

FROM THE CHRONICLES

THE FIRST GENERAL CHAPTERS OF THE CONGREGATION

The following gives some insight into the early chapters of our congregation in order to show how unity in love pervaded all the discussions. We know from reports and general letters of the unity, as a special grace, that was experienced by the capitulars, so that each chapter became a celebration, an event of joy and hope for all. Viewed in this manner, these chapters became not only guardians of our heritage, providing criteria and regulations for keeping that heritage alive, but are themselves a living expression of our heritage, to be "one heart and one soul" in Christ.

FIRST GENERAL CHAPTER: JUNE 1-18, 1879

Mother Pauline had been asking for a general chapter long before the dates cited above. Permission had been withheld by Bishop Conrad Martin due to the unrest and turmoil caused by the Kulturkampf. Thus when the permission finally came, Mother Pauline was delighted. In a letter written to all the Sisters on December 2, 1878, she earnestly begged them to pray for God's blessing on the chapter.

When Bishop Conrad Martin opened the first general chapter of our congregation he pointed out, in his address, the essential duties of the chapter: election of the superior general, examination of the status of the congregation, disclosure of the abuses and means of correcting them, renewal and strengthening of unity within the congregation. It was the last point that the Bishop especially emphasized, since unity is indispensable for the continued existence of the congregation. "Weakening of unity," he said, "means weakening of the entire structure while strengthening of unity means the strengthening of the whole." The capitulars of the first general chapter witnessed this unity guaranteed primarily by Mother Pauline's almost unanimous reelection as superior general. The records show one dissenting vote. With great circumspection, with courage and humility, in unconditional surrender to God's will, and with unwavering confidence in God, she succeeded in unifying the congregation when all else seemed to be falling apart. The devastating powers of the Kulturkampf were present at the time of the first general chapter. She alone with the grace of God could successfully lead the congregation through these troubled times. She, who had been a mother to the entire congregation and to each individual Sister for thirty years. No one surmised that she would have but a short time for this difficult task. It was a brief time, yet long enough for her last strength to be spent in fortifying and strengthening unity among the Sisters with ever loving care and devotion. Mother Pauline, personalized in her what the circular letter strongly recommended to the Sisters: "That we cherish the greatest love toward our own congregation is understood. Its honor and growth must be a matter of solicitude and great interest to us. We must be enthusiastic about our congregation, comply with its decisions and constitutions, etc. and bring honor to it through our living of the constitutions."

SECOND GENERAL CHAPTER: NOVEMBER 1-26, 1881

We all know the second general chapter was an extraordinary one. It convened for the purpose of electing a successor to Mother Pauline, so that the orphaned congregation would again have a superior general. There is evidence of great grief over the death of Mother Pauline in the accounts of the chapter. Her demise was something no one envisioned during her lifetime. That the congregation would some day have to continue without her presence, now became a harsh and painful reality. On the other hand there was the conviction that "our esteemed Reverend Mother, who with deep love and solicitous care always sought the welfare of our congregation, will certainly support our prayers for the chapter

Emphasis was placed, in the discussions, on the points Mother Pauline advocated most strongly and repeated untiringly: unity and love. The unanimous election of Sister Mathilde Kothe as Mother

Pauline's successor clearly shows that the Sisters' greatest concern was a continued guidance of the congregation in the spirit of Mother Pauline, and that this would be best accomplished by one who worked closely with her from our beginnings. Sister Mathilde was shaken at the thought of the responsibility and burden of directing the congregation. The account tells us that after the election she spent a long time, before the image of Mother Pauline, without doubt seeking strength and help for the direction of the congregation according to her predecessor's spirit. The circular letter emphasizes the great responsibility that all the Sisters have for the preservation of "complete unity." "If we, in the future, remain as faithfully and firmly united (as heretofore) and faithfully observe the heritage of our beloved Reverend Mother and the holy rules no external enemy, no storm or pressure of the times will be able to cause us harm."

THIRD GENERAL CHAPTER: AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 25, 1887

Mother Mathilde Kothe was unanimously elected superior general. All knew that she had faithfully guided the congregation in the "spirit of the unforgettable Mother Pauline" (Report of the chapter) and guiding the congregation according to this spirit brought it to full bloom. The bishop's representative who had presided at the election was visibly pleased with the vote's result. However, he reminded all the Sisters "that the position of the superior general is always a difficult one, but that it was especially so because of the current difficult times and also because the congregation was so widely spread. Thus, there was a special obligation on the part of each Sister to preserve the spirit of love of neighbor and kindness bequeathed to it by Mother Pauline so that these virtues ever remain the characteristic mark of the congregation. In this manner he urged us to an ever greater love and loyalty to our congregation and its foundress as well as to the superior and mother he, the bishop, had (again) given us." (Report)

The circular letter addressed to the Sisters emphasized the healthy spirit that prevailed in the congregation. "This realization should by no means be a source of pride but should serve as a deep well of gratitude to God, who has blessed the congregation, and preserved and confirmed it in this spirit, and, by the same token, gratitude to our beloved Foundress, who while her physical presence was no longer with us, continued to protect the work she had begun so humbly and beautifully while on earth. The work that she nurtured to full bloom in spite of trials, difficulties and sufferings, and through which her spiritual daughters now have the grace of perseverance and continued progress in their vocation as religious. Finally, the assurance that a genuine spirit, fervent zeal, and sincere striving are prevalent in the congregation must animate us to an ever greater love and loyalty to our community, so that we will always and everywhere bring it honor, and with justifiable pride consider ourselves its children, its members ever ready to make any sacrifice that the institute and its interests require. That is the spirit that has prevailed and that is the spirit that must continue: faithfully and unflinchingly we will support one another in good times as well as in bad times, and through a life wholly conformed to our holy rule, ensure continued existence and God's blessing for the work of our beloved Mother Foundress."

FOURTH GENERAL CHAPTER: AUGUST 6-21; 1893

Until now, Mother Mathilde Kothe had guided the congregation in absolute fidelity to the spirit of Mother Pauline as well as with an interior strength and deep faith akin to hers. In accordance with the constitutions and in consideration of Mother Mathilde's poor health, the capitulars agreed that a re-election of Mother Mathilde was out of question. With deep-felt emotion they thanked Mother Mathilde, who followed in the footsteps of Mother Pauline, and for consuming her strength to keep the spirit of Mother Pauline alive. It was because of her courageous, wise, and persevering guidance, that the community could at this time enjoy a unity and love that, as stated in the

circular letter, binds all the Sisters not only with each other but also with the superiors, and with the general motherhouse, the center of the congregation. "The interrelationships are excellent and we cannot thank God enough! It is His work and much is due to the intercession of our beloved Mother Foundress that we enjoy this spirit of love and unity. Sincere gratitude is also due to our dear Mother Mathilde for her loving care and untiring effort to maintain and fortify this same spirit in the congregation. We, the Sisters of Christian Charity, on the other hand, have a serious obligation to be totally faithful in safeguarding this precious blessing."

With the election of Sister Philomena Schmitt diel everyone perceived continuity in the spiritual direction of the congregation guaranteed.

In this chapter a new facet of the congregation came to the fore; internationalism was looked upon as an opportunity for even greater unity generated by mutual sharing of personnel. "We believe that an interchange of Sisters among the three provinces as a special means of strengthening unity and love should be recommended. We, therefore, suggest, that taking into consideration the possibilities and needs, the three provinces exchange Sisters not only as heretofore; European Sisters sent overseas but vice versa, also, that American Sisters be sent to Europe. It is understood that this would not be the general norm because of language barriers and distance. However, we do encourage these exchanges." (Circular letter)

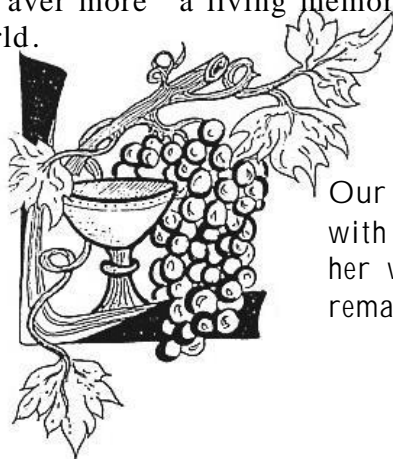
FIFTH GENERAL CHAPTER: AUGUST 6-21, 1899

This chapter was significant; it was the golden jubilee year of the congregation. We were filled with gratitude to God and for His grace, that the spirit of Mother Pauline was still alive. This is reported in the circular letter: "May it ever remain that way so that after another fifty years, our beloved congregation, far richer in grace and merit, endure in the same love and unity, the same spirit of our constitutions and directives, for the joy and honor of holy Church and the pleasure of our Foundress, Pauline von Mallinckrodt. Above all, may the admirable example of her holy life and blessed death and in a special way her unconquerable love, continue to bind us in holy, mutual love, as she bids us to do in the inscription on her tomb stone in St. Conrad Chapel..."

"In the name of the entire congregation and each individual Sister we place this holy promise on that cherished tomb; that all of us will seriously and zealously strive to observe this admonition of our beloved Mother Foundress, so that her prayer may be effective and bear fruit in us."

CONCLUSION

The 22nd General Chapter is obligated to follow this same tradition of safeguarding, strengthening, and re-creating unity in love. As all previous chapters, it too will be an obligation for all of us to bring to fulfillment, "in gratitude and availability," (Cardinal Pironio) an ever greater love of God, so that we are ever more "a living memory of Christ's life and action" in and for the Church and the world.



Our Congregation, most intimately united with Holy Mother Church, desires to serve her with all its powers, and to be and ever remain a living, fruitful branch on the vine.