

## Meeting of the Major Superiors of the Order,

26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> 2007

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Prior General

### CONCLUSION

#### *Preamble*

As we bring this our first meeting of this six year period to a close, I would like to comment briefly on the Conference and express a few words of gratitude to all who contributed to the smooth running of the Conference. I will be brief because of the interaction and sharing we have had over the past week.

I opened the meeting with a wide ranging assessment of the situation of Order, as I see and have experienced it at the beginning of this sexennium. I highlighted certain factors that were positive i.e. the changing map of the Order; faithfulness to the original inspiration of our Order i.e. the spirit of St. John of God; the great variety and quality of services the Order provides in its more than 350 centres and services around the world. I also spoke of the need and the opportunities for the practise of hospitality, as modelled for us by St. John of God, today more than ever before.

I also drew attention to some of the obstacles and challenges that the Order faces in terms of our life as Brothers and the need for renewal or refounding in order to free the membership to live contented and fruitful lives as Brothers of St. John of God, consecrated in Hospitality. I believe that in general I can say that we are becoming increasingly more aware of why we were founded and of our place in the Church. However, we need to deepen this awareness through personal reflective study, community sharing, study of the Order's documents by Brothers and our Co-workers e.g. - Constitutions, Charter of Hospitality and Spirituality of the Order in the manner of St. John of God and so on.

#### *A consensus.*

It was interesting to see that there seems to be an agreement or consensus related to most of what I had to say in my introductory address. Obviously some people would like to have had a more detailed or precise exposé of certain areas of our life and ministry. However, through the feed back, which was very enriching, we gained additional food for thoughtful reflection by all of us over the coming months and years. I believe I am accurately interpreting the mood of our Conference when I state

that all of us agree that we have entered a new phase in the renewal or refounding of our Order. I say 'new' because the Spirit is always active in the lives of his children and therefore in the *new* members of the Order who bring their insights, experience and gifts when they join the Order as Brothers or Co-workers. The work of the Spirit is likewise present in the signs of the times and the demands of the apostolate. The considered and thought provoking insights and experiences shared during these days will be of great help to all of us at the level of the General, Provincial and local government of the Order, when we come to formulating processes and programmes that will help the Order to renew itself.

A sincere "thank you" to all who contributed to the discussions in the groups and or in the aula, thereby enriching the theme and topics, and also helping to clarify concepts and ideas. This was an exercise of collegiality and hopefully we will continue along these lines, entering dialogue with an open mind and a listening heart, motivated only to advance the mission of St. John of God. All of this will engender fresh energy, enthusiasm and hope into our Communities and the co-workers who are greatly influenced by what they see and what they absorb by osmosis, you might say, from the Brothers. We, the Brothers, are the first and privileged custodians of the mission of hospitality, therefore our passion for Christ and passion for suffering humanity will flow like a river into the dry open spaces of peoples lives, some times arid because of a feeling of alienation, marginalisation, suffering or illness, and as Thomas Akempis states "few are improved by illness", and consequently they are open to and eager for the nourishment, healing and new life that is Christ.

*Central to the renewal or refounding process of the Order is -*

1. The formation of its members, Brothers and Co-workers, according to the teachings and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council together with the subsequent developments and theological insights gained since the Council. A very important tool that will help us in the renewal process is to reflect once again on the very rich and practical experiences gained by the Order, the writings of the Brother Prior Generals and others related to our life and ministry as apostolic religious in the Church.
2. In terms of renewal what is of greater importance than structural changes is inner conversion leading to a change of heart and attitude. This is the bedrock, the foundation on which real life-giving and lasting renewal will take place. That is not to say of course that the changing, updating and the adaptation of appropriate structures, as we have shared during these days together, is not important, on the contrary. As stated elsewhere and I think we all recognise the opposite to be true if we are to maintain our services as a ministry of the Church into the future.

3. Also putting into effect the resolutions of the 2006 General Chapter which refer to the partnership between the Brothers and Co-workers i.e. *Brothers and Co-workers united in Ministry* will be the centre piece in this process. As stated by the Co-workers representatives at the Chapter, “*Brothers and Co-workers united in charismatic management in a collaborative and open attitude will contribute substantially to the shaping of a shared future and a shared vision leading to a vibrant future for the Order’s mission of hospitality*”.

These broad principles i.e. formation and the implementation of the Resolutions of the General Chapter and also the Provincial Chapters are the hinges on which the renewal of the Order will rotate. In the spirit of true collegiality we all need to work together, and be seen to work together, otherwise we will have failed in our responsibility.

#### *Activity at the General Curia.*

The members of the General Government who head the various offices and Commissions at the General Curia, briefly outlined the objectives, lines of action and work to date of their respective areas of responsibility, for which I thank them wholeheartedly. Taking collectively these reports hopefully has given you an overview and an understanding of the approach we have adopted and the work we have accomplished at the General Government level.

#### *Child Protection*

We had presentations and a good discussion on the subject of ‘Protection of children and vulnerable adults’. What we now wish to ensure is that in all of our Centres around the world an environment that is safe, secure, respectful and healing will prevail in accordance with best practise and the deepest desire and sense of responsibility that all of us feel towards our clients. This of course extends also to all who work in our centres and services, Brothers and Co-workers. As indicated during the discussions we strongly advocate that every Province should put in place policies and procedures that will ensure that this to be the case. At the time of the Canonical General Visitation this matter will be an area to which the Visitator will be giving particular attention. He will review the policy and procedures that are in place in the Province. Should any Province require assistance in drawing up such a document, we will be very pleased to offer assistance.

#### *PJP*

An area that eventually will affect the entire Order, but at this time is of greater urgency in the industrialised North than in the developing South, is the establishment of *Public Legal Personality* (PJP) for the works of the Order. This is proving

necessary because of a number of factors, the most compelling being the dwindling number of Brothers available and capable of administering and managing the Order's centres. Another factor is European legislation, a similar situation in non European countries such as Australia and the United States. The presentations of Sister Sharon Holland, who is the Office Head at the Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Brothers Laurence, John and Emerich, were extremely informative and useful.

While respecting the autonomy of each Province and the differences that may exist in civil law in the various countries where the Order has a presence, it was considered opportune to open up the debate on this very important topic. This will lead to further examination and study at the level of the individual Provinces, not only in order to ensure compliance with legislation, but more importantly to ensure that the necessary structures are put in place that will safeguard gift of Hospitality in the manner of St. John of God as a ministry of the Church, even in situations where there are no Brothers. Obviously we don't know what is going to happen in the future, that is in God's hands – which makes us very tranquil and at peace. However, we do have an obligation to do what is within our power to guarantee, in so far as we can, that the legacy of St. John of God continues into the future for the good of humanity, the humanisation and evangelisation of the health services thereby giving hope to millions of the most vulnerable and needy people in society. I thank most sincerely Sister Sharon and Brothers Emerich, John and Laurence for their contributions.

#### *Extended General Council.*

We were joined by the six members of the Extended General Council reflecting the evolution that has taken place in the Order's understanding of itself and the essential role that the Co-workers have in enabling the Order to be effective and faithful in carrying out its mission of hospitality in the world of today.

#### *Areas of particular importance.*

Some areas were identified as of particular importance in terms of our mission, although time does not permit me to mention all of the areas of our life and ministry that require particular attention. I would like to mention a few –

- Pastoral Care – this is of the greatest importance for several reasons, the most important reason is the fact that the spiritual accompaniment of those who come to our centres is essential if the individual is to have the possibility of holistic care. It would be ironic in a Catholic facility as stated in our Constitutions, *not only Catholic in name but in fact* that the service provided, is of a very high standard of excellence and yet was found wanting when it came to the spiritual accompaniment. As we will have an every dwindling number of

Brothers present in many of our centres, the future, the selection, training and certification of Pastoral Care workers is of critical importance.

- In a similar way, the setting up of Schools of Hospitality to ensure that the transmission of the Order's philosophy and values is continued into the future is of critical importance.
- In terms of Formation, it is important for the training of the formators and ensuring that the Director of the Novitiate in particular is free of all other responsibilities so that he can devote himself to the accompaniment, education and formation of the Novices. I do not wish to repeat what I stated in my opening address in regard to the importance of reevaluating the type of formation which we give to our young Brothers in preparing them for their future ministry.
- Regional and Interprovincial cooperation and twinning;
- Mission 'ad gentes' – it is very important to continue to support initiatives which already exist e.g. China. Furthermore I believe that we should seek new opportunities in the spirit and imperative of the Gospel to enter new areas and countries where the witness of our hospitaller ministry can assist the local church in its mission of evangelisation. It is important to be open to and encourage new initiatives and make new foundations in countries where the Order is not yet present. In our conversations over the past few days it is obvious that we have fewer Brothers and the demands are great in every Province, but this was always the case in the past, when Provinces made great sacrifices in order to spread the Good News in other lands.

If we wait until we have sufficient Brothers and the economic resources are available before undertaking a new initiative, then, it is never going to happen. Furthermore, if it so happened that all of the conditions were in place, there is no need of faith, even a person of no faith at all, could do just as well. It is when we ourselves are finding it difficult, but still trust in the Providence of God that we reach out to the other in greater need than we are, out of our poverty and vulnerability, then, we will be a true witness of the power and merciful love of the Father.

If one considers for example that 60% of the world's population is in Asia with only 2% who have had the Good News shared with them, then the urgency of addressing this situation is evident and as underlined by both Pope Paul VI and reiterated by Pope John Paul II. Likewise the inroads of evangelical movements in Latin America and Muslims in Africa, now the third largest religion in the world, the urgency of spreading the Gospel is evident.

In my view, every Province should have a mission. In some cases two Provinces could combine their resources, one may have the human resources i.e. Brothers and Co-workers, volunteers, while the other has the economic resources, so together they could establish a mission. In Asia there are several examples of this, the Vietnamese and Korean Provinces are working together in China. The French and Vietnamese and Indian Provinces are in Mauritius. In Japan, Korean and Indian Brothers are working with their Japanese Brothers. East Timor is a good example of a new creative way of being missionary, as we heard during the week from Brothers Brian and Jose Augusto. A Brother from Brazil and a Brother from Portugal, with volunteers from Portugal, are having enormous influence in the community in which they are integrated. In Africa Brother Aidan who was basically on his own for many years has succeed in establishing a wonderful Community Based Mental Health Service in Malawi. It is only in the past couple of years that he has been joined by Brother John Bangsi who heads up the formation programme. Currently there are two Brothers in the St. John of God College for Mental Healthy Sciences. There are just two Brothers in Honduras where a model service in the area of mental health has been established. So there are many models and ways of being missionary today from which one can learn and then create new works. What is most important is the urgency with which we need to act. The Lord's invitation To Go, seems to me to contain an urgent appeal, rather than a command.

### *Sharing of Provincials.*

The sharing of the Provincials and Delegate Provincials was rich, informative and inspiring, completing what I presented with regards to the Order, but, in a more global manner. I believe what we found exciting and gratifying was to hear of the developments, refinement of services and new initiatives which are taking place around the Order. We heard also of the challenges and opportunities, the difficulties and successes that exist within the Order today. It underlines the importance of us thinking globally, while acting locally. I thank you all for your interesting, honest and stimulating sharing.

### *Words of appreciation.*

You have all, I am sure, at some time or other in your life been involved in the preparation of large gatherings in your Provinces, so you know how much work and planning goes into its preparation. In a special way I wish to acknowledge and thank the Secretary General, Br. Jose Maria Chavarri and his team here at the Curia for carrying out all of the preparations for this conference. They did this without fuss or creating unnecessary tension or panic, even though I am sure at times there was reason to panic. They did an excellent job. Thank you all.

At the beginning of each session we had a stimulating and an appropriate reflection by Brother Moisés Martin, whom we also thank, together with the animators of the Conference. The way you did your work helped to create a good working environment in a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere. I wish to also to thank Brother Gian Carlo for keeping me on track, not an easy task I can assure you, and the many other ways in which he assists me.

I wish also to thank the Prior of the Tiber Island, Br. Geminiano, and Dr. Carlo M. Cellucci for the wonderful banquet that we had last evening at the Tiber Island Hospital. I also wish to extend our congratulations for the restoration work carried out in the Dining Room and more recently in the Chapel.

During the week we have been talking about renewing, adapting to and managing change, well, Brother Geminiano has had personal experience of major change over the past twelve months or so. With the appointment of Dr. Cellucci as General Director of the Tiber Island Hospital, Brother Geminiano's role and function within the administrative structure of the Hospital changed dramatically. Brother Geminiano faced the challenge of establishing the new role of the Prior, with openness, sensitivity and commitment. It goes without saying such dramatic change in role and responsibility has not been easy. It is not easy to change something that has been in place for more than 400 years, but Brother Geminiano faced the challenge with determination and in his own gentle way, gave reassurance to those around him. Brother has given a great service for the Order, not just at the Tiber Island. It is a pioneering role that will most certainly have a positive outcome.

I have left the best wine until last! The wonderful hospitality that you have enjoyed in peace and quite, with good food and moderate drink, is due to the hard work of our Prior, Brother Innocenzo. I have to say that probably more people within the Order know Brother Innocenzo than any other Brother, because so many have passed through this house over the past seven years, since he became Prior. He is a man of exceptional generosity and outstanding hospitality, which has made people feel at home and experience a new model of Church, which is so necessary today. I want to thank him, also thank our community and the staff of the housekeeping agency who have worked hard over the past several days.

Finally thanks to our Brother, Mgr. Jose Luis Redrado for coming and presiding at our Eucharist Celebration of thanksgiving for the many graces and blessings that our Order has received, but especially during these days together.

### *Conclusion.*

Thank you all very much for your active participation during the Conference. On behalf of all of us here at the General Curia I wish you a safe and pleasant trip back to your Provinces and may you have a blessed and peaceful Christmas. Please convey

our good wishes and fraternal affection to all of our Brothers and Co-workers. Thank you.