

The Word Became Flesh... (Jn. 1:14)

With enthusiasm, openness and hope, the members of the 20th General Chapter met to find new ways to revitalize our life as community. Supported by the prayer of the entire Congregation, we felt confident that God's Spirit would gift us with the courage, flexibility, and vision needed to develop the significant theme:

LIVING THE WORD OF GOD IN EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY - OUR WAY TO THE FUTURE

As the last General Chapter focused us in our call to be bread and wine for the world, so this new theme calls for a profound spiritual awakening flowing from the Word of God. We come together at the table of the Word to hear, to be challenged, to be changed. For "the Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since she increasingly receives and offers the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's Word and Christ's body." (DV 21)

As women of the Word, we hope to create a community life which is rooted deeply in prayer, the sharing of Scripture and Eucharist. Aware of the suggestions of the Sisters-at-large, we came to envision covenant communities which encourage simplicity and respect, communities where responsibility is shared and decision-making participative; communities which serve the mission of today's Church with a new joy, a new energy and enthusiasm-the fruit of intimacy with Christ...

*...all were made to drink
of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13)*

Ours is the sacred responsibility of developing Mother Pauline's charism according to the needs of the Church and the signs of the times. In this, she is a faithful guide for us. Ever obedient to the Gospel, she encourages us to STUDY JESUS.

Pauline's relationship to the Word of God was one of attention and receptivity. As a school girl, she found comfort and strength in frequent Bible reading. As a foundress, she framed her rule of life within the richness of Sacred Scripture. In her prayers, letters, and personal reflections there are many references to biblical texts--both directly and indirectly. Through her openness to the Word, she grew in the awareness that LOVE is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:10)

We are challenged by her life and spirit. Christian Charity is our name, our identity, our mission. Our founding charism, a gift of God's Spirit, is active and alive today! It is a dynamic power for growth within our Congregation. As each of us deepens and matures in her call, she expresses the charism in a unique and meaningful way. Pauline's vision and mission lives on in us; through us it touches the world.

Formed within the Eucharist and the Word of God, we understand very clearly that our principal law and rule, our whole character and life is a joyful, living LOVE-which bears all, believes all, hopes all, and endures all. It is significant that the first Sisters, when reflecting on Mother Pauline's entire life, chose for the inscription on her grave the wisdom of the Gospel of John: "This is my commandment, that you love one another." "Father...may they be one as we are!" Communion in charity was her goal. It is ours as well. We seek deeper communion with God, with one another, with the poor of every kind, with all creation.

"Freely you have received. Freely give..." (Mt. 10:8)

Renewal of life in community is a priority for the Sisters of every province. Community has two aspects: an inner unity of spirit ("one heart and one soul" in charity) and the visible external expressions of this spirit (common life). When we consider the common life and our ways of expressing it, we must remember that we are active, apostolic religious. This has an effect on the structures which shape our local communities. Structure is not an end in itself but a means to deeper life. Can we accept the challenge to create new structures which will help us toward solidarity and to let go of those that hinder us?

Resistance to change has been identified as an obstacle to renewed community living. We want to move from resistance to readiness so that, like the first christens we may be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Acts 13:52)

From the gift of inner unity arises the responsibility to make time for each other, to share at all levels, to communicate in significant ways, to "become Sisters". One of the most powerful means of sharing is communal reflection on the Word of God. Where "this is practiced with spontaneity and by common agreement it nourishes faith and hope as well as mutual respect and trust; it facilitates reconciliation and nourishes solidarity in prayer." (FL #16)

Since Scripture came into being within the believing community, we can best understand it within a believing community--under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Scripture sharing is a process which takes time to develop and mature and requires a commitment from the members of the group. In keeping with the Chapter theme, great emphasis should be placed on the frequent sharing of Scripture.

An obstacle to vibrant community living is a sense of being over-burdened, over-worked. Every Sister should learn how to create a balanced life, a more holistic sense of well being combining ministry, community, leisure, prayer, and time alone.

As pressures in ministry increase, we must find ways to nourish the contemplative dimension of life and take the time to cultivate a listening heart and peaceful spirit. We need the freedom in our prayer life to "be still and know that I am God..." (Ps 46) For this reason, it can be of value for us to encourage fewer prayer forms and focus, like Mary, on hearing God's Word, pondering it, and allowing it to transform us.

In an authentic community, every Sister is free to be herself. She knows and accepts herself as a gift of God and is able to respect the gift of the other. Each sister, regardless of her age, background or ministry, deserves unconditional acceptance and sincere respect. All forms of rejection and prejudice are incompatible with Gospel living.

An honest admission of weaknesses (such as unreconciled differences, fear of being vulnerable, perfectionism, and judgmental attitudes) can lead us to a new understanding of humility as the basis of loving relationships. It can also modify our unrealistic expectations.

We are challenged by the Word of God to find effective ways to resolve differences, to create new beginnings, and to make a fresh start toward deeper solidarity. In every human community reconciliation is an ongoing process. Each local community will find ways to restore peace whenever there is discord or division. We must learn how to forgive and be forgiven, to make peace with the past so as to be free to move into the future.

The Gospel also requires a deeper solidarity with God's gift of creation. As faithful stewards, we grow in respect for the earth and its resources, simplify our lifestyle and accept responsibility for the well-being of generations to come.

Jesus said: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work." (Jn. 4:34)

As a community of disciples, we seek always to discover God's will. More and more, we open ourselves in availability to do the things that please the Father. The kenosis of Jesus is the measure of our loving. He emptied Himself in servanthood and accomplished the mission of Redemption. His incarnation is our unfailing source of union with the Trinity. The more we become one with Christ, the more we live the riches of our identity.

Jesus taught equality in discipleship. Our Constitutions challenge us to practice community dialogue, collaboration, shared responsibility and subsidiarity—ways and means to deepen in mature, responsible obedience. Obedience requires a stance of hearing and healing.

Obstacles to a more responsible obedience include lack of faith, immaturity, individualism and authoritarianism. An obedience of love is rooted in respect for the human person and develops through trust, openness, healthy human relationships, community sharing, and the willingness to give and accept constructive criticism.

Subsidiarity, a concept implicit in our Constitutions, is intrinsic to the spirit of Mother Pauline. There is a need to develop it at every level. In response to the teaching of Vatican II, we want to move forward toward more participatory models of living. Superiors at all levels need to be prepared to implement these new directions.

The role of authority is one of service. Following the example of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples, good leaders in the community will be ready to listen, animate, strengthen, and enliven the community in the Way.

However, we each share responsibility for creating a strong, vibrant, local community. We each must be willing to bring our gifts to the group, exercise responsibility with accountability, and sacrifice ourselves for the common good. If life is shared in this way, no one will be in want. For such living the local assembly needs to be revitalized to include such concepts as goal setting, building consensus, strengthening the spirit of communion and mission, creating life-giving structures and sharing in faith.

To attain these goals, personal and communal discernment is of great importance and recognized by all as an integral part of obedience today. As we move into the future, the principles of discernment should be more widely implanted as an effective means of discovering and doing God's will. This process required preparation in prayer, detachment of heart, humility, and sincere openness.

"Do whatever He tells you." (Jn. 2:5)

Those who live the Christ-mystery cannot help but give their all for the coming of the reign of God. As women religious, we are consecrated for mission. Mission is more than an activity, an apostolate. It is our very life, united with Christ the Incarnate Word, who became flesh to dwell among us.

We are a prophetic sign which makes the primacy of God's love present and visible. As witnesses to the charism of Blessed Pauline, we live to serve the poor of every kind. With joyful love, energy, youthful enthusiasm and vigor, we give ourselves daily to the mission of Christian Charity, ever open to the urgent needs of our world at this time in history.

As women, and as religious, Mary is our model and mother. She is **the** women of the Word, the one in whose body and heart the WORD became incarnate. She is the contemplative woman who treasured all in her heart; the active, eager kinswomen who hastened in compassion to serve her "sister" Elizabeth, and who noticed the need of the newlyweds at Cana. She persevered in love on Calvary, and stood as a center of unity in the midst of the infant church, awaiting the coming of the Spirit.

In her Magnificat, Mary proclaims with joyful hope the everlasting mercy of God. She is a voice for the poor, the hungry, the lowly, the victims of injustice. We, too, are called to be witnesses of Gospel simplicity, to confront the culture of death and violence with the power of Christ's love, joy and peace. As we pray within the biblical mystery of "woman", we discover ourselves and our vocation to love.

As women in the church and for the church we share Mary's mission of presence and influence. Her YES to the Lord revolutionized human history.

"And know that I am with you always..." (Matt. 28:20)

For the past 150 years, our Sisters throughout the world have contributed to the church's life and holiness. Their lives bear splendid testimony to the Gospel and our particular way of en fleshing it. They call us to take our rightful place within the Church and to offer ourselves for the great tasks which lie ahead as together we build a new civilization of love.

Rome, August 5, 1995