

1ST ASSEMBLY TO THE YOUNG OLS WORKING INSTRUMENT

WE WALK TOGETHER FOR A COMMON DREAM



MAY 2021

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

CHARISM "Keeping the fire alive"

1.1. Knowing and Deepening the Charism to Understand How to Update it Today

- 1.1.1. Elisabetta Renzi's Experience
- 1.1.2. Dynamism of the Charism: From Tradition to Actualization
 - a) Good Historical Knowledge
 - b) Continuous Updating

1.2. How to Communicate the Charism to Today's Young People

- 1.2.1. A Look at the World of Youth
- 1.2.2. Young People Today: Some Food for Thought

EDUCATION "Nurturing Fraternity to Rebuild Relationships"

2.1. The Task of Education Today: Rebuilding Relationships

- 2.1.1. Rebuilding the Relationship with God
- 2.1.2. Rebuilding the Brotherhood
 - a) Social Injustices
 - b) Migrants
 - c) Responsible Citizenship
 - d) Access to Education
- 2.1.3. Rebuilding the Relationship with Creation
- 2.2. **Style of the Educational Mission of the MPdA: Some Traits**
 - a) Attention to the Human and Spiritual Formation of Educators
 - b) Educators by Vocation, rather than by Profession
 - c) An Inclusive Education
 - d) The Christian Proposal
 - e) Joy and Positivity

INTERCULTURALITY "Welcoming and Valuing Differences"

3.1. An International Congregation: Opportunities and Challenges

3.2. Being MPdA Religious with a Strong Identity and Sense of Belonging

3.3. The Values of the Charism as a "Common Home" - A Reflection

- 1. Union with Jesus Crucified
- 2. Poverty and Humility
- 3. Joy and Happiness
- 4. Trust in Providence
- 5. Search for the Will of God
- 6. Common Life
- 7. At the Service of Education

INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters:

It is with great joy that I present to you the Working Document for the Young Sisters Assembly MPdA, fruit of the work that the preparatory commission carried out over these past few months.

The purpose of this document is to offer each one of you participants of the Young Sisters Assembly, a tool for working, reading, and for personal reflection. It is therefore an "open" document, deliberately "incomplete," created to raise questions and open processes of conversation and dialogue.

The document consists of an introduction and three chapters, which are ordered according to the priority you gave through the answers to the questionnaire that had been sent to you.

Each chapter has a title and a subtitle that reinforces and illuminates the content of the topic and opens with two quotations - from the Magisterium of the Church and from our documents - on the topic in question.

The first chapter deals with the theme of the Charism and addresses two aspects: the importance of knowing and deepening the Charism in order to understand how to actualize it today, and the challenge facing the Church and Consecrated Life, on how to communicate the charism to young people today.

The second chapter, deals with the topic of Education as a mean to rebuild relationships: the relationship with God, with our brothers and sisters, and with creation. We also mention some of the fundamental traits of the educational mission's style of the MPdA.

The third and last chapter, addresses the topic of Interculturality. Intercultural living is practiced in many Religious Institutes today, and it is a topic that needs study and attention by us since we have become an international religious family. In this chapter, are included the Core Values of the Charism, a set of traits that identify and unite us despite our differences: age, culture, race, and education. For each of these values there is a comment/interpretation that can enrich our reflection.

This document is the fruit of a long process that has involved many people. First, an international commission was formed to represent the different cultural and linguistic diversities present in our Congregation. Then, with the help of Dr. Alberto Frassinetti, who accompanied the committee throughout the process, we worked in two language groups (Italian and English) with each group working on all three topics, developing and enriching each topic with contributions that enhanced each chapter. At the conclusion of the work by the language groups, we had the opportunity to discuss the three topics as a whole commission. Once this phase was complete, Sister Serena Pinotti, worked on the final version of the document, which is in Italian, and helped with the format. The final draft was then presented to the General Council for approval. Lastly, we worked on the translations so that each one of us, may have the document in her own language and understand it well.

How should we use this Working Document? Here are some criteria:

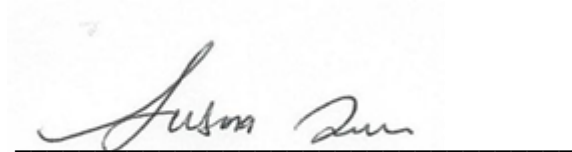
First, I ask that you read it individually in its entirety and attentively. Individually, because each one must let the document speak to her; in its entirety because we could be tempted to skip some parts that "do not concern us" or that we think we already know; attentively because reflection takes time, and should not be rushed!

While reading the document, I invite you to highlight those parts that most speak to you. Write down the questions and comments you have and the proposals you would like to present. Pay attention to everything that the reading arouses in you. This is precisely the purpose of the work: that each sister interact with the text, and sees it as a personal challenge. We all are called to preserve and revitalize the Charism, to live the educational mission and preserve it by rebuilding relationships, and to embrace the great challenge of interculturality within the Congregation.

Approach the document using 'two lenses' that seeing it as a dream and as a reality. Both lenses are necessary! They will help us reflect on the ways in which we, and not others, can make a vital contribution to the life of the Congregation in the present, now, and not in a distant future. This is the moment when we are called to go beyond ourselves, beyond the constraints of our nationality, our own interest, our studies and our ministry, beyond our personal desires. It is time to think about how we want to contribute to the life of the whole Congregation for the years ahead. To do this, we need a vision and a dream and we need to make proposals which are concrete and in keeping with the needs of today.

Before closing, I want to convey the joy and commitment with which each member of the committee has carried out the elaboration of the text. We experienced the challenge of not having a common language, and the difficulty of direct communication within the international committee: this clearly speaks of our reality as a religious family, and of the complexity of communicating when there is no one language that unites us. We cannot fail to address this issue in our assembly!

My sincere thanks to each of the sisters who contributed to the realization of this preparatory document. Thank you for enriching the content of each page with your personal contribution, with your life experience, and with the desire to continue building the present and future of our Congregation.



Sor M. Susana Díaz González

GENERAL COUNCILOR

Tepatitlán de Morelos, Jal. Mexico

May 26, 2021

CHARISM

Keeping the fire alive

Fidelity to the charism does not mean “petrifying it” - the devil is the one who “petrifies,” do not forget! Fidelity to the charism does not mean writing it on parchment and putting it in a picture. It certainly implies fidelity to tradition, but fidelity to tradition "means keeping the fire alive and not worshiping the ashes." (Pope Francis)

The charism, always remaining identical to itself, must possess the capacity for adaptation and insertion, to enliven the new realities and needs of our personal, community, ecclesial, and social history.” (Directory # 6)

1.1 Knowing and Deepening the Charism to Understand How to Incarnate it Today

1.1.1 Elisabetta Renzi's Experience

“There are many religious institutes in the Church and different from each other, according to the character proper to each one;¹ but each brings his own vocation as a gift aroused by the Spirit, through the work of "distinguished men and women,"² and authentically approved by the sacred hierarchy.”

When we are asked, "What is the Charism of your founder, of your foundress?" it would be strongly reductive to answer by indicating an end, an action, a task. We will always have to tell of an experience, the experience of him, of her, his choice of life, the founding intentions, the ideal motivations. In fact, founders and foundresses had a particular experience of the Spirit. They allowed themselves to be led by God into a new existential understanding of the mystery of Christ, of the Gospel, of Christian life, to the point of delineating the physiognomy of a work that is expressed in a specific service to the Church and to society as a response to the signs of the times. The contents of this experience constitutes what we usually call the "founder's charism."³

The root of Elisabetta Renzi's Charism must be identified in the experience of a strong union with Jesus Crucified. Elisabetta experiences the crucifix as the decisive saving event - the event that transforms the world. She was devoted to the crucifix from an early age since an ancient miraculous crucifix was venerated in her home Parish of Mondaino, and certainly she had learned to pray before

¹ cf. PC 7, 8, 9, 10

² cf. LC 45; PC 1, 2

³ CIARDI FABIO, Religious and lay people together in the same “charismatic family, p.12.

this image with her family. Over time, the desire to conform herself to this Jesus Who had given Himself for us, to the point of death, became stronger and stronger in her. The Cross, therefore, was not something negative for her, but it represented the place where Jesus shows us how we can truly love and live a full, fulfilled life by renouncing ourselves. "The Cross! It gave peace to the world, and I love it" she said.

This experience of Jesus Crucified in Elisabetta is accompanied by a great desire "to do good", a desire felt from a young age. Initially, she thinks that this desire to do good can be fulfilled through a life of contemplation and prayer in the monastery; but this is not God's plan for her, and she is forced to leave the Augustinian monastery of Pietrarubbia and return to her family. Very difficult years followed for Elisabetta: the shattered dream of contemplative life, growing older without forming a family of her own, the difficulty of remaining faithful to the life of the Spirit in a secular life, the death of her favorite sister, and a sense of bewilderment and uncertainty about her future.

But Jesus Crucified was with her in this darkness. He was there, waiting for her in the silence of the parish of Mondaino, and she must have turned to him many times to ask for light. Now, she too felt the loneliness, the sense of failure that the crucified had certainly experienced.

And God did not fail to show himself to her and help her change her life. It is never too late for the Lord to intervene! Her spiritual director, Don Vitale Corbucci, suggested one day for her to go to Coriano, where there was a Conservatory for the education of the girls from the small town. Elisabetta welcomed the will of God that was being manifested to her through this mediation and began a new life. She did not go to Coriano to begin a religious institute. She went to Coriano to respond to a strong desire to spend her life with the Lord doing good. Elisabetta arrived in Coriano on April 29, 1824 at the age of 37.

And so, the last one to arrive at the Conservatory, she was asked to take over the direction in 1829. Since then, Elisabetta continued the communication with Maddalena of Canossa in order for the teachers in Coriano to join the Sisters of Charity. But the Lord - always speaking through events - had them understand that He had a different plan for her. Thus, in 1839, the small Conservatory of Coriano became a new religious institution, recognized and approved by the Church: the *Maestre Pie dell'Addolorata* of Rimini, a diocesan religious Institute for women dedicated "to the Christian, civil and scientific education of people of their sex."⁴ The new Institute followed the Rules of the Pious Teachers, that is, of all the Congregations in Italy at that time who were dedicated to the education of girls, especially the poor ones. Hence the name: *Maestre Pie*.

Elisabetta's life is the life of a woman always open to knowing and doing God's will, willing to change her plans, always keeping her gaze fixed on Jesus Crucified knowing that the alleluia certainly exists, but it's beyond Calvary. "Every effort is small to get to heaven," she said, and her faith was strengthened by the constant presence of the Lord in her life.

Because she was deeply rooted in Him, she was free and detached from herself. What was important for her was not success or merit, but "doing good." Elisabetta was also a practical woman who faced the concrete problems of life with determination. She entered the field of education and wanted an integral education for her girls: Christian, religious, civil, and scientific. It was not enough to educate

⁴ Reg. # 5

them, she wanted them to be able to become good people, to know how to do a job, how to read (not all women learned to write at that time), and how to raise a family.

Her Charism as Foundress, therefore, was that of an educator, willing to spend herself for the people entrusted to her, and that of an apostle of Jesus Crucified who showed the depth of his love accepting even death for us. Jesus' love is a love that forgives and redeems everyone always.

1.1.2 Dynamism of the Charism: From Tradition to Actualization

The charism is not preserved by keeping it aside; you have to open it and let it come out, so that you can get in touch with reality, with people, with their anxieties and their problems. And thus, in this fruitful encounter with reality, the charism grows, is renewed and also reality is transformed, transfigured through the spiritual strength that this charism carries with it. (Pope Francis)

A Charism which is alive, is by its very nature creative, opening new spaces, renewing old patterns, and changing directions. Each Institute born of a charism has its own spiritual strength and, therefore, its own originality from which flows a vitality that refreshes life and enables works. A vitality which shows the ability of the Charism to regenerate itself in people allowing them to enliven a certain work and ministry. Not in terms of "novelties" as the world understands them, which are nothing more than re-editions of old things, though in different forms, but as it happens in the "world of the Spirit," in which "the new" is "the real."

For the charism to continue to be alive, it is necessary:

- a) **Good historical knowledge:** History contributes more than any other discipline to freeing the mind from the tyranny of current opinion, and protects against the risk of manipulating the information of the past, reconstructing it in a partial way. If we put the writings, the initiatives, the works, and the choices of the founders and subsequent communities in their real context, they offer messages to rethink, elements to reflect on, challenges to face, to express the creativity required today. This is the purpose: to rethink new ways of updating ourselves without neglecting or arbitrarily interpreting the essentials of our Charism.
- b) **Continuous updating:** It is not enough to draw on the writings of the Foundress and repeat what she has done. The constant challenge is to allow these texts to lead us to live the same experience they contain. This is the way in which we must approach the Tradition: to know not to repeat, but to actualize. For this it is necessary:
 - To be faithful to the questions that moved the Foundress, to the motivations that prompted her to give her life, without repeating to the letter the norms or the details of what she did or said;
 - To bring out the Foundress' intentions and ideals by abstracting them from the historical, social, and cultural context in which she lived, and then proceed to re-express them in today's cultural forms;
 - To allow the prophetic force of the Charism to give new life and guide us in responding in new ways to new poverties and new needs;

- To have the courage (like the founders / foundresses) to be operative in the light of the Charism, with a far-sighted vision, fully aware that this involves risk.

We must not be afraid to renew the Charism because it does not mean making it lose its own identity. On the contrary! Since identity is a dynamic reality which, though rooted on solid foundations is capable of new manifestations, the Charism becomes stronger to the extent it is enriched by different manifestations. A fixed identity is a weak identity; an identity that is actualized is a strong identity. For this, we must not fear the process of enculturating a Charism in the various geographical areas of the world. The important thing is to keep our gaze fixed on the founding core of the Charism, without transforming it, but enriching it with new manifestations. In this way, our times will also be "the first times."

1.2 How to Communicate the Charism to Today's Young People

Just as Elisabetta Renzi lived her experience of union with Jesus and her desire to do good by educating the youth of her time, so too are we called to turn to the young people of today. Our mission – that of accompanying them on the journey of encounter with the Lord and of educating them to a life spent for others – is in need of constant renewal, of finding deeper motivations and of finding a new way of communicating. To do this, we need to question ourselves and understand well the world we are addressing: Who are the young people today? Where can we meet them? How do we talk to them? Are they still interested in consecrated life in a religious institute?

1.2.1 A Look at the World of Youth

"The characteristic of youth is to be on a journey, to be on the way to something, to be on the path of illusions, to be on the path of plans, to be on the path of desires, to be on the path of love."⁵ As Pope Francis recalls, being young is synonymous with change, progress, and the future. It means facing challenges and creating or recreating a space for full development and for the future, transforming problems into opportunities, into solutions.

When we say the word "young," a way of speaking, behaving, or dressing comes to mind, but young people are much more than that! However, since we are used to thinking in stereotypes, it is important to try to understand who young people really are, what they think, how they live, what they do, and why they do it.

First of all, it is necessary to remember that there is a plurality of worlds of youth: the word "youth" takes on different meanings according to the different cultural contexts. The plurality of the world of youth needs to be known, and understood; and for this, we must keep in mind the cultural diversity of each country, the personal, and social aspects.

Even the role that young people have in society is not the same everywhere: certainly, in the world young people represent the present, and they are enriching it with their contribution. Their power and

⁵ Pope Francis

influence are much greater today than a few years ago. We are witnessing a "youthfulization" of society, a phenomenon according to which young people impose their ways of speaking, fashion, taste, hobbies ... on society. For this reason, it will be especially important that the Church - which tends to be led older people - abandons rigid schemes and opens up to an attentive listening of young people, allowing them to give their contribution to the community.

1.2.2 Young People Today: Some Food for Thought

- Places where we find young people: The space occupied by today's young people is defined not by institutions (family, church, school, society ...), but by a space that is cut out against everything and everyone, the space of the night, the space of free time, headphones, friendships, loneliness, indefinite waiting, silence, research, wandering, responding to calls. The phenomenon which most characterizes today's young people, is the search for their own spaces in life, for places in which to spend time feeling free, but in which loneliness, which is so frightening, can be avoided: the garden, the park, the team, the company, the band, the square, the beach, the concerts, the pub, the disco, the night, the car; virtual spaces, music, comics and the internet. These are the spaces in which young people define their choices and make their own decisions. And every decision must be "live" where friendship, feeling alive and free, is of the essence.
- Relationships and connections: We all need relationships because they are a constitutive part of each human being. In recent years, the advent of social media has created new ways of relating, and young people are the first protagonists of virtual relationships, experiencing the potential pitfalls that this relational style entails. The web is in fact an opportunity to promote encountering others, but it can also enhance self-isolation; it is like a spider's web capable of trapping. It is precisely young people who are most exposed to the illusion that the social web can totally satisfy them on a relational level. But, it is now clear that multiplying connections is not enough to reduce the sense of loneliness. Pope Francis quotes Blessed Carlo Acutis, a young man who knew the digital world, but who managed to keep a balance and not get lost. The digital world offers many good things, but it is also a source of great dangers, including the tendency to isolate oneself as an attempt to fill the existential void. It is precisely here that the young person must be welcomed and cared for with tenderness and concern.
- What language to speak to young people: Pope Francis said that young people need to feel tenderness, to find people who appreciate them, listen to their dreams, and are a support. It is important that we are not the ones who only point out their mistakes, but that we are able to welcome them as they are. Doing good by young people means listening to them, knowing their world, their desires, and becoming a support; it means being the people who discretely help them find the safe path, without giving answers, but helping them finding their own answers. The verbal and gestural language of Pope Francis puts us on the right path: empathic listening, immense sympathy, unconditional welcome, true cordiality, openness of the soul, renunciation of any type of dogmatism and rigidity, truth wrapped in charity - a clear choice for man's suffering.
- The questions of young people on consecrated life: Three fundamental aspects of consecrated life are still very much felt by young people today, even if in a completely different way from the past: the search for a profound experience of God, but not always linked to the life of prayer; the desire for communion, but not always accompanied by the yearning to live in community;

the dedication to the cause of the poor and marginalized, but not always lived in an institutional setting. The only vocational ministry that can be visible, credible, and fruitful is therefore the very life of consecrated persons, the testimony of a good, beautiful, happy life of people who are as fully realized in Christ. The witness of people living in communities that are true homes and not hotels; people who not only do ministry, but live the Charism bringing it to the peripheries of the world.

- What consecrated life asks of young people: There are three things that consecrated life asks of young people today:
 - ✓ **Combining the "always" with the "new."** Youth culture reminds consecrated life that, on the one hand, the language we continue to use, imperturbable, is a dead language that no one understands outside of our closed environments, least of all the youth. The language that young people naturally speak today is different. It is the language of secularization, a kind of mother tongue for them, which has not been proven to be useful for transmitting the Christian message. And so consecrated life is faced with a decisive alternative: "learn" this language, at least enough to express the gift they received, or ignore it (perhaps demonizing it) and think that it is an impossible mission. But in this second case, we end up speaking an incomprehensible language and proposing a Christianity of other times.
 - ✓ **Do not stop dreaming:** Only those who dared to dream managed to change the world. It is certainly not a question of idealizing, given that even our young people today sometimes have dreams without consistency, fleeing from reality, floating in the illusory world of the virtual. However, there is no doubt that only young people can come to that particular way of looking at life that leaves room for novelty and utopia, for the tension towards the impossible, for the aspiration towards the highest level of realization of possibilities. In this sense, the contribution of young people to consecrated life in the present moment of uncertainty about the future, of difficulty in deciding the most necessary interventions, of striking disproportion between the poverty of our forces and the vastness of the problems, could be very significant in overcoming the "the greater the ability to listen who, like young people, could disturb a certain inertia and laziness." Then we open ourselves to the impossible possibility of God.
 - ✓ **Giving their life for a higher cause, a greater vision, an ideal for which it is worth living and dying.** Young people today - beyond appearances - need radicalism. They do not need proposals which, from the beginning, are yes and no, half measures. They are not interested in lifestyles that seem to canonize mediocrity and the pursuit of comfort.
 - ✓ We have verified that the Congregations with the greatest vocational response are those that look very high, those that are not afraid to ask the young people the maximum. Where new forms of consecrated life are born, especially if characterized by a radical commitment, it is already known that young people prefer them to traditional forms. The phenomenon presents aspects to be clarified, just as, at times, it is necessary to correct one's own perspectives, but the weight of youth expectations for the quality of life and witness of each religious Institute is indisputable. We are not naive because no one is attracted to half measures or mediocrity. The vocational crisis is always and above all a crisis in the quality of consecrated life itself.

EDUCATION

Nurturing Fraternity to Rebuild Relationships

*"All men of any race, condition and age, by virtue of their dignity as a person, have the inalienable right to an education that responds to their own vocation and is in accordance with their temperament, gender difference, culture and traditions of their country, and at the same time open to fraternal coexistence with other peoples, in order to guarantee true unity and true peace on earth. True education must promote the formation of the human person both in view of his ultimate goal and for the good of the various groups of which man is a member and in which, when he becomes an adult, he will have tasks to perform."*⁶

*"Any change, like the epochal one we are going through, requires an educational journey, the constitution of an education village that generates a network of human and open relationships. This village must put the person at the center, foster creativity and responsibility for long-lasting projects and train people willing to put themselves at the service of the community."*⁷

2.1 The Task of Education Today: Rebuilding Relationships

Never as in this moment, in a context characterized by social contrasts, disparity and lacking a common vision, is it necessary for education to take the field to rebuild relationships and fraternity, so that unity can always prevail over any type of conflict. Certainly, one cannot think of carrying out the educational action alone, it is not enough as an old Ugandan saying goes, "It takes an entire village to raise a child." But we MPdA's, as religious whose mission is education, certainly have the task of placing ourselves at the service of this cause.

Today, as Pope Francis always reminds us, there are many cultural impulses in the world that move against fraternity: from the culture of waste to that of indifference. There is no awareness of a common origin, of a mutual belonging, or of a shared future.

Education, therefore, is called to heal the internal and external fractures of the human person, to form mature people capable of overcoming fragmentation and contrasts and working toward rebuilding the fabric of relationships for a more fraternal humanity.

The great areas in which there are fractures to be healed are three: the relationship with the transcendent, the relationship with others seen as our brothers and sisters, and the relationship with creation.

⁶ PAUL VI, Declaration on Christian education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, Rome, October 1965, n.1.

⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Global Educational Pact*, *Instrumentum laboris*, Introduction.

2.1.1 Rebuilding the Relationship with God

In the great wealth of stimuli today, a great poverty of interiority is experienced. The first relationship to be rebuilt is therefore that with God, with the transcendent.

Our mission is to witness and experience a God who is close and present, a neighbor God, a God who is the friend, the ally, the spouse. In prayer, which is a relationship and not a simple practice of piety, we can establish a relationship of trust with Him, so much so that in the prayer of the 'Our Father', Jesus taught us to ask Him a series of questions. We can ask God for anything, explain everything, and tell everything. It does not matter if we feel inadequate in our relationship with God - when we are not good friends, when we are not grateful children, and when we are not faithful spouses - because He continues to love us.

In Christianity, there is no room for words like "subjection," "slavery," or "vassalage." In their place, there are "covenant," "friendship," "promise," "communion," and "closeness." Jesus addressing His disciples said: "I no longer call you servants, but I have called you friends" and whatever is asked of the Father in His name, He will grant it.

2.1.2 Rebuilding the Brotherhood

The greatest educational challenge today is perhaps that of the fracture between peoples and cultures, between rich and poor, between masculine and feminine, between economics and ethics ... Education today must therefore fight against a true idolatry of the self, making them experience that "together" is the true word that saves us. Here are some major issues that must challenge us as educators:

a) Social Injustices

Injustices certainly have their roots in bad social and economic policies, but they are born of and grow first of all in the mind of the individual person and in the daily interactions with what is different, in how we value the other. We are called to educate for inclusion, to reject the throwaway culture, to get involved in favor of the weakest. But to do this, we have to make choices ourselves in this direction and change our way of thinking! As Pope Francis reminds us, "wars begin within us when we are unable to open ourselves to others, when otherness is considered an obstacle to the affirmation of identity."

b) Migrants

The efforts towards migrants arriving in our countries can be summarized in four verbs: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate. "It is not a question of lowering welfare programs from above, but of making a journey together through these four actions, to build cities and countries that, while preserving their respective cultural and religious identities, are open to differences and know how to enhance them in the sign of human brotherhood."⁸

c) Responsible Citizenship

Education for responsible citizenship of the new generations is a service to society, which is in need of participation, cohesion and shared capital, and is a service to young people.

We are in favor of an education which is able to contribute to a just society, which questions the structural causes of poverty and exclusion and which, consequently, can stop them. The greatest service of education is educating people to be of service. It is the courage of forming individuals willing to serve the community.

⁸POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical *Brothers All*, n. 129

d) Access to Education

Education is the best mean to guarantee for children and young people a future of freedom, autonomy, and success. The global health situation marked by the current Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the importance of school and the access to education. It has also highlighted strong inequalities in access to means and technology: this threatens to widen the global learning crisis. It is essential to give everyone the opportunity to have an education in a safe and healthy environment, and to accelerate internet access for every school and every child.

2.1.3 Rebuilding the Relationship with Creation

The environmental challenge relates to the relational challenge: "The human environment and the natural environment degrade together", says Pope Francis. Our educational mission pushes us today to sensitize children and young people to the care and protection of the environment, our "common home."

In concrete terms, it is important not only to help young people critically acquire adequate information and knowledge on this emergency, but also to stimulate and support them to undertake, in their daily life, behaviors that are aimed at tackling these serious environmental problems. The examples of these actions are innumerable and range from waste recycling, to avoiding water waste, choosing less polluting means of transportation, defending animal and plant species at risk of extinction ...

Education in the protection and care of nature requires not only the elaboration of existential reflections but also, if not above all, a concrete commitment in one's life, and a change in one's lifestyles and use of earthly goods.

2.2 Style of the Educational Mission of MPdA: Some Traits

From the beginning the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows have operated in the field of education through a multiplicity of works, some of which have remained constant over time - such as schools, orphanages - and others that have been, and still are, a response to the signs of the times and the particular educational needs of the various places.

There are some characteristic traits of our educational style which however remain stable over time and in the different cultures in which we operate. Here are some of them:

- a) Attention to the human and spiritual formation of educators: Elisabetta Renzi, gifted with an enlightened spirit and far-sighted intuition, began her work convinced that in order to guarantee a wise and safe education for the pupils, it was necessary that the educators had a profound spiritual formation. It was important that they teach the students to know and practice virtue, and to help them acquire other virtues. Our identity is characterized and sustained by our life united with Jesus Crucified and Risen. We will not be true MPdA educators if we do not take care, first of all, of our relationship with God through the means that are already part of our identity as MPdA: meditation on the Word of God, participation in the Eucharist, Eucharistic Adoration, and fraternal relationships with the sisters. For this

reason, we MPdA are called to continuously take care of our human, spiritual, and professional formation, by continuous updating and renewal.

- b) Educators by vocation, rather than by profession: We are not educators only "at work," but in every area of our life. Educating is not only to carry out a profession, but to live every relationship in an educational way, in schools, in parishes, in the formation of young people, in community life ... Educating is first of all a way of living, of getting closer to reality; it cannot be limited to the workplace.
- c) An inclusive education: Remembering the words of the Foundress, we believe in the power of education. Even with the most difficult people, we always act with patience and love. No one should be discarded or pushed away in our educational action. "The Teachers must have great care for all the Students, as if they were their daughters [...] God, who has given them to the teachers, wants for them to be educated by the teachers who act like diligent Mothers; they must be educated for Him and guided to Him. [...] With love, patience and discretion of the Teachers they may be corrected and amended, and brought back on the good path in order to receive the promised reward in Paradise."⁹
- d) The Christian proposal: The encounter with Jesus elevates and ennobles man, enhances his existence and gives it a meaning. For this reason Jesus, the Gospel, and Christian values are at the center of our educational plan, explicitly where possible and through our example and our witness where it is not allowed to speak of one's religion openly.
- e) Joy and being positive: We educate students to achieve a positive outlook on themselves, on life, and on people, to live every situation with serenity and trust in God and in oneself knowing that God loves us and is always next to us. This is why we favor an educational environment characterized by serenity, cordiality, and the joy of being together. We accompany every young person with care in their growth so that they can feel understood, loved, welcomed, listened to, valued, and free to express themselves.

⁹Elisabetta Renzi, Vol. V Regulations 5, chapter VI, 1, On the conduct of teachers towards boarders, p. 172-173

INTERCULTURALITY

Welcoming and Valuing the Differences

“What matters is to initiate processes of encounter, processes that can build a people capable of gathering differences.”¹⁰

“The intercultural dimension is, in a certain way, part of the heritage of Christianity, a “universal” vocation. In fact, in the history of Christianity, we read a path of dialogue with the world, in search of a more intense fraternity among men. The intercultural perspective, in the tradition of the Church, is not limited to enhancing differences, but collaborates in the construction of human coexistence. This becomes particularly necessary within complex societies in which it is necessary to overcome the risk of relativism and cultural flattening.”¹¹

“Openness to higher values common to the entire human race - founded on truth and, in any case, universal, such as justice, peace, dignity of the human person, openness to the transcendent, freedom of conscience and religion - implies an idea of culture understood as contribution to a wider consciousness of humanity, in opposition to the tendency present in the history of cultures, to build particularistic worlds, closed and withdrawn into themselves.”¹²

3.1 An International Congregation: Opportunities and Challenges

“We continue to form ourselves in a mentality of openness and acceptance of diversity, recognizing the dignity and value of all the members of the Congregation, since the Gospel is our only point of reference. This is why among us: there are no cultures superior to others; we do not use “we” and “you” and we do not call ourselves “foreigners” referring to each other.”¹³

The multicultural or pluricultural reality has opened the Church to new ways of evangelizing, of facing social problems, and above all, of making present the merciful love of a God who overcomes all barriers that we human beings place towards others.

If the Church has seen it necessary to make changes to its way of evangelizing, it is necessary that our religious Institute, faced with the complex realities that the world is experiencing, has the courage to look closely at the reality of its multicultural composition. To live interculturality, it is necessary to be open to new cultures, to a pluralism and a variety of traditions, customs, and languages, which are in themselves a mutual enrichment and development. We would like to say that if the richness of differences is not valued, we can enact subtle forms of violence that generate discomfort and

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *All Brothers*, 217.

¹¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating for Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 29.

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating for Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 33.

¹³ MPdA, *Resolutions XXXIV General Chapter*, 37.

exclusion, and lead to conflicts that are sometimes silent but very divisive. Instead of achieving cohesion, an unbridled rivalry is generated, although perhaps not brought to the surface.

To live true interculturality - which is not only the sum of cultures that do not know each other rather look at each other with distrust - it is necessary that each one of us appreciate her own culture and that of others, that one desire to know the world of the other, knowing that no culture is perfect and we can all learn something from others.

For us MPdA, living interculturality is part of our vocational choice. We know that we have chosen an international Congregation where many cultures are present, and we are committed to always favoring constructive dialogue and mutual acceptance. Our ideal is not just a community made up of people of different nationalities or cultures - this is usually described with the term "internationality." It is not simply a community where people of different cultures and nationalities can coexist side by side - this is what is expressed by the term "multiculturalism." Our ideal is a community where the different cultures of the members can interact with each other, mutually enriching the individual members and the community as a whole. This is interculturality!

3.2 Being MPdA Religious with a Strong Identity and Sense of Belonging

When it comes to identity and sense of belonging, we can ask ourselves two questions: What is my identity as a consecrated woman? Who am I, and who do I belong to? There is certainly the moment when these two questions become pressing in the mind and heart of every consecrated person and often the answer is a struggle for young consecrated persons.

We all tend to identify our identity with our name and surname, which immediately say who we are, what family we belong to, what culture we come from. But who we are and to whom we belong as consecrated is not an immediate fact; it must be developed from initial formation and continually safeguarded by renewing awareness.

We know well that it is not enough to know theoretically who one is, not even a juridical belonging to the Institute is enough, it is necessary to feel it inside as a constitutive element of oneself, as a backbone that gives meaning to one's existence and history. Belonging to a family of origin is a natural event; belonging and feeling part of a religious family is a response to a call and a choice that must be continually remotivated.

For those called to consecrated life, the experience of the Charism plays a decisive role for the understanding and development of one's own identity and, before the concrete content and the various charismatic facets, it is important to have understood the function of the Charism itself in one's own life. It is not simply a kind of stage, on which one's existence is recited, or a noble tradition to be preserved. It is instead a detailed proposal of life, which embraces all aspects of one's existence and which the person finds corresponding to what it is called to be; it is the modality in which one is grasped by Christ. It is one's own full identity, present and also ideal, something firm and stable, which cannot change, both from the spiritual and human point of view.

It cannot be just a novitiate experience, lived with so much emotion and sentimentality and immediately afterwards placed in the drawer of memories to devote oneself to other, more interesting things. The journey of human maturation includes life in the Spirit, intellectual formation, and experiences of apostolic activity and mission. If one has a consecrated vocation, one's identity can only be entirely charismatic.

To understand oneself, moreover, one cannot ignore the presence and relationship with people who live the same Charism, which is not entrusted to an individual, but to a charismatic group. The charismatic "you and we" are essential to the person to such an extent that it is not possible to reach personal sanctification and full self-realization, if not through "you and we."

The Charism, a gift from above for one's own identity, is a gift shared with other people, and this makes one become sisters and brothers with a stronger bond than flesh and blood, introducing the person into an evangelical history. And since the Charism is a gift for the good and the salvation of others, not only for one's own self-realization, it becomes a specific mission, with all the passion and restlessness that must be generated in those who possess it. In this way, the consecrated person "belongs" to an Institute, through a double assignment: she hands herself over to it and, at the same time, the Institute hands itself over to the person.

3.3 The Values of the Charism as a "Common Home"

The Core Values of the Charism is an identity document, a fundamental document for every Sister of Our Lady of Sorrows, in which we find the most important elements of our identity.

Since its delivery during the XXXIV General Chapter of 2017, it has been a reference document, both inside and outside the Congregation.

It offers a synthesis of the inalienable values that characterize our Charism and a synthesis of the mission we share as MPdA. For these reasons, it is also a fundamental tool for the formation of the sisters, of the Lay Associates MPAs, and of our Collaborators.

The values of the Charism and our mission are the way in which each MPdA interprets and implements the Gospel: we are different in age, culture, origin, language, formation, but the values of the Charism are a bit of a common home, in which we all meet and identify ourselves.

We propose below a comment and an in-depth analysis as an invitation to make it more and more a point of reference and union between all of us:

1. UNION WITH JESUS CRUCIFIED

Our commitment, our vows, call us to establish a deeper union with Jesus Crucified, a relationship stronger than any other human relationship. As MPdA, we live at the foot of the cross as Mother Elisabetta and Our Lady did. Our standing at the foot of the cross invites us continuously and helps us to do everything with great love, as Mother Elisabetta taught us, so that whatever we do is sanctified. Living in our union with Jesus Crucified gives us a particular strength to remain in the Presence of God at all times, and to nourish our fiat and our vocation every day.

2. POVERTY AND HUMILITY

Our poverty as MPdA includes, and yet goes beyond, the material dimension: it is a detachment from goods and detachment from oneself. In our poverty, we truly conform to the life of Jesus Christ, and this includes the way we think, speak, and act. Our whole being, our whole life, indicates the reality of what it means to live poor at the foot of the Cross. Let us think of Mother Elisabetta: we learn from her spirit of poverty how to truly give ourselves to Jesus Crucified. This is a spiritual treasure for us. As MPdA, true poverty invites us to be an authentic witness of who we are in Christ and who He is in us.

3. JOY AND HAPPINESS

Mother Elisabetta wanted her daughters to be joyful and happy. However, she knew that achieving this was not going to be easy. Living in union with Jesus Crucified, we are called to a total abandonment that has no reservations. This leads to a freedom that gives peace, joy, and happiness in the depths of our being. Furthermore, this freedom is supported by the Presence of God, and this is why we can face difficulties, responsibilities, etc. with joy and gladness.

4. TRUST IN PROVIDENCE

Our life as MPdA is rooted in a confident abandonment to Divine Providence, which is realized in seeing all our daily experiences as an opportunity for total submission and love to our Divine Spouse. Trust in the provident God is a beautiful treasure to be lived and handed down since there is always a need for hope and faith that, in whatever situation we may find ourselves, the Lord is present and will not fail to help.

5. SEARCH FOR THE WILL OF GOD

Our identity as MPdA includes the search for God in everything; and even more, in what we do and in the way we do it. Our desire for God's will is rooted in Mother Elisabetta's spirituality. She imagined that her life was in her Heavenly Father's hands, especially in difficult times. Her resilience and the simple humility of wishing to please God formed a solid basis for her faith and trust in God's will. This is the challenge and invitation for us: to open ourselves even more to the point of wanting "only what God wants." This dignifies our following the invitation of Mother Elisabetta: "Let us not turn away in the presence of the cross."

6. COMMON LIFE

For us MPdA, community life is a sort of fourth vow. It is part of the foundation of our vocation because we are called to live together. Despite its inevitable challenges, community life provides us with a beautiful guarantee that we are carrying out the mission of Jesus. Mother Elisabetta teaches us how valuable community is: she knew that her call was not for herself individually, but to be lived in a community dynamic, for the glory of God and for the grace of God. This is part of the fabric of our inheritance, which we are called to pass on, "whole and perfect to those who follow ..."

7. AT THE SERVICE OF EDUCATION

It is beautiful to reflect how the Lord in His goodness has brought us to this day to live a variety of apostolic services. It is even more beautiful to reflect on how we are part of a tradition born of a Charism that is guided and supported by the Holy Spirit. Our mission as MPdA educators is to bring the love and presence of God to those whom we serve, and it is a mission that each one is called to live throughout her life, since it is part of our being MPdA.