

**ANNOUNCEMENT'S LETTER 11° GENERAL CHAPTER**

7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

*Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary*

Dearest Sisters ,

the time has come to begin the event of our 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, and I do this today in order to entrust ourselves to the help and intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary, our good Mother and Queen of the Little House, who always invites us to do “*whatever, his Son Jesus, tells us*” (Jn 2:5).

“*The General Chapter is an ecclesial event and a time of grace to discern the will of God for the Congregation, in creative fidelity to the founding charism*” (RL 101) and as “*legislative structure of the Congregation, the Chapter is called to promote spiritual and apostolic vitality of our two religious Families*” (RL 102).

The General Chapter is an event of communion in synod style that involves all of us Sisters and all our communities, it must be lived in unity and continuity with the real and concrete journey of our Congregation, it is nourished by the breath of the Church, it draws on the heart of St. J. B. Cottolengo and allows itself to be led by the lightness of the Holy Spirit.

By this circular letter, in accordance with article 104 of the Rule of Life and article 107 of the Directory of Contemplative Life and article 115 of the Directory of Apostolic Life, with the consent of the Plenary Council,

**I OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCE**

**THE 11<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**

**OF THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH BENEDICT COTTOLENGO**

which will have as a THEME:

**“OUTSIDE THE WALLS<sup>1</sup>:**

**THE COURAGE TO DARE**

**NEW WAYS OF EVANGELIZATION”**

SUB-THEMES:

- THE MOVING LIFE
- THE WOMEN’S GENIUS
- THE CORRESPONSIBILITY

OBJECTIVE:

*In the paschal Christ to generate new styles of Cottolengo consecrated life and to be mothers and sisters of the Poor in today's Church.*

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Regina Coeli*, Solemnity of Pentecost, 31 May 2020.

The Chapter event that we begin today is to be experienced by all of us Sisters as a process of synod discernment in the Holy Spirit that involves and embraces the whole Congregation and extends over six years, divided into three successive stages:

- Announcement: is the start of the process of consultation and participation within each community, in order to bring out significant indications and elements on the theme and sub-themes of the Chapter to be reflected and deepened in the Circumscription Study Assemblies<sup>2</sup>.
- Celebration: is the convocation of the Chapter Assembly representative of the whole Congregation, which in the light of the Holy Spirit is called to the great responsibility of evangelical discernment and future planning for our Religious Family.
- Acceptance: is the way by which each Sister and our communities accept the orientations and deliberations of the Chapter in order to walk together towards the achievement of the Chapter objective.

In the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the Circumscription Study Assemblies will be convoked in April 2021 and the Chapter Assembly in November of the same year, if the pandemic will not impose new restrictions.

The General Council, in choosing the theme and the objective of the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter, was provoked and stimulated to look at our congregational reality in the light of some relevant evangelical, charismatic, ecclesial, pastoral, cultural, social indications that emerge from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, from the Guidelines of the CIVCSVA for *New wine in new wineskins*, from the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*, from the Encyclical *Laudato si'* and from the spiritual experience of Saint Cottolengo.

What gave the initial spark and made our hearts burn were the words of Pope Francis on the Solemnity of Pentecost 2020, the day when the Plenary Council and the Provincial and Delegation Superiors were gathered together to begin discernment on the theme of this Chapter. Divine Providence has given us a glimpse of the reality that we live today as Cottolengo consecrated women in the words of the Pope on the first Christian community in Jerusalem, which we know to be the evangelical Word inspiring the charismatic lifestyle given to us Sisters by our Holy Founder. And these words heard on the day of Pentecost made us dream and hope that the unifying and transforming power of the Spirit, which dwells within us, can generate new and courageous ways for the future of our Congregation and our mission of charity in the Little House and in the Church.

Pope Francis at the Regina Coeli of the Solemnity of Pentecost says: *“By forgiving and gathering his disciples around him, Jesus makes them a Church, his Church, which is a community reconciled and ready for mission. ... When a community is not reconciled, it is not ready for mission: it is ready for discussions within it; it is ready for internal discussions. ... And precisely to inspire mission, Jesus gives his Spirit to the Apostles. The Holy Spirit is fire that burns away sins and creates new men and women; he is the fire of love with which the disciples can ‘set the world on fire’, that tender love that favours the little ones, the poor, the excluded... The feast of Pentecost renews the awareness that the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit abides in us. He also gives us*

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<sup>2</sup> There are six Circumscriptions: the three Provinces, the Delegation, the Houses dependent on the Mother, the Family of Contemplative Life.

*the courage to go **outside the protective walls** of our “Upper Rooms”, of our little groups, without easing into a quiet life or withdrawing into sterile habits”.*

The awareness that the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit dwells in us was very much present in St. Joseph B. Cottolengo who updated the exhortation of St. Paul “*do not get drunk on wine, ... but be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph 5:18) saying to the Sisters “*the fullness of the Holy Spirit be upon you all*”<sup>3</sup> and “*with the word ‘ciocote’ I mean that you are, or at least you should be, inebriated with God’s love*” (DP 304), that is filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Church asks us “*to go forward in obedience to the newness of the Spirit*” (NWiNW 57) for “*an exercise in evangelical discernment, wherein we strive to recognize – in the light of the Spirit – a call which God causes to resound in the historical situation itself. In this situation, and also through it, God calls the consecrated men and women of our time, ... because ... all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel*” (NWiNW p. 8; cf EG 20). “*The Gospel message ... is a spiritual guideline that is always new. It requires the open-mindedness to imagine prophetic and charismatic ways to live the sequela of Christ through suitable, and possibly unprecedented, frameworks. A renewal process that cannot affect and change the structures, in addition to hearts, will not produce real and lasting change*” (NWiNW 3).

Pope Francis having opened for us a new season of spirituality, and looking forward to new paths and processes of growth (cf. EG 169), insists a lot on the moving life: “*A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order*” (EG 44). “*We are asked ... to keep growing, [to live] the wanting to grow as we advance along the path of the Gospel. .... What is essential is to be certain that God loves [me], that Jesus Christ has saved [me] and that his love always has the last word*” (EG 151). “*With this newness Christ is always able to renew our lives and our communities, ... Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel [and the Cottolengo Charism], new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.* (EG 11). Without forgetting the destination towards which our life is headed: *The new Jerusalem, the holy City, is the goal towards which all of humanity is moving* (EG 71).

In *Evangelii gaudium* Pope Francis places Religious Institutes in the Church in communion and in relation with all ecclesial subjects within the People of God (cf. EG 98). He stresses the need for “*a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church*” (EG 102) and “*acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets ... which finds a particular expression in motherhood.*” (EG 103). He remembers also that the Church is a people with many cultural faces, so is our Congregation which, present in different continents, has Sisters of different cultures within itself, whose values and positive forms enrich the way of proclaiming, understanding and living the Cottolengo Charism and consecrated life (cf. EG 116).

Throughout the journey that our Congregation has covered and matured, with the renewing planning of the previous Chapters and in particular of the last one that ends, we can only give thanks to God the provident Father and give thanks to one another in a sincere and true way. The Word of the Lord continues to help us to proceed along courageous and joyful paths of renewed passion for the Gospel in the service of the Kingdom of God, walking together towards the

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<sup>3</sup> Cottolengo, letter to sr. Antonia Pejretti, C. II°, n. 719, p. 510.

peripheries of human existence, moved by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and trusting in Divine Providence which always precedes us.

As required by the Directory, art. 108 of Contemplative Life and art. 116 of Apostolic Life, after hearing the opinion of the General Councillors, I have appointed the Technical Commission composed by the following Sisters:

*Family of apostolic life:*

CALCI Sr. Claudia, CHINNAPPAN Sr. Christina Mary, GALLI Sr. Elisabetta, MAGNI Sr. Debora, MUNYUGI Sr. Jane Karegi, PONNASSERY Sr. Soley.

*Family of contemplative life:*

BALOCCO Sr. Anna Maria, DE BORTOLI Sr. Paola Maria degli Angeli, MWALACHI Sr. Agatha Daniel.

They are accompanied in the work by the General Councillors ARRIVABENE Sister Nicoletta and FUSERO Sister Maria Elena.

The Technical Commission, following the indications of the General Council and in the light of the Word of God, of the documents of the Magisterium and of the Founder, prepares the instruments for the involvement and participation of the Sisters, communities and circumscriptions.

Let us accompany the whole journey of the 11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter with intense prayer, with generous offering and with authentic charity towards all, with immense trust in the Risen Lord present among us, certain that only the Holy Spirit will make the Chapter work begun today fruitful and will bring it to completion according to the “*good will of God*”.

In order to live this Chapter in the spirit of the Gospel and of our Charism, my wish is that the hope of newness of life and mission, which we all desire, will not be found in the abstract, but reflected in our being consecrated women, in our witness of maternal tenderness, in our giving ourselves and consuming ourselves out of love for God and for fragile and rejected humanity to the point of the sacrifice of life. With confidence, each of us must ask God the Father: what can I do on this chapter journey to become more and more a witness to the joyful life touched by Jesus, to the meaningful life that expresses and proclaims the word of the Gospel that we should never forget “*you have done it to Me*”?

Let us raise our thoughts to Mary. She was there, with the Apostles, protagonist with the first Community of the admirable experience of Pentecost; let us pray this tender Mother of ours to obtain the effusion of the Holy Spirit on our Congregation.

Let us turn our grateful and prayerful heart to St. Joseph B. Cottolengo, to Mother Marianna Nasi, to the Saints and Blessed of the Cottolengo Family so that they may intercede for us an ardent evangelical and missionary spirit.

Let us entrust to our elderly and sick Sisters, to the Sisters of contemplative life, “the work” of prayer and offering so that they may obtain grace and blessing on the Chapter journey. Deo gratias!

Mother Elda Pezzuto