



+ Rome, September 24, 2006

Dear Sisters,

You are in the midst of the preparation for your Provincial Chapters which I observe with great interest and, of course, support with my prayers. It is a joy for me to see the readiness and dedication with which you take part in the preparation of the Chapter of your Province, be it by personal study, group sharing, assemblies and above all by your prayer. The Provincial Chapters have a close relationship to the General Chapter. In all deliberations and decisions with regard to a Province we should always keep in mind the whole Congregation. On the other hand the General Chapter can only be fruitful when it does not ignore the realities of the Provinces.

With this letter I want to give you some information with regard to the theme and preparation for the General Chapter. (Cf. Handbook of the Government of the Congregation, General Level). The period officially specified for the General Chapter is July 9 to August 4. Already at least two days before all members of the General Chapter will come together for informal meetings. I am very grateful to the leadership of the German Province that the Chapter can again take place in Paderborn at the origin of our Congregation. That fact alone gives the General Chapter a special character.

The theme which we chose for the General Chapter is taken from *Vita Consecrata* (# 22) and *Starting Afresh With Christ* (# 22):

TO BE A LIVING MEMORY OF JESUS' WAY OF LIVING AND ACTING.

The themes of the Provincial Chapters are related to the one of the General Chapter:

German Province:	To be on the way with Jesus – To be witnesses of the living God
N.A. Western Province:	To be a living memory of Jesus Christ
N.A. Eastern Province:	To live Jesus
Chilean Province:	To make Christ present so that the world will believe
Urug.-Argentinian Province:	Do this in memory of me

These themes are a continuation and deepening of those of the General Chapters of 1989, 1995 and 2001.

In the following I want to give a short explanation of the theme “To be a living memory of Jesus’ way of living and acting.” First of all I want to clarify the term “memory” as distinct from “remembrance”. Every day during the Eucharist we hear the words: “Do this in memory of me.” That is not simply a remembrance of something that had happened in the past; it is rather the ever new realization that God’s salvific action is happening here and now. We have taken this understanding of memory from the Hebrew “zikkaron.” The history of the Jewish people was never considered as something that had passed; it was always a living history, present here and now. The memory of something that had happened was always considered as actualized again in the present. That becomes very clear in the liturgical celebration of Passover. What was clearly stated in the Torah, the Prophets and Scripture was always related to concrete daily life.

That is exactly what takes place when we celebrate the “memory” of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and when we are called to be “a living memory of Jesus.” “ ‘Do this in memory of me,’ says the

Lord. Celebrate the commitment of your life, let transformation happen to you, become part of the salvific action and then leave the celebration with a new dimension of community. That is the gift which we as Christians shall give to the world.” (Bishop Alois Schwarz)

We can only be a memory of Jesus’ life and action when we let transformation happen, when we allow him to form us, when we look at him, when we study Jesus, as Mother Pauline expresses it. To be a living memory of Jesus means to make his life and actions, our life and actions. He gives himself to us so that we no longer live but Christ lives in us (cf. Gal. 4:20). Jesus wants community with us, communion. But then he sends us to be “communion,” “bread” for those who are entrusted to us: “bread” of being present, of listening, of sharing; but also “bread” of a breathing space in order not to fall into activism. We shall be “bread” of hope, community, peace, “bread” of joy in the midst of a society in which the entertainment industry is booming, but in which the people are experiencing less and less true joy. As a spiritual preparation for the General Chapter, that will begin in nine months, I would like to invite you, personally and as community to be “Messengers of Joy.” Joy, in the biblical sense, always means fullness of life, it is an expression of someone who knows that he/she is accepted and loved. Joy is the basic attitude of those whom Jesus calls to follow him. We know how important the attitude of joy had been for Mother Pauline. “The spirit of joy and cheerfulness cannot be sufficiently recommended to the Sisters,” she says in the First Draft of 1849. She never lost joy, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Even in midst of the Kulturkampf she writes: “The dear God does all things well. Let us therefore praise and bless him at all times and cheerfully continue along life’s way. Alleluia!” (Mother Pauline, 1872) Unfortunately for many people, even for us Religious, joy is not highly rated. I am very grateful that Pope Benedict XVI is underlining just this aspect again and again. He wants to awaken the joy of faith, the beauty and the positive aspect of belonging to Christ.

Dear Sisters, we are called to be witnesses of the Good News, the Joyful News, as we say in German. But do we not fulfill this mission often too “dead seriously” so that no spark reaches the others? The Gospel will only be credible when we give a joyful “face” to it. “Be joyful always,” St. Paul writes to some of his communities(cf. Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:6) “Always!” The refrain of a song brings out this point: “If the end of the world would be tomorrow I would still dance today and plant an apple tree.” During the recent interview for some Radio Stations the reporters asked the Holy Father, among other things, to what extent humor would be important in the life of the Pope. His answer is refreshing: “I’m not a man who constantly thinks up jokes. But I think it’s very important to be able to see the funny side of life and its joyful dimension and not to take everything too tragically. I’d also say it’s necessary for my ministry. A writer once said that angels can fly because they don’t take themselves too seriously. Maybe we could also fly a bit if we didn’t think we were so important.” We should “take seriously” humor in our life, dear Sisters, because “from humor arises a loving relationship with oneself and with others, an attitude of joy and humility. Humor changes, transforms us.” (Prior Johannes Pausch) Mother Pauline gives us an example. In the midst of the Kulturkampf she writes to a Sister: “Let us practice holy joy.” (Mother Pauline, 1877) In her letters we can discover many humorous expressions, a fact not yet well known to us. Mother Pauline was a joyful person because she was a person deeply united with God.

But how can we feel joy today in the midst a world, quaking with fear, violence, disasters, in the midst of people who are disappointed and who do not have a vision for the future? Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, for which we must ask. But this gift has also to be nourished. In order that joy can grow and mature we have to cultivate community/communion, we have to practice reconciliation which – from the biblical perspective – always leads to a feast. Joy is nourished by entering into the Word of God – personally and in community. Joy is nourished by adoration, by simply BEING in the Lord’s presence and listening to him. Joy matures by looking to Jesus crucified. We can only experience deep inner joy when we are touched by the wounds of Christ, visible in many people today, even in our nearest

surroundings. Let us keep alive the joy of Mother Pauline, dear Sisters! Let us be a living memory of Jesus' joy. "Ask and you shall receive, so that your joy may be complete." (John 16: 24)

Using the well-known prayer of Mother Pauline together with the age-old intercession to the Holy Spirit will remind us daily of this spiritual preparation for the General Chapter:

***"Grant, O Jesus, that your image be formed in me,
that I live only from you and in you and with you and through you -
you the vine and I the branch.!
Help me that all my views and opinions resemble yours,
that others, as it were, see Christ in me."***

(Mother Pauline, 1854)

***"Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Your faithful,
and enkindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created,
and You shall renew the face of the earth."***

Dear Sisters, let us prepare for the important event of the General Chapter with that joy, which should characterize us as Sisters of Christian Charity. Even when many things are still in darkness we can go towards the future with joyful confidence. Pope John Paul II encouraged us: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things. Make your lives a fervent expectation of Christ; go forth to meet him like the wise virgins setting out to meet the Bridegroom. Be always ready, faithful to Christ, the Church, to your Institute and to the men and women of our time. In this way you will day by day be renewed in Christ, in order with his Spirit to build fraternal communities, to join him in washing the feet of the poor, and to contribute in your own unique way to the transfiguration of the world. May our world, entrusted to human hands, become ever more human and just, a sign and anticipation of the world to come, in which the Lord, humble and glorified, poor and exalted, will be the full and lasting joy for us and for our brothers and sisters, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit." (Vita Consecrata, # 110) Dear Sisters, LET US LIVE WHAT WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD FROM THE GOSPEL, BE IT EVER SO LITTLE. BUT LET US LIVE IT!

May the Lord bless our way! With hearty greetings also from my assistants I am in gratitude
your

Sr. Adalberto