nourish our quality of life by being rooted in the Word of God and in the reality to which we are sent.
- We strengthen the inter-Provincial/District sending and receiving in order to live concretely internationality and interculturality. *“This kind of interchange is made by the mutual agreement of the Superior General and her Council and the Provincial Superiors or those of the Districts concerned.” (Const. 97)*
- We have the courage to take risks and to persevere at all times.
- We reinforce the South-North mission and ensure together its continuity. For this we must:
  - Identify the new calls in the ‘North’.
  - Give from our poverty and believe in solidarity.
  - Create and manage our projects together.
  - Give time for the learning of the language.
- We give the possibility of mission *ad extra* to ‘less young Sisters’.
- We define clearly our mission projects and let all Sisters know about them.
- For the newly professed Sisters sent by the General Council, Provinces/Districts
  - Do a comprehensive review when they return from mission.
  - As much as possible, ensure they return on mission *ad extra* after their professional studies.

## ***COLLABORATION with the SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS***

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As Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, we appreciate the common roots we share with the Society of African Missions.

### **The Chapter recommends that**

- ✓ the General Council seek ways of promoting this collaboration between our two Institutes.
- ✓ Provinces and Districts be open to the possibility of a common reflection with SMA on Charism and Mission.

## ***COLLABORATION with the LAITY***

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Several Provinces and Districts have initiated various ways of sharing our missionary charism with the laity. The Chapter affirms the positive contribution that lay people can make to our mission of Evangelization today.

**The Chapter recommends** that this subject be further studied with shared information and suggestions from Provinces and Districts. This information will be used as a basis for work on the subject during the next Plenary Council.

*'In fidelity to the missionary ideal which directed the life of Father Planque, we stay watchful and attentive to what the Spirit says to us through the Church and the expressed needs of the world' (Const. 14).*



## ***SPECIFIC DISCERNMENT***

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The Chapter recognized the fragility of our presence in Botswana, Algeria and Argentina. The Chapter discerned a way forward in order to strengthen our apostolic presence with a witness of viable communities in all three countries. As **OLA ONE BODY**, we assume the responsibility for ensuring that all parts of the body continue to have viable communities.

### ***BOTSWANA***

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The only OLA community in Botswana, located in Maun since 2008, has been well inserted in the local Church and the Sisters are committed to responding to local needs which include primary evangelization, catechesis, pre-school education, marriage counselling, attention to the youth and to people living with HIV and AIDS.

The Bishop has invited the OLA Sisters to open a second community in Francistown to respond to the needs of secondary education among the youth.

The Chapter recognizes that this new call is in line with our charism and recommends that the General Council open a second community in Francistown. It also suggests that one Sister engage fully in social and pastoral work.

### ***ALGERIA***

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The mission in Algeria is very dear to the Congregation. Presently, there are two OLA communities there. The presence of the Church is greatly appreciated and is described as an '*open window to the world*'.

#### **The Chapter affirms the mission in Algeria and proposes that:**

- All Provinces and Districts support this mission.
- The entire Congregation be made aware of the new reality and needs of this mission.
- OLA in Algeria continue to reach out to the needs of migrants and reinforce their commitment to Inter-religious dialogue.

**The Chapter recommends** that the General Council send two sisters to Algeria.

## ARGENTINA

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Our mission in Argentina responds to an appeal from the local Church to help it become more open to the universal dimension of the Church's mission.

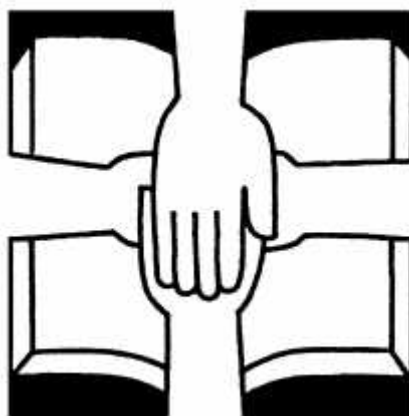
The Chapter recognizes the zeal of our Argentinian Sisters who are always ready to live mission *ad extra*. Currently there are six sisters in two communities in Argentina.

The General Chapter recognizes the need to strengthen our presence there.

### In view of this, the General Chapter recommends that:

- **The General Council**
  - find two Sisters for mission in Argentina within the next two (2) years.
  - explore, in collaboration with the Provinces/Districts concerned, the possibility of Sisters doing their studies in Argentina
- **The District Council, in collaboration with the General Council,**
  - continue to seek financial resources to sustain the communities and the mission there.
  - explore, in dialogue with the General Council the possibility of opening up mission *ad extra* to the laity in Argentina.

*'Pray to the Master that He will maintain in all hearts, a spirit of union and of unity, which he has asked from those to whom he confided the evangelization of the world'*  
(P. Planque).







## COMMUNITY LIFE

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### **'Live in unity... and they will believe...' Jn.17:21**

The theme of our Chapter invites us to become more aware of the fact that our community is a sign of the love of God for all humanity. *'Our apostolic effectiveness derives its strength from the authenticity of our communal relationships'* (Const. 43).

The time shared in community is support for mission, because **Community is mission**. *'The manner of our communal living can also testify to the reality of Christ's presence among us, for as a sign of the Gospel values, it reminds the world that the kingdom of God is already here'* (Const. 15).

#### **The Chapter affirms that the strength of our communion comes from:**

- The sincere desire of each Sister to live community.
- The willingness of each Sister to actively participate in building community.
- The quality of our relationships.
- The balance between prayer life, apostolate and recreation.
- The richness of our interculturality.
- Our common mission.
- Non-violent Communication.
- Gracious acceptance of the limitations of age and of health.

In order to make of our communities, places of communion and of hope, the Chapter invites each Sister to develop attitudes of respect, trust, kindness, availability, appreciation of the other, listening and especially forgiveness, given and received.

#### **The Chapter recommends the community to find:**

- A balance between prayer life, the apostolate and recreation.
- Special periods of time for:
  - Regular sharing of the Word of God.
  - Sharing of our faith and lived experience.
  - Regular community meetings and Community Action Plan/Community Project.
  - Feasts, recreation and sharing each Sister's joys and sufferings.

#### **The Chapter recommends that Provinces/Districts**

- Organize formation on
  - Non-violent Communication
  - Leadership.
- Continue to evaluate their insertions.

*The Church expects a lot from the witness of religious communities, marked by racial regional or ethnic diversity. They proclaim by their very life, that God makes no difference between persons, because we are all children, members of one and the same family, living harmony, in diversity and in peace.*

*(Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa: Proposition. 42)*

# MISSIONARY AND VOCATION ANIMATION



*‘Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals; namely, informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization’. (Redemptoris Missio no. 83)*

In a globalized and often de-Christianized world, our commitment to Missionary and Vocation animation remains a priority. Our world needs witnesses who will remind us that the call to mission is still valid. *‘Thus, we endeavour, by our participation in this activity, to awaken in others a lively attachment to Christ and the desire to become evangelizers in their turn’. (Const. n. 21)*

The Chapter recognizes what has been done in this area and highlights the following aspects:

- The witness of our personal life and of our intercultural community living is itself a sign of the universal dimension of the kingdom.
- Greater collaboration with the local church and other Missionary Institutes, especially with SMA, as well as sharing our charism with the laity, are privileged means of Missionary and Vocation Animation.
- Accompanying young people through listening, personal relationships, prayer and sharing the Word of God, and involving them in our animation and missionary activities are means of awakening a missionary spirit in them.
- The promotion of Missionary Childhood in our schools and parishes develops a sense of sharing and solidarity in our children.

## **The Chapter proposes that:**

- Our communities be open to receive people who want to experience missionary life.
- The following should be integrated into MVA programmes:
  - Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
  - Evangelical Non-Violence.
  - Interreligious dialogue and Ecumenism
- The Congregational website have a page for MVA.

## **The Chapter recommends that:**

### **Provinces/districts**

- ✓ Continue to strengthen MVA Teams.
- ✓ Ensure MVA animators make use of the MVA booklet prepared during the 2011 session in Tanzania.
- ✓ Encourage MVA coordinators to communicate with each other through the use of internet.
- ✓ Organize MVA meetings with the SMA and the laity.

### **General Council**

- ✓ Organize, if necessary, international MVA meetings.

# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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The passion for justice, the ardent longing for peace and non-violence, showing concern and care for creation, and its integrity (JPIC) are essential to life according to the Gospel. It is not an option but a real lifestyle. *“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world ..... are constitutive dimensions ... of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation”.* ( *Justice in the world n° 6*)

Commitment to JPIC remains a priority for OLA.

The Chapter highlights the importance of

- making use of JPIC publications at all levels throughout the Institute
- strengthening our engagement in national and international JPIC/AEFJN networks.

## **The Chapter recommends:**

### **Provinces and Districts ensure**

- ❖ More conscientization in communities and apostolates:
  - Include JPIC issues in our community meetings/Community Action Plans.
  - Choose a special theme each year to deepen our commitment to JPIC
  - Personal and community conversion to evangelical non-violence
- ❖ That a new lifestyle rooted in respect for creation and for our environment is developed
- ❖ More justice and respect towards our employees and collaborators.
- ❖ Adequate formation for JPIC contact persons

### **The General Council:**

- ❖ strengthen the JPIC network within the Institute to awaken interest and foster commitment at all levels.



# CHILD SAFEGUARDING



*'The raising of awareness on child protection has been strong in recent years. At the Plenary Council in Dublin, 2009, the Provincials and District Superiors benefited from training in support of the rights of the child. Several Sisters have been trained in the policy of the rights of the child so as to fight against all forms of abuse. In every one of our activities, we are trying to live it; hence the necessity to give ourselves a common orientation, as a Congregation, so as to give value to the rights of the child in all our institutions'. (General Council Report 2008-2013)*

In order to relate better to children in our care and to safeguard their interests and welfare, the **Chapter proposes** the following orientations:

- ❖ We become protagonists in active non-violence by:
  - Healing personal hurts.
  - Improving the quality of our community life by witnessing to non-violence.
- ❖ We have an attitude of listening, compassion, courage and respect.
- ❖ We renew our understanding of our vows in order to live an authentic prophetic religious life.
- ❖ We conscientize and educate Sisters and others:
  - Young women in initial formation
  - Children, parents, teachers, medical staff and all our collaborators on Child Safeguarding and on the rights of the child.
- ❖ We are attentive to possible signs and symptoms of abuse in children and we know the appropriate laws and procedures in order to act effectively.

## CONCRETE STEPS:

- 1) Know and Analyse:
  - The social setting where we are
  - The laws of the country
  - What is being done for children who are victims of abuse.
- 2) Collaborate with:
  - Families of children, social workers, the police.
  - Associations for child protection.
  - Other networks that work with children.

### The Chapter recommends the following:

- Formulate a **CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY** for the Congregation
- Present the policy at a Plenary Council for approval; then each entity adapts this template to suit their own reality.
- The Policy should be displayed in all apostolates and in communities where appropriate.
- Have a contact person at Province and District levels for the implementation of the POLICY.
- Have a regular evaluation of the POLICY among the contact persons.



## INITIAL FORMATION

*'Each stage of our formation as Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, is marked with the sign of the Spirit of Pentecost... by living this twofold dimension of our life, we hope to grow in faith and apostolic zeal, thus attaining the integration of contemplation and action that our Founder desired for us' (Const.63).*

The Chapter recognizes the steps that we have taken together as the OLA Body, in initial formation, to enable us live a prophetic religious life, capable of making visible the presence of God in our multicultural world.

The Chapter affirms that:

- our Charter of Formation gives a common basic formation which helps strengthen the spirit of 'OLA ONE BODY'.
- the experience of interculturality that our candidates live at different stages of initial formation, ensures they are prepared for mission *ad extra*.
- The sending of Sisters after their first profession on mission *ad extra* deepens their knowledge of the second language, widens their horizons and helps them to appropriate the OLA mission.
- the international preparation for final vows fosters dynamism and passion for mission.

**The Chapter recommends that:**

▪ **FORMATORS AND ACCOMPAGNATRICES**

- Well-formed, international and intercultural teams be put in place at each stage of initial formation.
- Future formators speak the second language and have the experience of mission *ad extra*.
- A common inter-cultural formation be given preference.
- Accompagnatrices of the temporary professed Sisters be given adequate formation.

▪ **THOSE IN INITIAL FORMATION**

- Formation in non-violent communication, inter-religious dialogue, JPIC and the social teaching of the Church be strengthened.
- The letters and conferences of Fr. Planque be made available to help those in initial formation in their study of our Charism.
- they be educated in the responsible use of modern means of communication.

▪ **COMMUNITIES**

- All sisters be familiar with the Charter of Formation.
- Young sisters be welcomed and well integrated into the community and the apostolate.

▪ **FOR THE INSTITUTE**

- The next Plenary Council study the issues related to the inter-cultural month for Sisters going on mission *ad extra* for the first time.

### **The Chapter decided**

- ❖ To continue to have two International Novitiates, Anglophone and Francophone, and therefore abandon the idea of having only one International Novitiate.
- ❖ If necessary, give the Arabophone Provinces the possibility of having their own Novitiate after dialoging with the General Council.

*“Formation should have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God. Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his **total self-giving**, this must be the objective of formation.”* (Vita Consecrata, 65).

## **ONGOING FORMATION**

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*“But above all, consecrated persons must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death”.* (Starting Afresh from Christ, No. 15)

**On-going formation is a process of growth and integral maturation of the individual and communities, which endures throughout life.**

« *To rekindle the gift that God has placed in us* » (2 Tim. 1:6), the Chapter invites us to personal conversion and community renewal by deepening the spirituality of communion and of hope through:

- Daily discernment of God’s action in our lives.
- Counseling, or spiritual direction/accompaniment or other tools for personal growth.
- Spiritual reading.

The Chapter recognizes that the community is the privileged place for on-going formation, where the Sisters find support and balance in their prayer and apostolic life.

### **The Chapter recommends that:**

#### **THE MISSION/ONGOING FORMATION COMMISSION**

1. Plan a programme on
  - Intercultural living (different themes).
  - Leadership
2. Organize Sabbatical period/courses for different age groups.
3. Pay special attention to the spiritual needs of our senior Sisters.

#### **THE PROVINCES /DISTRICTS**

1. Organize formation on non-violent communication
2. Make use of the existing OLA documents on Spirituality and Charism



# STRUCTURES

The Chapter affirms the positive impact that changes recommended by General Chapter of 2008 have had on the Institute namely extended Plenary Council and International Commissions. To continue our review on structures, the Chapter reflected on the following: length of mandate, International Commissions, Province of Francophone Africa and Tanzania.

## I) LENGTH OF MANDATE

1. Based on the reflection made throughout the Institute on the length of mandate of the General Council:

**The Chapter decided that the mandate of five (5) years, which is renewable, be maintained** (Cons. 109)

2. To ensure adequate time for feedback of the orientations of the General Chapter in the Provinces/Districts and to facilitate the work of the new General Council,

**the Chapter decided** that there be at least six months between the General Chapter and Provincial Chapters/District Assemblies (but not more than one year).

3. **The Chapter recommends** that Provinces and Districts ensure adequate administrative support for the Generalate and consideration be given to appointing a bilingual Technical Secretary and an Archivist.

## II) INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONS

**The Chapter decided** to maintain all three existing commissions: Initial Formation, Mission/Ongoing Formation and Solidarity and Finance Commissions.

**The Chapter recommends the General Council that**

- Attention be paid to the different realities of the Congregation when reconstituting the Commissions.
- As much as possible modern means of communication be used to reduce travels.
- The General Council define a Statute for the Commissions on Initial Formation and on Mission/Ongoing Formation.
- The role of the General Councillor within each Commission be clearly defined.
- The Congregation Website and Meeting Point be used to create more awareness in the Institute of the activities of the Commissions.

### **III) PROVINCE OF AFRIQUE FRANCOPHONE**

The question of how to restructure the Province of Afrique Francophone has been discerned within the Institute for many years, particularly since General Chapter 2003. The Province proposed to the Chapter that it be re-structured into three Provinces and two Districts:

- ✓ The Province of Ivory Coast
- ✓ Province of Benin
- ✓ Province of Burkina Faso/Niger
- ✓ District of Chad
- ✓ District of Togo

This proposal raised several questions regarding their practical organization and the manner of collaboration between these entities and with the Institute as a whole.

**After much discernment and discussion the Chapter decided:**

That the Province of Afrique Francophone be re-structured into **three new Provinces and two Districts**.

The three Provinces are: Ivory Coast, Benin, and Burkina Faso/Niger and two new Districts: Chad and Togo.

Meanwhile, the reflection on the implementation of this decision will continue with the help of the General Council.

### **IV) TANZANIA**

The OLA Mission in Tanzania began in 1991. There has been ongoing discernment in relation to the most appropriate structure for Tanzania.

**The Chapter approved the proposal of the Province of Ireland that Tanzania become a Region under its responsibility.**





## FINANCE

*Management of goods and finance at all levels will be carried out in a spirit of sharing and solidarity at the service of mission. (Cf Const. 180). We are conscious of the prophetic character of our lifestyle which comes through simplicity and transparency. We constantly search for balance between the preferential option for the poor and financial self-sufficiency. We also believe that Divine Providence is always present.*

### ***I) OPTION FOR THE POOR***

To sustain our commitment to the marginalised at the economic level, we are still called to live out a greater financial solidarity and to be inventive in finding new ways.

**The Chapter recommends that:**

**Provinces/Districts**

- Ensure apostolates that cannot be self-supportive are helped through the solidarity of other apostolates and communities.
- Apostolates for the marginalized be made known, so that friends and benefactors can participate in them through their financial help.
- Continue and intensify in our institutions (schools – dispensaries...) strategies to ensure financial support for the poorest.

**Communities**

- discuss and set aside money to help the poor who come to their door.

### ***II) TRANSPARENCY***

To help us in managing our properties and finance in a transparent manner

**the Chapter recommends that:**

**Communities**

- Ensure personal budgets and accounts are submitted in time to be factored into those of the community
- Prepare their budget and review their accounts together
- Ensure all Sisters participate in the management of community finance.

**Provinces/Districts**

- Continue the formation of sisters in financial management paying attention to inventories.
- Audit (internal audit) regularly accounts at all levels (Communities/ activities/projects/ Province/District) ;
- Train some sisters in auditing.

### ***III) SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE INSTITUTE***

In recent years the Institute has provided itself with instruments to better live out solidarity and the spirit of One Body. The Chapter has evaluated the effectiveness of these instruments and recommends the following:

#### **Annual Contribution to the Generalate**

Provinces and Districts send their annual financial reports / accounts to the General Bursar by the end of March to facilitate the calculation of this contribution.

#### **Generalate Fund**

- Provinces and Districts continue feeding this fund with contributions until it reaches its ceiling.
- The General Council and the Finance Committee, with the help of experts, study the best ways to use this fund in order to maximize profits.

#### **Project Account**

##### **Provinces and Districts**

- continue to feed this account according to their means.
- inform the General Council of undesigned donations available, if it is not possible for them to transfer directly into the Project Account

#### **Apostolic Projects**

##### **General Council**

- provides the Plenary Council with all the necessary information concerning projects

##### **Finance Committee**

- examine the possibility of simplifying the procedure where necessary

##### **Provinces/Districts**

- commit themselves to training sisters for project planning and management.
- respect the different stages of the procedure for the presentation of projects





### *CLOSING ADDRESS*

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Four weeks ago, we gathered here in Monte Cucco to celebrate the life force of our Institute.

We gathered here to make a reflective evaluation of what we had lived together as Institute during the five-year period between 2008 and 2013 and to discern the way forward “under the guidance of the Spirit who is continually at work in our history”. We gathered here to give thanks to God for the life shared in the Institute, for the graces bestowed on us and for the gift of mission entrusted to us as Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles. During the past four weeks, we have endeavoured to be present to one another, sharing our gifts, our strengths, our challenges and our difficulties as one family. We thank God that this special period in our life as Institute has been grace-filled and that God himself has given us the necessary wisdom, strength, courage, openness and good health to work diligently, this past month, to achieve the goals we set ourselves.

We have lived our General Chapter this time in three big moments: **where we have come from, who we are now and where are we going?** As Institute, the tendency has been to forget where we have come from. We do not tell our story often enough. We tend to look only to the future, missing out on the inspiration we might get and the strength we could draw from the rich heritage handed down to us by our elders, beginning from our Founder, Fr. Augustine Planque. We therefore used the first couple of days to look into our history, using charts and statistical information from our own Archives to answer the question, “Where have we come from?” Through the use of market scenes, we presented our Provinces/Districts and answered the question, “Who are we?” where we are found and what we do as Institute. The question, “Where are we going?” took the rest of the period for the Chapter as we tried to discern what the future holds for us.

We began this third moment of the Chapter, “Where are we going?” with an input on “**Prophetic Religious Life in Our World Today**” given by Sr. Pat Murray, IBVM. She told us how we can be prophetic religious in our world with all its challenges, using her practical experience of their work in South Sudan. She pointed out, among other things, that in order to be prophetic religious, we must be risk-takers; we must get off our horses and attend to the wounds of those who are broken. To be prophetic, we have to go to the periphery; we have to listen with compassion. We must acknowledge our own woundedness, in so doing we can identify with the woundedness of others.

We also listened to the testimonies of our three Sisters engaged in diverse activities other than those of OLA tradition. We felt the need to be courageous and challenged ourselves to take the risk as prophetic religious and go to the periphery to be life-lifters for, we have been lifted ourselves.

The above input and testimonies put us in the correct frame of mind to tackle the question of Charism and Mission which is our whole life as Institute, and make recommendations among which include:

- Each entity to carry out an assessment of their reality and listen to new calls within their area.
- Collaborate with other Congregations or Institutions in areas of common interest.
- Train Sisters for social and pastoral work to answer specific needs.
- Mission to become a way of life for every OLA Sister.
- Give the possibility of Mission ad extra to “less young Sisters”.
- General Council to find ways to promote collaboration with the SMAs.

The Chapter again re-affirmed our commitment to the mission in Algeria and Argentina and recommended that the General Council, in consultation with Provinces, send Sisters to these two Districts as soon as possible. We also agreed that a second community be opened in Botswana, our newest insertion.

The Issue of Child Safeguarding was treated under the broad topic of J.P.I.C. Sr. Mary T. Barron, OLA, who gave the input, took the Chapter through four areas of abuse – sexual, physical, emotional and neglect. She added that recently **spiritual abuse** has been added to the list of forms of abuse. She said that, as OLAs, we should create abuse-awareness, educate people around abuse. In abusive situations we should listen with openness and affection and that our policy will help challenge structures that promote abusive situations. **“Whatever we do we should never do nothing”** was the advice she gave us. The Chapter worked on other areas of our life – Initial and On-going Formation, our Structures, which included the evaluation of the International Commissions set up after the Chapter of 2008.

Our structures have been opened up with the granting of the request of the Francophone African Province to change their entity from one province of two regions to three provinces and two districts. We are happy for the growth in the Institute and hope for a prayerful and smooth journey towards the erection of these new entities.

Under On-going Formation, the Chapter was given a Conference on Inter-culturality by Sr. Maria Laetitia Youchtchenko, O.P. She said, among other things, that intercultural living is not pluricultural but a quality of life that gives witness; that our community life is a mission. She added that each one is responsible for building peace in community, not outside and that we have to persevere and come back to the initial fervor; to rediscover the dynamism of religious life. We need a communal conversion to make our communities what they should be.

We took whatever time necessary to make proposals and orientations which would help us live our OLA commitment for the next five years, given the challenges we face in our world today.

In a calm, serene and prayerful atmosphere, the Chapter elected the Superior General of our Institute for the next five years on 21<sup>st</sup> July and the three Councillors on 25<sup>th</sup> July. With a new General Team in place, the Chapter continued its work of approving all the orientations and recommendations that were made during our time together.

Our life here together has not been all work and no play. Even though we did not get to see Pope Francis of the Vatican as we had hoped, we were able to visit the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi. The trip to Assisi did not only refresh us but also gave us the opportunity to pray to the holy St. Francis to help us in our effort at respecting God’s creatures, including the mosquito and taking

good care of our beautiful environment. There was a healthy balance between prayer and shopping.

Sisters, this special period we have lived together has been made possible through the collaborative effort and help of our Sisters, our friends, acquaintances and well-wishers who were always ready to put themselves out for us in whatever way they could. There was a powerful prayer group who journeyed with us during this Chapter as we could see from the many letters and messages that came to us from all over the world. We are grateful for their prayerful support.

Now I would like to thank the **Sisters of Nostra Signora Madre della Misericordia, Ancelle di Cristo Re**, Sr. Ignacia and her team for accepting to have us here in their house for one whole month, even when the original date of the Chapter had been changed. We have been looked after very well by all the Sisters and the lay staff. We ask Sr. Ignacia to convey our sincere thanks to them all. We will come again!

Fr David Glenday, our Facilitator, has been a wonderful facilitator. It is true, the search for a facilitator for this Chapter had been long and difficult and sometimes disappointing; but I now believe, God had someone special for us and He made him known to us at the appointed time. Fr. David, on behalf of my Council, old and new, and on behalf of all the Chapter delegates, I say a very big 'thank you' for who you have been to us this period of the life of our noble Institute. You have journeyed with us through thick and thin. Sometimes issues were difficult but you always remained calm and prayerful and steered us away from trouble; like the good captain you never abandoned ship with passengers on board; you always brought us to safety. Hopefully, with God on our side, the search for a facilitator for our next General Chapter will not be long and arduous. Thank you very much Fr. David.

Given the fact that some of us are linguistically challenged, the need for the services of translators to help us communicate with one another, especially in the hall was very evident. Thank God we had Br. Roger Bosse and Sr. Benedicta Mante with us to help us satisfy this need. Br. Roger, if my memory is right, this is the third time you have translated for us during our General Chapters. You must have a special love for us, always coming with us on our journey. Thank you very much. Sr. Benedicta, always available to do translations, OLAs are grateful to have you as our own, always ready to answer the call of translation. We are grateful to God for giving you to us as special gift and thank you for your availability whenever we call on you.

The work of the secretaries – Srs. Maria Lee, Gaëtane Duquette and Clarisse Soubeiga – has been formidable. They have ensured that our proposals and recommendations have always been ready for further discussion and final voting. Their work has always been done quietly and without any fuss. Thank you very much; you are always a wonderful gift to our meetings. We appreciate very much your availability and service given to our Institute. Secretaries of our daily assemblies, thank you for writing minutes of our daily activities. The periods spent ensuring that the record of our work was ready to go to the secretariat did not go unnoticed. Thank you for your service freely given. God bless you all.

To our redactors, officially named and ad hoc, what can I say to express our gratitude? It is not easy to sit back and see a text one has worked on torn to pieces. Not only did you live that experience calmly but you actually took the texts back to re-work them. Thank you very much for this difficult service, rendered to the Chapter. The patience it requires, the simplicity and courage it

takes to submit one's self for such a difficult task are immeasurable. Sisters, thank you very much and God bless the work you have done here.

To our Secretary General of this Chapter, Sr. Nicole Rivard, on behalf of the General Team and all the Chapter members and on my own behalf, I say a big 'thank you' for the wonderful work done during this Chapter. You have never said 'no' to any request made of you. You have always rendered service to the best of your ability. Thank you very much for all you have done and continue to do for our Congregation. I know that wherever you may be after here, you will always remain available to render service to the Congregation you love with your whole heart. Thank you, Nicole, and God bless you.

Our Eucharistic celebrations and morning prayers were lively, as well as solemn. The efforts Provinces/Districts put in their preparation were evident. Thank you all for that. We also thank Cardinal Peter Turkson for making time to be the main Celebrant for our Opening Mass. Our thanks also go to all the priests who left everything to come to celebrate the Eucharist with us each day. Sisters who invited them, please convey our sincere thanks to them. May God bless them all.

The General Council is grateful to Provinces and Districts who contributed to the funding of this General Chapter. I would have loved to mention you by name but that may not be prudent here. Please note that your generous contributions have gone a very long way to defray a greater part of the cost of our General Chapter. God bless your generosity. We are also grateful to you all for taking the trouble to carry plantain chips and groundnuts and all the little edibles in your suitcases, outwitting all the airport officials so that our break periods would be enjoyable. Thank you all.

Sisters, convey our sincere gratitude to all the Sisters in your provinces and districts for taking the time to answer the many questionnaires sent out to them during the time of the preparation. Without their work the General Council would not have been able to put the Work Document together. We thank all the communities for their collaborative effort in putting together this rich document. We know our Sisters have journeyed with us during the Chapter preparation and during the Chapter period itself because we have felt their prayerful support. We sincerely thank them for their prayerful and moral support. We know that they will continue to pray for the new General Team, put in place to lead this Institute of ours.

Last but not least, I sincerely thank the out-going General Team for putting together this General Chapter. All fears and anxieties have been worth it. I believe that what we have lived with the help of our Facilitator has been an experience of Emmanuel, God with us.

Sisters, as we return to our Provinces/Districts and to our various apostolates, let us remember that 'we are prophets of a future we do not own, that we are workers of projects whose end results we may not see'. However, our hope is that in doing the tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work, we may bring the compassionate face of God to all we meet. Let us continue to strive to be '**Women Apostles** who are **rooted in the Word of God** and who are ready to **dare to be Seeds of Communion and Hope**'. Let us go back to **live in unity** so that all who see us may **believe**.

On this note, I declare the 16<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Institute of Our Lady of Apostles closed.

**Sr Felicia Harry**  
**OLA Superior General**





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***SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF APOSTLES***