

MEETING OF THE MAJOR SUPERIORS OF THE ORDER,

General Curia, 26 – 30 November 2007

Opening Address

Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General

1. Preamble

My dear Brothers,

You are all very welcome indeed to this our first meeting since the holding of our General Chapter just over one year ago, and the Provincial Chapters that followed it over a seven-month period up to the end of August of this year.

Over these coming days together we shall be engaged in dialogue, discussions and a certain amount of planning. Above all, I want you to feel at home here in Rome, even though some of you have to reside outside the General Curia, for which we apologise. But this is due to the large numbers attending this particular meeting. We trust that it will not be too inconvenient for you, and those of us who are living or staying here at the Curia will be especially sensitive to your needs. If you require anything, at any time, please do not hesitate to contact any one of us, and we shall be only too pleased to help in whatever way we can.

2. In a spirit of collegiality.

We of the General Government have been looking forward to this meeting with you as the final act of putting in place our plan for this Sexennium. The approach to the animating role that, as the General Government, we have adopted is through collegiality. There are obviously certain aspects that pertain directly to our roles as – shall I say – ‘Order-wide leaders’, and other aspects that pertain to your role as ‘Provincial leaders’, but there is much in terms of animation, renewal and advancing the mission of Hospitality on which we shall be working together. The fundamental values of relevance to the Religious Life and the specific mission of the Order, which are fundamental to our existence as Religious in the church and for which we have responsibility as leaders, require us to work together in communion with one other, promoting communion throughout the Order and with the local church, in dialogue with others and with society in general.

This is a type of *Hospitaller leadership* that is never complacent, but outward-looking, restless for the things of God, consistent with, and passionate about, the mission bequeathed to us by John of God. As *hospitality in the style of John of God is at the*

heart of who we are as a religious Order, we need to be constantly and consistently evaluating, re-discovering, re-defining, re-directing, re-visioning the mission in response to the needs of today and projecting it into the future in a way that is flexible, that is honest and open to new trends and scientific developments in a spirit of dialogue and sincerity. We need to be able to communicate traditional fundamental values in a manner that is humble, emanating from a ‘heart that listens’ (Pope Benedict XVI DCE), that encourages dialogue and expressed in language that the people of today can understand.

3. Special words of welcome.

We are very happy indeed to have two former Priors General with us, Br. Brian O’Donnell and Br. Pascual Piles. Both Brothers have given the Order consistency in leadership over an 18-year period, breath of vision with the capacity to articulate important insights arising from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council that have contributed enormously to the path of renewal embarked upon by the Order over the past forty years. Brothers Brian and Pascual both have a great capacity and the skills that enable them to communicate and enthuse others with love of St. John of God and love of the Order that he founded, particularly its core values and its mission of hospitality. Following on the charismatic leadership of Br. Pierluigi Marchesi we can say that the Order has been blessed with a style of leadership at the level of the General Government that really took the teachings of the Second Vatican Council to heart and interpreted its teachings for the Order in a manner that has motivated change and adaptation both in terms of the life of the Brothers and the mission of the Order.

We are also blessed that both Brothers continue to serve the Order, Br. Pascual as the newly elected Provincial of his home Province of Aragon. Since leaving Office as Prior General thirteen years ago, Br. Brian has not only served in various capacities within his own Province of Australasia, but has also performed a most important role across the Asia Pacific Region as President and Secretary of the Asian Pacific Interprovincial Commission (APIPC). To our third former Prior General, Br. Maria Alfons Gautier, who is in the Residence at Marseilles, we send our prayerful good wishes and prayers for peace, inner strength, good health and courage. I visited Br. Maria Alfonso on December 23rd 2006 and found him in reasonably good health for his age, fully alert and very much interested in the affairs of the Order.

I also have to extend a special warm welcome to three other former colleagues in the previous General Government: Br. Pietro Cicinelli, now Provincial of the Rome Province. Br. Emerich Steigerwald, now Provincial of the Bavarian Province and Br. José Luís Muñoz, Provincial of the Andalusia Province. Welcome home to you all!

4. *Some of the objectives of this Address.*

What I hope to do in this opening address are three things, without wishing to repeat what I stated in my recent secular letter of October 10th from Bogotá. In the first instance I want to connect you, or give you a vision of the Order worldwide; secondly, to use this meeting as a mechanism to advance the renewal process within the Order, and thirdly, to highlight some of the issues, concerns, challenges and opportunities that the Order faces at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

5. *Aggiornamento mandated by the Second Vatican Council.*

The Order has undergone huge changes since the Second Vatican Council, that makes it almost unrecognisable in some parts of the world from what it was prior to the Council, except for its central core value of *hospitality*. This should fill us with a sense of pride in the Order to which we are privileged to belong. It is wonderful to be easily recognised for who we are, what we stand for, and our mission. Many perceive that we have a clear vision about where we wish to go in future, how we are going to get there, and who is going to help us achieve our goal. Some may have doubts about the accuracy of this perception, but I see it as having a certain amount of validity and therefore something positive.

Unfortunately, however, I have to say truthfully from my personal experience of the renewal process in terms of *practice*, as distinct from having good documentation and many conferences, that the teachings of Vatican II on the renewal of the religious life has not been fully implemented across the Order. Accepting the fact that some people cannot change, that most people find change difficult while others welcome it, I don't want to appear to be over stating the fact when I say that there seems to be resistance by some people within the Order to the adaptation, renewal, updating – *aggiornamento*, that Vatican II mandated for the Church and for religious. Where this is the case there are related difficulties, and if they have not yet surfaced, they are just around the corner.

As we all know, change happens whether we like it or not, whether we plan for it or not, whether we manage it well or not. I believe that the first lesson we need to learn is to accept the inevitability of change, to plan for it and to manage it. In terms of the religious life we do this, in my view, not for personal reasons – status or personal gain – but in order to preserve a prophetic stance at the heart of the Church and the mission of *hospitality* that has been entrusted to us. You cannot resist change for long. If you try to resist it, it will destroy the very thing you wish to preserve. Some would say that in order to continue to be faithful to the historical vision or mission of the Order, things must remain the same as they were in the past. This means forgetting that much of what we value today, ways of doing things in terms of the mission of *hospitality*, our community life (speaking in general), our prayer life, things that are good, we have because previous generations of Brothers have had the vision, the

humility and the zeal for the mission of St. John of God that impelled them to make hard choices, to take tough decisions: in a word, to change. It takes humility, allowing oneself to be led by the Spirit and placing trust in others as well as in God in order to change. Unless we change, the very things we wish to preserve or hold on to will be lost. I could mention certain changes that people have made which have not been so good, perhaps indifferent in themselves; yet those same people refuse to accept the necessary changes that will ensure that the mission of the Order will continue into the future.

6. *Change of the map of the Order.*

Some of the changes, developments, challenges, opportunities, differences to which I will draw your attention to later are connected with, among other things, ‘A *change in the map of the Order*’. I see this as a very significant, important and positive development. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that it is the most significant development that the Order has experienced this century, and if managed properly and with vision it might even be considered tantamount to a refounding of the Order.

I will treat with the reality of the *change of the map of the Order* under the general headings of:

- i. The geographical presence of the Order throughout the world;
- ii. The highly creative and imaginative way the Order is endeavouring to respond to the needs of sick, poor and vulnerable people;
- iii. In terms of membership an ever increasing number of Brothers in the ‘new entities’¹ with an increase in the number of Co-workers;
- iv. More Co-workers having an executive role in the Order’s services.
- v. New structures in terms of the administration and management of the Order’s Services already implemented or being planned.

7. *The geographical presence of the Order throughout the world;*

All of the above and much more of what is happening in the Order is a sign of life and growth. We are living out our Exodus story, if I might put it that way, in a manner that is more beautiful than the first! “*Do you not perceive it?*” (Is 43, 19). Instead of wringing our hands or having a fatalist attitude we need to ask the question, *what does God want to teach us through all that is happening?* This new situation in which the Order finds itself above all else, calls for a response from the leadership of the Order at both the General and the Provincial levels, that is creative, courageous, imaginative, visionary and mission-driven. Today, the Order’s leaders need to have a

¹ In this address I will refer to the presence of the Order in the developing countries as ‘new entities’ with the presence of the Order in the industrialised countries as ‘old entities’!

passion for the hospitality of St. John of God in the world of today, and to possess the skills to communicate this optimism and vision to others.

To deliver a type of leadership that is life-giving, full of hope and opportunities for people, of whom some have lost confidence in the old ways of doing things and are seeking a new way forward for their lives and ministry, trust and openness need to be shown in accord with the dignity and responsibility of each individual. This requires an openness to the spirit, *to fix our gaze, more than ever before, on the face of the Lord*². I have to say truthfully that what is more worrying is the fact that some members of the Order are beginning to harbour doubts about its future and its mission of hospitality because of a reluctance by the leadership to correctly '*interpret the signs of the times*' (Mt 16:3) and make the changes that the new situation demands, than the fall-off in the numbers of young people wishing to join our brotherhood. This is especially the case in the industrialised countries.

Not recognising or wishing to adapt to the new situation is like trying to '*pour new wine into old wineskins*', (Mk. 2.22) – in other words, using old slogans, old symbols, old methods, and then wondering why the wineskins are leaking, why there is discontent among the membership, why the quality of services being provided to the clients is not what it might be, why we have economic difficulties, and so on.

Another related aspect of which we have to be aware is that health services in nearly all of the countries where the Order is present are undergoing change, more rapidly in some countries than in others, impacting on the way the Order administers its services. We need to be prepared for this, and have competent people in place who will be able to manage these changes effectively, with the skills and the ability to deal with governmental, local and – where necessary – Church authorities. In the industrialised countries, health services are being increasingly seen as a commodity to be had as cheaply as possible with scant regard for the effects this is having on the health of the population and individuals who are suffering.

Wherever the Order has a presence in the world, being true to its mission means having the ability to provide the highest quality service to persons in need, in a truly humanising and welcoming environment. As stated in the Priorities of the General Government for the next six years, Charismatic Management will therefore play an important part in the renewal process. This requires people to be appointed to leadership positions of responsibility after being selected, trained, skilled and imbued with the spirit and philosophy of John of God, and who have bought into the Order's values.³ In this way we shall have a social impact that will be effective in terms of setting standards of care and treatment, client-centred and therefore a real instrument of evangelisation.⁴

² NMI, 16

³ The General Chapter Resolution. 3.2. PRIORITIES IN THE MISSION OF THE ORDER

⁴ The Charter of Hospitality 4.4

8. *Things in common, differences, opportunities.*

Having participated in and presided at all of the 24 Provincial Chapters (although one, of course, was not a Chapter in the canonical sense but a Conference of Africa), I am able to say that I found a very healthy situation, although it varied very widely not just between Provinces, but with differences within regions and continents. This is one of the reasons why, while promoting our universal sense of brotherhood and communion within the Order, we are emphasising regional meetings and cooperation in this Sexennium. In terms of our numbers and the services we provide we are a *small fish in a big fish tank*, that is to say, in the world of health care! While there are obvious differences between the different entities, countries and cultures in a given continent, maximum cooperation is therefore essential, since we have so much in common and a great deal to gain from mutual exchanges of ideas, cooperation and joint planning.

a. **‘International status’**

The first change of major significance that has occurred, as I see it, is that the Order is achieving a truly **‘international status’** in terms of membership, with a strong **‘ecumenical’** emphasis not only in terms of the people whom the Charism of Hospitality requires us to serve, and which has always been part of our mission, but also of members of other faiths and none, who find that working with the Order and becoming immersed in the hospitality of St. John of God helps them not only to be better human beings and more professionally fulfilled, but also better members of the particular religious group or church to which they belong.⁵

Until recent years, while the Order had a presence in many countries outside Europe, the actual leadership roles in these countries were performed by Europeans. When ‘international gatherings’, including Chapters and other types of meetings, were held the participants were therefore mostly Europeans, even though some of the participants represented the ‘young entities’⁶ as missionaries, and some of the topics discussed were of a truly international character. This was very evident at the 2006 General Chapter when, for the first time, only one of twelve Brothers and three Co-workers representing the Asia Region was a European. (Br. G. Magliozzi while a Provincial Delegate of the Philippines was elected vocal of the Rome Province). From Africa six Brothers, one of whom was a missionary from Europe, and one Co-worker attended. This was the first time that a Co-worker from Africa had participated in a General Chapter. From Latin America only one European Brother out of twelve Brothers and four Co-workers attended the Chapter.

⁵ See Constitutions no 6.

⁶ From here on I will use ‘old entity’ for the European Provinces, and I will use ‘young entities’ for the Provinces and Delegations of the developing countries.

Addressing this point, the Charter of Hospitality draws our attention to the North-South divide and highlights the cultural differences between East and West. Linked to this the Charter describes the great variety of locations, types of apostolate and the manner in which these are delivered.⁷ People come to these meetings from completely different backgrounds, cultures and experiences.

b. Diversity brings richness but also challenges.

While this is a welcome development for the richness that it brings to the expression of hospitality and to our meetings, we also need to be aware of the diversity of opinions and experiences that will feature at international gatherings as a result. Of the 51 countries in which the Order has a presence, 30 are in the developing countries. I think that we all can readily agree that this also raises many challenges, mostly in terms of continued financial and other forms of support, even though ‘independent entities or structures’ have been created. However, since it is evangelisation and hospitality practised in the manner of St. John of God that drives us, we wholeheartedly welcome the enormous possibilities that this opens up to the Order in terms of its mission in the Church and to society. The leadership of the Order in the *new entities* is coming from very different cultures, experiences, backgrounds, bringing with it different sacred histories. The *hospitality* that we all profess, and by which we have been consecrated as Brothers or to which we give our allegiance as Co-workers, will enable us to be receptive to the richness that this variety brings, with enthusiasm, realism and great commitment. We need to create an environment in which all can feel at home, which will only come about if we are receptive, and willing to learn from the experiences and insights of others.

The consequences of this shift is that the Brothers coming from the *old entities* (the European Provinces) are gradually relinquishing a leading role as founders, missionaries in the developing countries, and providers of resources, to being enablers and companions on the journey, and as such open to sharing with the *young entities* their experience, resources and expertise acquired over a long period. Both Brothers and Co-workers need to be actively involved in this process.

Those Brothers and Co-workers belonging to the *new entities* are now ‘*missionaries in their own land or in their own continent,*’ with full responsibility for the inculturation of hospitality in the manner of St. John of God, and in the unique way of living the religious life that is authentically Hospitaller. Given the many needs of their people, the shortage of resources, the members of the Order in the developing countries need to be receptive to, and willing to receive, help from other Provinces in the industrialised countries and from Associations in the form of *twinning, joint projects and continuing formation, benefiting from these countries’ expertise acquired in administration and management down the centuries,* and to seek other

⁷ Charter of Hospitality 1:1

ways of cooperating. While this is mutually enriching, it demands humility, mutual respect, passion for the mission of St. John of God and the careful preparation of all those involved in the process of cooperation for it to be successful.

9. *An increase in the number of Co-workers exercising executive roles in the Order's services.*

A dramatic evolution has taken place over the past three decades or so in the way the Order views itself. It no longer sees itself as comprising only Brothers, who are assisted in the exercise of the apostolate by lay staff, a lay work force, but rather as '*Brothers and Co-workers united in the mission and Charism*'⁸. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council forty years ago, the Order began animating and pushing through a movement for a Covenant with our Co-workers. Recently, the Church has acknowledged that the laity work for the mission, or collaborate in the mission of religious, share the charism and mission of the Religious, such that "a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity." (VC 54) (cf. Const. 23a) "*What is important is that the gift of hospitality received from St. John of God should establish a bond of communication between the Brothers and the Co-workers so that both develop their Christian vocation and to be a visible sign of the merciful love of God towards men and women, the poor and the needy.*" (Charter of Hospitality. 7.3.2.2)

I do not believe that anyone who is being really honest with themselves would disagree with the sentiments expressed in the Charter of Hospitality where it states that "*the Co-workers in our Centres play a decisive role in helping the centres to perform their work by becoming actively involved in their mission.*" (7.3.2.2). Successive General Chapters down the years, including the General Chapter of 2006, have recognised, rejoiced and highlighted the fact that there are an increase in the numbers of Co-workers because there is an ever-greater demand for the Order's services to which the Co-workers enables it to respond. As a consequence of this in order for these services to be delivered in the spirit and manner of St. John of God and of the Order's values, the transmission of the values of the Order to the Co-workers is an *impelling necessity*.⁹

The 2006 General Chapter states.. *All of us Brothers would be committed to this task, along with the Co-workers, especially those in positions of greatest responsibility, namely top and middle management. Sound human resource departments are required, with selection, induction, follow-up and evaluation plans, with a background which should include training in the philosophy, history and reality of the Order, and other aspects specific to each situation and place. Consistency and transparent management practices, in accordance with the principles previously set fort, must always be present if we really want to be effective. In addition to this, the*

⁸ Gen. Chpt. 3.2 PRIORITIES IN THE MISSION OF THE ORDER

⁹ General Chapter Resolution 3.2 CONVEYING THE VALUES OF THE ORDER.

personal witness of the Brothers and Co-workers is an essential tool to adequately convey our values. (Gen. Chapt. Conveying the values of the Order)

a. Hospitaller Family.

Overall, I would say that the Order is “continuing to move forward with a new vision of the Order as a “family”, and that we welcome the possibility of sharing our charism, spirituality and mission with others, as a “family”. This situation, which has been very slowly gathering strength, is a challenge to us to identify so closely with our mission that our Co-workers feel animated to do likewise, not only because the apostolic works of the Order, particularly in the developed countries, have become enormously complex, but also because it is **driven by the Gospel imperative to joyfully and freely share what we have freely received from the Lord, for the good of the ecclesial community and for the proclamation of the Gospel of mercy.**” (Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St. John of God, 33)

An International Congress on Religious Life stated that “*We understand that Consecrated life **must reach out beyond the boundaries of our Institutions, of our Catholic faith, or our Christian faith.** For this reason we join with those lay sisters and brothers who share our charism, in such a way that we identify ourselves not as an Order or congregation, **but as Family, sharing our life and mission**” (Page 129). Influenced by the discussions in recent years and at the General Chapter itself on the Family of St. John of God, the letter presenting the programme of the General Government for the next six years stated that, “*When it comes to this area, the Priorities urge us to find new ways and means to bolster the Hospitaller Family or the Saint John of God Movement, to establish new bonds of greater spiritual communion amongst the Co-workers.*”*

I believe this is an area which demands our serious consideration. Perhaps we need to draw up guidelines which could be implemented worldwide. If these guidelines were approved and circulated, the future roles of Brothers and Co-workers could be more easily evident and clarified. This clarification would naturally open up the way for both Brothers and Co-workers to support and encourage each other as they pursue their different ways of practising the same hospitality for the benefit of the person being served, the person who is suffering or in need, in one way or another. Furthermore, the clarification would also remove any anxiety regarding our differing vocations within Hospitality, allowing those Co-workers who wish to, to forge stronger ties within our existing structures.¹⁰

¹⁰ Inspiration for the ‘clarification’ of this concept came from Br. Brian Colgan, Korea.

b. The mission impels us.

As I see it, the urgency of sharing responsibility with our Co-workers stems from the urgency of the mission. At the closure of the 5th Centenary of the Birth of St. John of God Br. Pascual said *“I appeal to all, Brothers and Co-workers, Friends of the Order, all the sick and needy, and all of you here this afternoon....**Let us commit ourselves to the Gospel values which Christ gave us with His coming. Let them be operative in our lives, and be operative in our secularised society which either does not believe at all in God and the presence of the Spirit or does so in its own peculiar way.**”*

In his Humanisation document, Br. Pierluigi Marchesi said *“In our world there is still so much violence so much alienation, social illness, and so many millions of starving men and women just because the heart has not yet won the battle.”* That battle is what Schneider calls the struggle for the reign of God. Living for an alternative world. As Hospitallers we have to ask ourselves the question: are we ready for that struggle? Schneider continues *“Religious participate in the struggle for the Reign of God by creating, living in and ministering from **an alternative world.**”* St. Paul had the same point of view, Rom 12.2 *“do not conform to the present world’s systems, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”* In 1993, our Order’s document ‘New Evangelisation-New Hospitality’ had the same message *“Consequently our (lifestyle) will have to be reconsidered and re-evaluated in the light of the Gospel and Charism if we are to be a leaven and light in the world.” – **an alternative world.*** What all three quotes have in common is ACTION!

c. It is God’s mission.

If we try to *tailor the mission* to meet our needs, or to the numbers of Brothers or religious communities we have, we are dictating to God the terms by which we will become involved, the conditions under which we will commit ourselves to the mission. We must not forget that this is not our mission; **it is God’s mission** in which we are called to participate. The mission is to continue Christ’s healing ministry – GO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS, HEAL THE SICK. (Mk.16:15) God has given us resources, both material and human, not for ourselves, not so that we can hold on to power, but to enable us to help his suffering brothers and sisters who are in great need so that they may come to know how much he loves and cares for them. The human resource that God has given us at this point in time are our Co-workers, the new vocations.

Some Brothers shut out the Co-workers so that they can hold on to power or because they feel threatened by the professionalism, knowledge and skills of the Co-workers, and often their commitment to the person being served, which may exceed that of

certain Brothers.¹¹ Co-workers bring fresh and new ideas to the ministry of hospitality that can germinate ideas and passion. The General Chapter of 2000 tells us that we as Brothers need to:

- Commit ourselves to the evolution of Hospitality and the new opportunities that present themselves; and
- Animate the apostolate by the way we do our particular job and by our presence.

The 2006 General Chapter was even more explicit when it stated that the presence and role in the centre of the Brothers, where it is possible to have Brothers, is characterised by five fundamental factors to -

- become and be more explicitly a critical conscience;
- be a moral guide
- prophetic presence;
- be receptive to new needs,
- live in a renewed spirit of integration with the Co-workers

This understanding of the role played by Religious in the work of evangelisation has resonance in the words of Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* where he states that “*For the Church, evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new...by affecting and as it were **upsetting**, through the power of the Gospel, **mankind’s criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.*** (E.N. 18: 19.)

d. ‘New Leaders in Hospitality’.

Given the imperative that the mission demands, in simple terms the vast numbers of people who are suffering with no-one to care for them, and the new needs that are emerging in our society and those who have not heard the Good News, requires Co-workers not only to take on leadership roles within the existing services, but to become the protagonists and founders of new works without the presence of Brothers. By 2008, half of the world’s population an estimated 3.2 billion people will be living in cities. Perhaps it is in the inner cities, in the slum areas, working with people of a subsistence level of income, immigrants, the sick and frail elderly of whom there will be a dramatic increase in the coming decades, neglected children and so on, that we will find the *new porches, the new platforms and new doorways*¹² that will host the

¹¹ INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS for General Chapter 2.7.

¹² Sr. Helena O’Donoghue discourse to General Chapter.

neediest members of society. This is where the church needs to be, and this is where we need to be; but it will take planning, visioning and very careful preparation.

It is the responsibility of the Provincial Leadership Team to identify the new needs in society to which the Order must and can respond. Then they have the task of identifying the Co-workers who have worked with the Order for a sufficiently long period of time, and possess the professional preparation and necessary skills for this special mission. The ones who are chosen, and are invited to pursue this mission, will also need to have and live by basic Christian values, possess certain human qualities, understand and accept the Order's philosophy, values and mission. They will need to understand that *“For the Church, charity is not a kin of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is part of her nature, and indispensable expression of her very being. For this reason, it is very important that the Church’s charitable activity maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance.”* (Pope Benedict XVI DCE 25,31) There will need to be structures in place in the Province and centre that will offer support to these ‘lay leaders of hospitality’ and to accompany them. As in all the other Provincial centres and services, policies and procedures will have to be put in place for periodic evaluation, accountability and planning.

Later in the week we will devote a whole afternoon to the topic of putting in place appropriate legal structures that will ensure that the *Gift of Hospitality bequeathed to the Church and society through St. John of God will continue as a ministry of the Church, even in situations where there are few Brothers – or none.* These structures also will give voice, executive authority and responsibility to the laity for the Church’s mission of evangelisation, which in concrete terms in this case is *the gift Hospitality practised in the way of St. John of God* which God gives to his church and society. Sr. Sharon Holland from the Congregation for the Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Br. Laurence Kearns and others will provide input on this important topic and lead the discussions.

e. New structures in terms of the administration and management of the Order’s Services already implemented or being planned.

The services that the Order is providing are increasing by the day. Not only are more people coming to our Centres than ever before, but the demand for more services to meet new and unmet needs is a source of constant concern to all of us. How often do we receive requests from Bishops and others for help to either set up a medical service or to take over a hospital already in existence. The Order is outward-looking in a new movement that has developed over the past forty years, and while not abandoning our traditional ministries and ‘institutions’, it is moving more and more into the community, working with local people, bringing greatly needed services, preventive medicine and education. This, as I see it, is the way forward for us. *“The New Hospitality must be expressed in two directions: in innovative centres in the*

community and offering new responses where care is not being provided by others... We therefore have to review the way we think and act, so that we can transform our existence as Brothers or Co-workers to become truly 'transparent' living witnesses of the merciful love of God." (Charter 3.2.2;8.3)

This means that we are cooperating with other bodies who share our philosophy and values. In my view, this is a trend that will increase as we de-institutionalise our centres, becoming more involved with other groups and individuals in the planning and delivery of needed services in the community. In this way, more and more people who are infirm, disabled, poor or marginalised by the very nature of their illness or disability, are receiving a service they would otherwise not have, even in their own homes. This is already happening in several places, and is something that we only could dream of a few years ago, and this, in my view, is only the beginning.

The consequences of the developments taking place in the Order, particularly in the industrialised countries have been *an increase in the number of Co-workers who exercise an executive role in the Order's services*, which I see as something positive and very much in keeping with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, together with the theological debate and insights that have ensued. But it also means that we need to examine our structures. "*Do you not perceive it?*" (Is 43, 19). Structures are there to support the mission, and once they fail to do that they must be changed. The Commission for the Updating of the General Statutes is also looking at this aspect.

I wish to stress the fact that it is only to the extent that infrastructure is in place that it will be possible to hand on the direction of the mission of hospitality. We will need to do two things at once. If, on the one hand, we say that we are all members of the *Hospitaller Family*, engaged in the mission of Hospitality, we have to bring that about. But on the other hand, it will not happen if the Co-workers are not given the resources and the capacity to make decisions about the mission, namely, to play a leadership role that includes executive authority, with all the proper procedures and policies in place. We must have structures in place to ensure that the mission can be performed effectively and efficiently in the manner of St. John of God by our Co-workers and/or the Brothers (Charismatic Management). As indicated earlier we will be giving this particular attention later in the week. I want to repeat what I stated earlier, we cannot compromise or limit the scope of the mission of the Order because we do not have sufficient Brothers, to do so would not be in keeping with the spirit of John of God and the imperative of the Gospel message.

f. Lack of vision is greatest danger to the Order.

The greatest danger to our existence as a Religious Order is not a lack of Brothers but a lack of vision. Lacking a vision for the future of the Order or the Province will lead to complacency, a comfortable life-style that will not attract vocations to our Brotherhood and will eventually destroy religious life as we have seen throughout

history, and of course it does not in any way benefit the mission. St. Paul says that “*love of Christ overwhelms us*” (2Cor.5.14) and impels us into action.

There is a danger that we may become too complacent, content with what we are doing and how we are doing it. In John of God’s life we see his ‘constant urge’ over and over again, particularly when he rushed recklessly into the burning Royal Hospital with total disregard for his personal safety to rescue the inmates. And again at the end of his life rising from his sick-bed and plunging into the freezing waters of the Genil river in a vain attempt to save a child. *The love of God impelled John of God.*

I do not wish to go into detail here of the state of the world’s poor, which we see daily on our television screens. There are so many people suffering and the list is so long. But just to mention a few for the purpose of refreshing our minds, as well as those areas mentioned above I might add a few more e.g. 11 children die every minute from neglect; millions of children are deprived of an education; children are being abused – sold into slave labour, conscripted to fight as soldiers, taken into prostitution; children born with a learning disability are allowed to die of neglect or are not given the possibility of an education or training to develop the skills and talents they possess; the elderly who are the ‘new poor’ in many countries of the industrialised north; individuals and families who suffer as a result of AIDS; people suffering from mental illness, and their families; families and communities affected by natural disasters, such as drought or flooding; victims of domestic violence, women and children... and so on.

g. Put on the mind of St. John of God.

We need to be mission-oriented, we need to put on the mind of John of God, as Paul urged the people of Corinth to put on the mind of Christ, (1Cor. 2.16) – the mind of John who was so pained at *seeing my brothers and sisters suffering, since I cannot help them all, it breaks my heart.* When we read the letters of St. John of God we see the urgency with which he pleaded for help, the humble way he advised the doubtful, the insistent and loving way he advocated on behalf of his sick and poor. I am always struck by John of God's boundless charity and concern; there was no human need he encountered that he did not try to respond to. He was all in all, to all and for all. We may have become too remote from the reality of life; too secure in ourselves, too comfortable in our life-style that has robbed us of the *urgency of hospitality* in our day.

To be true to our vocation every Brother of St. John of God should pray for this sensitivity to the suffering of our brothers and sisters and to be driven to help them, to relieve their suffering in whatever way we can. Henri Nouwen is quoted as saying “*To pray, I think, does not mean to think about God in contrast to think about other things, or to spend time with God instead of spending time with other people. Rather,*

it means to think and live in the presence of God". And we, as Hospitallers, find the presence of God in the sick, the poor, the marginalised and the mentally ill. Being in that Presence and sharing their pain *is prayer*.

We know of many Brothers who have given their lives to the service of their sick brothers and sisters, the first of whom must of course be John of God, then John Grande, Sts. Benedict Menni and Richard Pampuri, the Spanish and Colombian Martyrs and shortly two new Beati, Brs. Eustace Kugler and Olallo Valdés. Of course we have far many more Brothers who faithfully lived their vocation as followers of St. John of God, faithfully serving the sick, the poor and plague victims to the end. We also have so many Co-workers – and I could give a long list of those I have personally known some with whom I have worked with, (and I am sure you could do the same) who have dedicated all or a major part of their professional lives in our centres to serving the sick and the poor, often, it has to be said, with very limited resources, fare from ideal working conditions and sometimes without a decent salary either.

h. 'Child Protection'.

Just to draw your attention to a topic, one that is popular with the media, that we will be dealing with this afternoon and is related to 'child protection,' but obviously not confined to that particular vulnerable group. It is a part of our very being as followers of *the man who knew love, a compassionate and forgiving God, and so became hospitality for others* – John of God, to always seek to provide a quality service to all those who come to us at a time of vulnerability or need in their lives. It is unthinkable that the opposite would happen, and that an individual child or adult might be abused or harmed in any way while in our care. This is the antitheses of the Hospitality that we profess, a betrayal of the trust of the people who entrusted their loved ones to us, but it does happen unfortunately. This afternoon we will reflect on this topic with the help of experts and with some personal sharing by Br. Timothy Graham, who will give us some idea of what it costs a Provincial and a Province when accusations are levelled against a member of the Order.

i. Who will listen to the cry of those in pain?

We need to have *a listening heart*; we need to listen to the cry of the poor; we need to listen to those who are burdened with suffering, whatever the origin or cause of their suffering. We need to sit with John of God as he laments at *so many people suffering, my brothers and sisters, and since I cannot help them all it breaks my heart*. Would John of God be running a large institution today, or would he hand it over to Angulo, the Co-worker who is of the *same mind as John of God* and is capable of administering the service in the way John would wish it to be administered? Br. Pier Luigi Marchesi in his writings expressed the view than he believed that John of God would have no problem in handing over the running of the hospital or centre to the Co-workers. This would free the Brother to go to the fish markets of these post-

modern, wealthy, industrialised countries of the South – the railway stations and the underpasses where so many homeless and chronically mentally ill people live, caught up in addictions and so on.

If our main concern is the *mission of hospitality*, and I do not doubt but that the Brothers would not be ready to give their lives for the mission that has been entrusted to them, then we need to think and act differently. We have to recognise that in a very short period of time there will be very few active Brothers left in many of the Provinces in the industrialised countries. Among these ‘few’ Brothers there will be only an ever-dwindling number who will have sufficient qualifications and the necessary skills to take up major leadership roles in the Provinces. If, on the one hand, we say that we are for the mission while insisting on setting the terms e.g. there must be so many Brothers and so many religious communities, the Brothers must be in charge, then, as I see it, before very long a crises situation will arise, which can have only one end i.e. withdrawal from or closure of services.

j. Leadership succession.

There are other possible solutions. Prepare for leadership succession among our Co-workers, putting structures in place that will safeguard the mission of the Order for the Church into a future in which there will be very few and in some places no Brothers of St. John of God at all. This, dear Brothers, is the stark reality, the challenge that we must face, in order not to be found wanting when history passes judgment on us. None of us asked to be where we are in terms of leadership. It was thrust upon us by God through our Brothers, and we therefore have the privilege of setting out a new direction, a different course for the Order at the beginning of this new millennium, or bide our time hoping for some miracle to happen and run the risk of allowing *the flower that was given to the church to beautify it with all the other beautiful flowers, (charisms) to wither and die* - “Do you not perceive it?” (Is 43, 19).

We need to sit with John of God. We need to ask him what we should do in order to remain faithful to his inspiration and mission to day and project it into the future; we need to listen to him, rather than perhaps telling him of our plans. Let us ask him what he thinks might be the *new porches, the new platforms and new doorways* that will host the neediest members of society, and thereby advance his mission in today’s world.

10. The Life of the Brothers.

You may have been wondering when I would get to address this important aspect – *Our Life as Brothers*. At this type of gathering and at Chapters it would be normal practice to being an opening address by speaking about vocations, formation, community life, prayer and faith. I have deliberately reversed this procedure! I wanted to deal with the mission first, since we are for mission, so that we can judge

whether the people we are selecting to join our brotherhood and the preparation we are giving them adequately prepares them for the reality in which they will be exercising their ministry. The picture that I have endeavoured to present to you at the outset, namely, *the changing map of the Order; the various expressions of hospitality and circumstances in which it is lived out today; the challenges and opportunities that the Order faces; with a little of the reality of the contemporary world where we, as apostolic religious, are called to bear witnesses to the compassionate, loving and caring Christ of the Gospels, hopefully will help us when considering all of the other matters related to our life as Brothers, including the ones I just mentioned i.e. proper selection of candidates to our brotherhood and their formation.*

I do believe in my heart that this picture that I have tried to present to you shows two things: first, that the Order of St. John of God is alive, in touch with the reality in which it exercises its ministry, and to paraphrase the words of the Second Vatican Council in its Document on The Church in the Modern World *the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of St. John of God as well.* (*Gaudium et Spes; Preface*) I see this as very positive and a cause for thankfulness to God and celebration.

a. The need for renewal

Alongside this positive picture of the presence of the Order today and its mission of Hospitality, there is another reality that is not so positive, but is more challenging and one that I personally find worrying. When we compare the two aspects of our life – mission and ministry, and our life as religious Brothers – we can see, in my opinion, that in some parts of the Order there is very little adaptation, renewal of our life as apostolic religious. We are still very monastic and traditional in the way we live and pray, and in our attitudes to our Co-workers and others. I believe that this is why we need to embark on a renewal process at the level of Province, individual communities and as individual Brothers.

In relation to life in community, prayers in common, community houses, I would like just mention as an example some community houses where there is a small number of Brothers, three or four, but they are living in a house built for 20 or more Brothers. How is it possible to develop sense of community in this type of structure? Today many Brothers have their own TV, DVD player, the Internet, mobile phone, iPod and shortly no doubt an iPhone. I am not passing judgement on these, since it is important to keep abreast of what is happening in the world in which we live, and to pursue our studies with the help of the Internet. After our meals each Brother disappears until the next time, the next day or whenever, or waits for an SMS to arrange the next meeting!

I am exaggerating, but only just a little! Perhaps what we need to do is to redefine what we mean by 'community' and 'communion'. In order to be effective witnesses of brotherhood in the Christian tradition the *programme of life* drawn up by the Community needs to stipulate a minimum physical presence, a quality presence and time together to pray, share a meal, and so on. Many people today are seeking community, one should ask whether some of our communities are really life giving, offering the type of community life that will attract new members wishing to follow Christ radically. A Brother not too long ago responded to his Superior, who had expressed the opinion that perhaps he was living 'too simply', by saying, "I didn't give up a well-paid job, an apartment and a car to come to the Religious Life and live in luxury." There is a great need within the Order for the Brothers to develop an authentic personal prayer life, and constantly search for a closer and deeper personal union with Christ through continuing personal formation.¹³

b. A simple lifestyle

Our lifestyle should be simple, reflecting the poverty we profess. The Order in Chapter wisely decreed that the finances of the Community should be separate from those of the Centre. Each Community should therefore have its own budget. If a Community, especially in the industrialised countries, has a higher income than it needs, the Provincial Council should decide how that extra income is to be used. One way for Brothers in the industrialised countries to show solidarity with our Brothers in the *new entities* is for two or more Communities to *twin*. Many of the Communities in the *new entities* do not have sufficient income so they have to be sustained by the Provincial or the General Curia. This is especially true of the Formation Centres.

A community in the *old entity* could sponsor some Brothers and Co-workers for further education, buy or send them laptop computers, and other office equipment, maintain a student etc. Education is always a great need. The universal brotherhood of which we form part must instil in us that desire to care for the whole; if one part suffers or is in need of something, the whole body should feel the pain and a sense of responsibility. It would certainly go against our membership of a universal brotherhood for one part to live a luxurious life-style, while in another part of the world the Brothers are struggling to survive.

On the other hand, we have to be very careful with money and materials that are donated for a specific purpose, and ensure that they are used for that purpose as stated in our Constitutions. "*Our Brothers should remember that they are not the owners of temporal goods but merely stewards and administrators. The administration of property must be carried out to the advantage of the sick and those in needs, our Constitutions and General Statutes, and the just laws in force in the different countries.*" (Const. 100) This is where integrity, accountability and transparency is

¹³ Starting Afresh from Christ 15 'Ongoing formation'.

crucially important, which is not only in keeping with the poverty we profess, but is demanded by justice and charity. It would be terribly wrong for communities, individual Brothers to use donated money, property and goods to live a life-style more in keeping with the rich, than a life-style more closely identified with our neighbours who can barely survive.

c. Candidates to our Brotherhood.

The selection of candidates to our Brotherhood is also critically important. It is better not to have any candidates at all, than to have people who are either looking for a nice place in which to retire or are seeking a style of religious life which is more consistent with the *institutionalised type of religious life* of pre-Vatican II days or a monastic style of life. We are for mission. Our mission is to be with people who are suffering and to use every possible means that God gives us to reach out to as many of these brothers and sisters as we possibly can. The Order needs men who are dynamic, passionate, enthusiastic about the things of God in the first place. Secondly, men who understand the needs of others, especially those who are suffering and wish to share with them the hope that is in their hearts,¹⁴ so that they can also enjoy the very fullness of God¹⁵ in their lives.

The type of formation these Brothers receive, both spiritual and professional, needs to be of such a nature or quality that it will engender in them a passion for the Hospitality of St. John of God and a love for suffering humanity. To have a willingness to sacrifice themselves in the service of the mission with confidence and a sense of pride in themselves as Brothers, evangelisers and missionaries. They will therefore not only be able to enthuse others in what they are doing, but work with others as a team member, bringing to bear in their group or team, with humility and sensitivity, those spiritual insights and values of the Order gained from a life of personal prayer, closeness to St. John of God and above all closeness to the person who is suffering.

d. Deep concern regarding Formation.

If we take an overview of the Order on the basis of the study of the *State of Formation in the Order* presented to the General Chapter, together with the General Chapter Resolutions and the concern expressed at many of the Provincial Chapters regarding Formation, the picture we see is one of deep concern about the state of Formation in the Order today.

It is worrying to see young Brothers with ‘old heads’ – by which I mean an outdated understanding of Religious Life, despite the teachings of Vatican II, and the subsequent developments and theological insights about the Religious Life in the

¹⁴ I Peter 3.15-16

¹⁵ Eph. 3.19

Church since the Council, together with the experience that the Order itself has acquired over the past forty years. My concern is that these men see their role or place in the Order as people who want to be in control, to be in charge.

e. The Gifts of Brotherhood and Hospitality.

I am afraid that there are still strong monastic influences in the Order, which are not consistent with the model of Religious Life that the Church and the Order has promoted since the Second Vatican Council for apostolic Religious. It is not the model of life that John Ciudad demonstrated for us and lived, which the Order on the advise of the Council Fathers discovered when it returned to our Founder, St. John of God for inspiration and guidance on the way or path of renewal. We have two particular gifts to offer the church and humanity as a Religious Order: one is a sense of BROTHERHOOD¹⁶ *to be Brother* to the other, and HOSPITALITY, the unconditional acceptance of the stranger whose only demand on us is his or her particular need.

If ever there was a time in human history that these two attitudes or qualities were needed in the Church and the world, it is now. All of us should try to find our identity by BEING BROTHERS and identifying with the lay nature of the Order, whether we are ordained or non-ordained, and not with the monarchical or clerical models. The day we make our Religious Profession we offer all that we have, all that we are and all that we could possibly become to God in one great act of love. Unless a person received the call from God to do so, the vocation, he could not presume to take it upon himself and make it his life-choice. In the act of Religious Profession our offering is accepted by God and we are consecrated by Him as Brothers in Hospitality. This joyful, mysterious event is witnessed by the People of God and blessed by the Church. Within this calling a Brother receives other callings, for example, to serve on the missions, and to accept temporary assignments to certain offices. The Brother may also be called to the priesthood with the title of hospitality, a call which will require an adequate discernment between the Brother and the leadership of the Order at Provincial and General level, as our Constitutions (n. 52) and General Statutes (n. 52) require.

Today, the Co-workers have taken (or are taking) on responsibilities in the administration, direction and management of our Centres and services. Some of our Brothers look at this *as a loss* they find hard to accept, and therefore project an image of a monarchical and clerical style, to avoid losing the leading, central role they have always enjoyed in the past. This way of living Hospitality is not in keeping with the way Our Founder lived Hospitality or what the Church and the Order is asking of us today. It seems to me that this type of attitude is a means of regaining control and the power that they feel they have lost. This monarchical and clerical style is

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demonstrated though external appearances, a superficiality that lacks real substance and often in ways that are inconsistent with the demands of Hospitality.

Obviously this monarchical and clerical style is not only in evidence among Brothers who are priests, but those Brothers who are not ordained. It is true to say however, that the vast majority of the Brothers both ordained and non ordained do not live or exercise their ministry in this way. The evidence is there, the temptation is there, therefore I believe that we need do all in our power to overcome the trend towards a monarchical and clerical style within our Order and in the Church. In a special way, our Brother priests must see themselves as being at the service of Hospitality, avoiding a clerical mindset or view of our life and mission, always bringing the gifts that all of us as Brothers of St. John of God have received from God, **to Brother and Hospitality** – to their life and pastoral care ministry, or wherever obedience assigns them.

The attitude of the monarchical and clerical style as evidenced has nothing to do with concern for providing proper chaplaincy services, spiritual accompaniment of our patients, their families and our Co-workers for which there is so much need in our Centres and services today. This would appear to be motivated by a desire for power and status, rather than self-giving in the service of suffering humanity in the manner of St. John of God.

Spiritual accompaniment or chaplaincy is not something that I wish to go into here, but having raised the subject, I would just like to say briefly that it is an area that needs careful consideration and updating, especially for a change of attitude and understanding, and in the preparation of pastoral care workers, if we are to truly provide a holistic service to those in our care, their families and to those who come to us at time of special need in their lives. People who work as chaplains in our Centres, whether ordained or non-ordained, need to be certified pastoral care workers. They need to be ecumenical in outlook, able to work as members of a team and to accompany others following the example of St. John of God. The Pastoral Care Ministry is an aspect of our ministry of Hospitality which, in some of our Provinces, is not developing sufficiently to keep pace with other changes and developments taking place in our Centres. There is an inherent danger here that pastoral care may not receive the recognition that it deserves as an integral part of a holistic service that the centre endeavours to provided to the client, family members and Co-workers. It may also not receive due recognition and inclusion when comes to the distribution of resources planning and programming.

11. Conclusion.

In this introductory talk I have tried to offer you an overview of the Order as I see it, and as I have experienced it, not only over the past twelve months or so, but also over my past twelve years as a member of the General Government. So many positive

things are happening in our Order for which we must be thankful to God, especially for its faithfulness to its original inspiration – St. John of God – by continuing his mission with his spirit and in the manner that he has shown us. This fills me with a deep sense of pride.

I have indicated where the Order is today, present in 51 countries, as a truly international organisation with a membership in terms of Brothers from 57 different countries, rich in cultural experiences and insights. This change in the map of the Order raises many challenges, but also many opportunities for the practice of hospitality.

One major concern that we at the General Government would have in the area of our life as Brothers is **Formation**: our concern and wish is that with relation to the selection process that only suitable people are chosen to join our brotherhood; that the initial and continuing education and formation of the Brothers is such that it will prepare them to meet the many challenges and opportunities that exist in the post-modern, secularised world into which they will be sent, or already are serving, to witness to the Good News through the practice of Hospitality in the way modelled for us by St. John of God. In some Provinces there is a need to adapt our community houses, that more accurately reflects the new reality of a reduction in membership and therefore the size of our communities; to adopt a programme of life, that will give the members of the Community, and individual Brothers, the opportunity to develop a deep personal prayer life.

In terms of the apostolate, as well as in the life of the Brothers in general, as I said earlier, there is so much that is positive happening throughout the Order. Having said that however, yet the renewal of the Order has not been complete and the process needs to be accelerated while there is still time, because not to do so will adversely impact on the mission entrusted to us and our place in the Church. The leadership needs to have the courage to move forward with the necessary changes and adaptations, otherwise the Order will be left in the backwaters of ministry and medicine. Responsible governance demands hard decisions be taken in the interests of the mission, failure to do this will impede the mission of the Order, and we shall have failed in our responsibility.

Finally, there is a diplomatic term used following a rather tense and difficult meeting between two opposing sides to discuss a matter of major importance related to two countries or whatever, but the meeting was not conclusive, in fact it might have been rather rowdy so the diplomatic jargon used to the press afterwards in describing what took place during the meeting is: *they had an open and frank discussions*.

In this address I have been *open and frank* not in the diplomatic jargon described above, rather in the sense that as I am speaking with a group of men who are my Brothers in the first place, and secondly that you share with me a passionate love for

the Order and its mission of hospitality. I felt therefore, that I could share and speak openly from the heart with you of my pride at being a member of our beloved Order, my love for its mission and those who carry it out on a daily basis. But I also wanted to share with you my concerns, identify some of the obstacles that I see to the Order's mission and finally the deep desire that I have, and no doubt a desire that we all share, of seeing our beloved Order continue on the road to true greatness as a fit instrument of evangelisation in our world. This is what I have tried to do in this opening address. Having said that, not being a diplomat perhaps I have been too frank in certain places in my address. If so I do hope that I did not give offence nor make people feel uncomfortable, this certainly was not my intention. However, if you felt challenged, well that is okay as we are all challenged with the task that lies ahead of us, but by the grace of God we can together face the future and whatever challenges it may bring with confidence and hope.

What I have expressed here is the way I see the Order at this moment in time, perhaps your experience might be different and I respect that. You may also have sensed a certain amount of impatience in what I had to say or the manner in which I expressed it. If that be the case it is coming from my awareness of so much suffering in the world and the extraordinary possibilities that the Order has to respond to some of these needs. In the medical field where there is a blocked blood vessel, the remedy can be a procedure called angioplasty. Angioplasty involves temporarily inserting and expanding a tiny balloon at the site of the blockage to help widen a narrowed artery. Angioplasty is usually combined with implantation of a small metal coil called a **stent** in the clogged artery to help prop it open and decrease the chance of it narrowing again (restenosis). Some of you're here present may have benefited from this very effective procedure!

In the same way I believe that renewal in the spirit and teachings of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent theological insights gained since then, is the 'spiritual angioplasty' that will remove the obstacles, the blockages to growth and development, allowing the full flow of God's life-giving grace into every aspect of the life of the Order that will revitalise and renew it. This will also release new life, new energy for the great mission of hospitality that God has given to the Church and society through St. John of God, which is the precious heritage bequeathed to us.

During the week we shall be hearing from the members of the General Government who head the various Commissions, and we shall also be hearing from you as leaders, of your experiences and hopes and the challenges you face. Renewal of the Order is required, in my view, not so much because of neglect or failure on the part of individuals or Communities, but because growth, expansion, changing times, new circumstances, demands of the mission and developments together with the *changing face of the Order* demand it.

I would like you to consider the Special General Chapter to be convened in 2009 not only as a Chapter to approve the Revised General Statutes, but a *Renewal Chapter*. During our time together this week we can perhaps consider this matter. In 2009 we shall be only five or six years away from the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. It would be a good opportunity for us to use that opportunity to take stock of where we are in the *renewal process as an Order* and where we need to go in the future to be true to the spirit of the Council and taking account of the developments and theological insights gained over the past 50 years.

During this time together let us pray for our Church, our beloved Order, for each other, for our very troubled world and for so many people caught up in violence, hardship as result of violence, wars and discrimination. Let us pray for our Brothers and Co-workers who faithfully continue the work of St. John of God ever single day, and in particular for all those who come to our Centres or attend our services or programmes to meet a need in their lives.

I place this meeting under the guidance of our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, our Father St. John of God, and our Hospitaller Saints and Martyrs who are our models and intercessors before God.

I wish us all a fruitful meeting and trust that, as Brothers, we shall enjoy our time together.

Thank you.