

# CONSTITUTIONS

1984

2014 Edition

CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY  
CANONESSES OF SAINT AUGUSTINE



CONGREGATIO  
PRO RELIGIOSIS  
ET INSTITUTIS SAECULARIBUS

Prot. n. P. 115-1/84

## DECREE

In accordance with the Motu Proprio 'Ecclesiae Sanctae' (II,6), the Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady, Canonesses of St Augustine, have undertaken the revision of their Constitutions and submitted the texts proposed by the General Chapter of 1984 for the approval of the Holy See.

The Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes has carefully examined these texts, introducing various modifications. The Congregation recognised the call of the sisters to follow Jesus Christ together in the consecrated life. Gathered together in community they seek to have "*one heart and one soul in God*", according to the spirit of St Augustine and of their Founders, St Peter Fourier and Blessed Alix Le Clerc. Their prayer, rooted in the Word of God, is directed at one and the same time towards God's glory and the salvation of their neighbour. They share in the teaching and educating mission of the Church, giving their special attention to young people. They place particular emphasis on formation in the faith and on proclaiming the Good News to the poor.

By the present decree, therefore, the Holy See grants the desired approval, without prejudice to the requirements of Canon Law.



## CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY CANONESSES OF ST AUGUSTINE

In 1617 and 1640, when St Peter Fourier was drawing up Constitutions for the Congregation, he frequently consulted the Sisters and the texts we have today are the fruit of the labours of all our Sisters throughout the years following the Chapter of Renewal held in 1969 in response to the Second Vatican Council.

These Constitutions set out the way we want to live following Alix Le Clerc and Peter Fourier, expressed in:

a spirituality of the Incarnation, in which a special place is reserved for Our Lady, who invites us, as at Cana, to “do whatever her Son tells us”;

the Augustinian spirit, characterised by both fraternal communion and respect for each individual;

the vocation of educators, which informs the whole of our apostolic life, and which makes us creative in the field of human development, so that “all may have life”;

an awareness of the needs and priorities of each country and of every era, giving direction and an international dimension to our mission.

May these Constitutions, approved at Rome on 4th May 1987, help us today to live our vocation more fully in the Congregation of Our Lady for the sake of the Kingdom.

December 1987

*S. Stéphane Marie*

Sr Stéphane Marie Boullanger  
Superior General



## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

THE CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY was born in 1597 in the Duchy of Lorraine which was at that time independent of France. The Congregation came into being as a result of the meeting of two saints, PETER FOURIER and ALIX LE CLERC, who were both inspired by the same apostolic spirit and who were particularly responsive to the needs of their time.

This was a time of great unrest. Social injustice, degradation, destitution and ignorance were rife. The war which would later devastate Lorraine was already threatening. Nevertheless, against this background shone a ray of hope. In the Church, after several centuries of crisis and faced with the fervour and the spread of Protestantism, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) had just sent forth the call to that renewal of faith which was to culminate in the Counter-Reformation.

Peter Fourier came to Mattaincourt in 1597. He was a young Canon Regular, born at Mirecourt in 1565, and had for thirteen years been educated at Pont-à-Mousson, first in the Jesuit school and then at the University which had recently been established by the Society. His strong personality combined humanist culture with apostolic zeal. He was to transform a long-neglected parish by his lead in tackling pastoral renewal and social reform and was to make of this small town in the Vosges a real focal point of the Counter-Reformation.

In the same year, 1597, Alix le Clerc met Peter Fourier. Born at Remiremont in 1576, she had recently experienced the grace of a conversion which left her with the conviction that God was calling her to “*found a new religious house for women where all possible Good should be done*”. Peter Fourier gave

her cautious advice and finally recognised her call as authentic. This was soon confirmed by the arrival of four other girls who, in their turn, felt the call to a more generous way of life. On Christmas night 1597, in the parish church at Mattaincourt, Alix and her companions received the first public recognition of their resolve to consecrate themselves to God and to “*come together as a Congregation*” for this purpose.

Peter Fourier shared his pastoral concern with them, particularly with regard to the education of girls, which was almost totally neglected at that time. He wanted to provide schools for girls, open to all, where they could learn a trade and where, through instruction, they could become better fitted to influence their families and thus society in general. So it was that the aspirations of the two Founders converged: the new Congregation would take as its first and principal aim “*to set up schools where free education would be given to girls*”. The first school opened in Poussay, near Mattaincourt. in 1598.

The same year the earliest foundation texts appeared, that is, the Provisional Rule, drawn up in 1598, and a petition to the Bishop of Toul, in which Peter Fourier outlined this new form of religious life. The first five Sisters of the Congregation made it their aim “*within their limited power, to do all things which they saw to be the best and most conducive to the glory and honour of God, to their own salvation and perfection, and to the spiritual and temporal relief of their neighbour*”.

The work so met the needs of the times that it grew rapidly. “*The Daughters of the Blessed Virgin Mary*” were asked to go to Mattaincourt (1599), Saint-Mihiel (1602), and Nancy, capital of the Duchy (1603). It was not long before they went beyond the borders of Lorraine. They were as ready to answer the needs of cities as they were those of country towns

and villages. They visited the sick and the needy. Their schools welcomed rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant alike, and in the case of the latter, the teachers were told not to say anything which might hurt their conscience. The more gifted girls were given a training so that they in their turn might go out and teach. This was the era of the “*non-enclosed house*” and the absence of enclosure made possible a wide extension of the work. Under the inspiration of Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc, a “*spirit*” grew up which was to characterise the new Congregation. The communities helped one another and all important decisions were made in common. The “*new house*” was developing into a real Congregation in the modern sense. In 1603 it received its first charter of foundation in the approval granted by Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine.

The ideal would have been for Rome to approve the way they had been living, that is, as both “*religious and school-teachers*” at one and the same time, but the reception of day pupils seemed then to be incompatible with the enclosure which had been enforced more strictly than ever by the decrees of the Council of Trent. The first Bulls, issued by Paul V in 1615 and 1616, gave no more than a limited permission to take day pupils, and that only for the house at Nancy. It was here that the first actual monastery was erected in 1617, and in the same year the Bishop of Toul approved the Petites Constitutions.

Alix Le Clerc died in 1622 at Nancy, where her sanctity had had a considerable influence. Not long after this, Peter Fourier was asked by the Bishop of Toul to undertake the reform of the Canons of Lorraine and to this end he founded the Congregation of the Canons of Our Saviour. The character of this foundation was to be broadly apostolic, its members having a field of action which embraced the work of the parish priest as

well as parochial missions, free education of the poor and the training of the clergy. This reform of the Canons Regular had its influence on the negotiations which were going on in Rome for the approval of the Congregation of Our Lady, and could have made the unity of the monasteries possible by the appointment of a Canon of Our Saviour as ‘Visitor’, the two Congregations having the same rule, the same Founder and the same spirit.

In 1628 a Bull was obtained from Pope Urban VIII. Though it did not entirely fulfil Peter Fourier's intentions, which were too daring for his time, it did at least authorise this essential: the sanctioning of apostolic work as the primary aim of the Congregation of Our Lady; for this reason the nuns would make a fourth vow, one of “*education*”. Permission was given for day pupils to be taught in a building separate from the cloister, but this was not the recognition of the “non-enclosed houses” which would have been so much nearer to the early intentions of the Founders.

From the outset Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc had chosen the Rule of Saint Augustine, which they considered “*the nearest to the style of life of Our Lord and his Apostles*”. The Bull of 1628 confirmed this choice and afforded the nuns a link with the reformed Canons of Lorraine and so they became attached not to the ‘monastic’ but to the ‘collegial’ order to which the Canons Regular, among others, were deemed to belong. This form of religious life united community life and pastoral mission. For Peter Fourier it seemed like a return to the early centuries of the Church, with its ‘*canonicae*’ or consecrated women who lived apostolic lives in the service of the local Church.

The Bull of Urban VIII caused friction with the bishops and tension between the monasteries. These difficulties were

further aggravated by the position of Lorraine in her struggles against France. The Thirty Years' War ruined the country. The nuns were dispersed and in 1636 Peter Fourier, who had always supported independence for the Duchy and whose influence with the Dukes of Lorraine was well known, was obliged to flee and to take refuge at Gray, in Franche-Comté.

It was there that he worked at the *Grandes Constitutions* until his death on 9th December 1640. But he was cut off from the main body of the Congregation. On the chapters which were in the nature of a directory, treating of customs and usages, he was unable to consult the Sisters as had been his habit. So it was that, though these Constitutions were approved by Innocent X in 1645, as soon as they were printed divisions arose among the monasteries. Nevertheless, the fundamental chapters of the so called *1640 Constitutions* on the following of Christ in the spirit of the Institute still remain a great spiritual treasury.

From the year 1598 the Congregation had continued to expand, first in Lorraine, then into France and across to Normandy “*on the way to the great Ocean sea*”, as Peter Fourier used to say. It was also established in Luxembourg, in the Duchy of Aosta and in Brussels. In 1640 it reached Germany. Ten years after Peter Fourier's death there were 59 houses in all.

The Congregation of Our Lady was to survive several centuries of history although battered by its stormy course. In 1789 there was the French Revolution and not one of the French monasteries survived; then in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, the Kulturkampf; and again in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, the anti-religious laws. The nuns would always prefer to leave their monasteries, even their countries, rather than abandon their apostolic work. When the

storms were over, they would reassemble to take up the work once more. In the countries in which they took refuge, England, Belgium, Holland, the Congregation took root, and these periods of trial occasioned further expansion. Houses had also been opened in Hungary, Austria and Italy. However the effects of the two World Wars, 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, and the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1919<sup>1</sup> with the subsequent political upheavals, were felt with particular acuteness in the monasteries in Central Europe,

A great preoccupation of the Founders had always been the unity of the Congregation as well as its fidelity to its apostolic vocation. Mutual help and communication between the houses promoted an unofficial union, and this became especially marked at the time of the canonisation of Peter Fourier in 1897. It was only in the twentieth century, however, that this union was to take a statutory form.

The monastery of Jupille, in Belgium, had been founded by Trèves in 1878 at the time of the Kulturkampf. In 1910 this house formed the “Union of Jupille”, consisting of itself and its daughter foundations. Three other monasteries joined them, and in 1940 the monastery of Berlaymont, a separate foundation in , was admitted to the Union. In 1931 recognition was accorded to the “Roman Union”, which was the result of the gradual linking of a large number of houses in different countries.

After the beatification of Alix Le Clerc in 1947, the desire for union between all the monasteries gave rise to meetings and joint research. In 1959 the two Unions together with the five monasteries of Germany and Austria formed a Confederation. In

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<sup>1</sup> Note to the 2014 edition: “the independence of Czechoslovakia was declared in 1918 and ratified in 1919 by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye: only subsequently did the Republic take the form of a federation.”

July 1960 festivities were held at Nancy to mark the official recognition of the relics of Blessed Alix Le Clerc, and it was then that the different groups of sisters of the Congregation felt themselves to be very close to one another, both in their spirit and in their fidelity to the same Constitutions. The German speaking Federation was set up in 1961. On 4th April 1963, the Holy See promulgated the joining together of the Union of Jupille and the Roman Union under a single Generalate.

The formation, first of the Unions and then of a more centralised form of government, promoted the expansion of the Congregation. In 1906 the Jupille nuns had gone to South America to found houses in Brazil, and in 1935 the Roman Union sent sisters to Viet Nam in Asia. Next, in 1940, the Congregation took root in Africa in what is now Zaire<sup>2</sup>, and then in Uganda in 1960. After 1963 there were foundations in Algeria, Hong Kong, California, Mexico and Chad. So the original inspiration of the Founders was gradually becoming a reality: a Congregation whose vision embraced the whole world: “*Go, and teach all nations.*”

This brief outline of the history of the Congregation of Our Lady shows it poised in time between two Councils: the Council of Trent (1545-1563), giving it the chance to live an apostolic religious life insofar as was then possible and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), summoning it to a profound renewal, based on a return to its origins.

For more than three centuries the Congregation had presented a uniform appearance, consisting of monastic-style communities with large educational establishments attached to

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<sup>2</sup> Note to the 2014 edition: has since become the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

them. After Vatican II these features underwent a change, with the Congregation taking on new forms of community life, prayer and educational initiative.

In 1969 an extraordinary General Chapter met at Verneuil-sur-Seine in France, and with reference to the Council document *Perfectae Caritatis*, paragraph 8, unanimously declared that “*apostolic activity is of the essence of the Congregation’s religious life.*” This was confirmed at the Chapter of 1972 and recognised by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

The fourth centenary of the birth of Alix Le Clerc, celebrated in 1976, was the occasion for a great gathering of Sisters from all over the world, the “Lorraine Meeting”, where sisters of many different cultures experienced for themselves the unity which derives from a common history and a single spirit. As we become more and more imbued with the original spirit of the Institute, while remaining always ready for fresh apostolic initiatives, the story of the Congregation continues to unfold.

(1984)

## **SPIRITUALITY**

*“As witnesses to all that Our Lord said and did, they will lead the life of apostles, at the service of God, of their fellow-citizens and of the entire Church.”*

(PETER FOURIER)

The roots of our apostolic life are to be found in the Incarnation. Sent by the Father to reveal his loving plan and the unity of the human family in him, Jesus Christ shared fully in our human condition with all its limitations, joys and sorrows, and he fulfilled the Fathers will even unto death.

*“I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly.”(1)*

Through the mystery of his death and resurrection Jesus Christ gives us his Spirit. In the same Spirit he founded the Church, the pilgrim people of God, as a visible sign of God's love among us.

*“To follow Our Lord wheresoever he goes, and to imitate him as closely as they can...”*(2) We are called to follow Jesus Christ and to share in his life and mission. He grants us to share in his deep union with his Father and his total self-giving and love for the world. He sends us forth to announce the Good News to the poor, to spread the Kingdom which is already in being and still to come, and to translate the mystery of his love into visible terms. All this is our way of sharing in the Church's mission.

The Spirit teaches us to recognise Jesus in the gospel as he treads our human paths. We see him, too, in the faces of the poor. The Spirit transforms our human view of the world and creates the attitude of apostles within us. He enlightens our understanding of the Word and helps us, gradually, to take on the mind of Christ Jesus as we meditate on his life, his words and his actions. In this way the Gospel becomes our rule of life.

Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc lived profoundly the mystery of the Incarnation. Deeply versed in the Gospel, they saw that at the heart of their own experience of God was the person of the Saviour who confronts sin and reveals to the world a God who is rich in mercy. They laid a particular emphasis on the humanity of the Son of God, *“Jesus of Nazareth, only Son of the Father and Son of the Virgin Mary”*. (3)

*“. . . their unique concern is to follow Our Lord wheresoever he goes, . . . knowing that all his actions, all his words during his earthly*

*life, are given them as a rule and as a heavenly example . . . they shall closely study his teachings, all they have learnt that he said and did and those things which he esteemed, recommended, advised, espoused and practised, such as poverty, labour, hunger, thirst, zeal for souls and the unquenchable desire to do the will of God in all things.”(2)*

Mary is the Mother, the one who allowed God to become flesh of our flesh. She always directs us to her Son, “*Do whatever he tells you.*” At Cana she invites us to become both hearers and heralds of the Word, and teaches us how to live as apostles.

*“They shall keep ever in mind that their Congregation is as it were founded on these divine words . . . and may be assured that in obeying them faithfully they are keeping to the spirit of their holy institute...”(4)*

Throughout history God has raised up apostles to preach the Gospel, and they hear the summons to continue the work of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in new ways. In Lorraine at the end of the sixteenth century the response made to this call by Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc was the foundation of the Congregation of Our Lady.

*“The principal aim and prime intention of the religious of the Congregation of Our Lady is to dedicate themselves entirely to the holy service of Our Lord Jesus Christ by instructing girls free of all charge .. and in addition to this instruction, to bend all their efforts towards the*

*greater honour and glory of God, their own salvation and the spiritual and temporal good of their neighbour.”(5)*

From the outset our founders had at heart that the apostolic life of the Congregation should be imbued with the spirit of St Augustine, implying a common quest for God and a common following of Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. *“The love of God has been poured our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”(6)* Augustine and Peter Fourier continually come back to this passage of Scripture. We are called to let our lives be guided by a Rule which is centred on charity and freedom according to the Spirit. This is the way marked out for us among many other ways of following Christ in the Church of God.

Just as Christ and his Father are one, it is our aim to have *“but one heart and one soul turned towards God”*.(7) We live our fraternal communion in the Church. The Church makes its own both humanity's longing for union and its call to become the Body of Christ. Our prayer and our apostolic action are wholly open to this ecclesial dimension. *“If you wish to love Christ, let your love embrace the whole world, for the members of Christ are to be throughout the world...”*(8)

Freedom according to the Spirit enables us to live and relate to others in a caring way, respecting the differences between people; it also makes us attentive to life and to all that brings life to birth, helps it to grow and sets it free. It makes us ready to speak out against anything which destroys life. Here, in today's world, we recognise our mission as educators and our resolve to announce the Good News to the poor. It is to this that we have been called throughout the whole of our history.

This call fashions our being and makes us ready in our turn to be educated by the Word of God, by the people we meet and by events. Today, as in times gone by, fidelity to the Incarnation demands a new response. Our work of education goes on expanding in different parts of the world as we seek to give priority to the poor so that an ever greater number may “*have life and have it more abundantly*”.

To be faithful to the reality of the Incarnation means to root ourselves wherever we are called to live. Hence the diversity of the places where we live and work. This diversity becomes unity when it is, caught up in and expresses incarnate love.

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Opening quotation: Extracts from the Opuscles Notre Dame, and the Letters

<sup>1</sup> John X, 10

<sup>2</sup> Peter Fourier, Const. 1640, Part 2, vi, 4

<sup>3</sup> Peter Fourier, Opuscles Notre Dame

<sup>4</sup> Peter Fourier, Const. 1640, Part 2, xi, 22

<sup>5</sup> Peter Fourier, Const. 1617

<sup>6</sup> Romans V, 5

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine, Rule I, 2

<sup>8</sup> St Augustine, Commentary on I John, , 8



## APOSTOLIC LIFE

*“When I prayed to God, it always came into my mind that we should found a new house for women where every possible good work should be carried out.”*

(ALIX LE CLERC, Relation)

*“A life of apostles, who are not content simply to pursue their own holiness as best they can, but who also strive together to turn their great charity, their burning zeal and their constant labours to the benefit of their fellow citizens.”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Preface)

1. To proclaim the Good News, Jesus Christ chose apostles whom he called to share his life and mission. Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc, sensitive to the Holy Spirit, heard the same call. They were able to discern the needs of their times and they responded to them by founding free schools in Lorraine for girls *“both rich and poor”*. Through education they hoped to breathe new life into the society of their time. They dedicated themselves above all to the most needy.

In this way the Congregation of Our Lady was founded. Alix and her first companions wanted to express their allegiance to Jesus Christ and their desire to be of use to all *“by contributing to the good of their neighbour both materially and spiritually”*.

2. This inspiration of our Founders is a gift to the Church from the Holy Spirit. In our own times we are trying to live by this inspiration, both as a Congregation and in union with all who are committed to the service of others, so as to be a leaven of hope for the world. We share in the teaching and educating mission of the Church, and we give special attention to young people, placing particular emphasis on formation in the faith.

3. In our times the whole world has become our neighbour. We are more and more aware of the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, of whole populations who are deprived of their basic rights.

We are all partly responsible for such a situation and, in the light of our faith, the offence against human dignity is sinful. This realisation urges us to a change of heart, both personally and as a community, in order that we may fight this sin within ourselves and in the world around us.

4. Faced with the scope and urgency of the work to be done, we recognise that it is the underprivileged, the oppressed and the poor who must be our first concern.

5. Whatever our work, in schools wherever possible, and also through other forms of educational activity, our desire as religious and educators is to promote the development and growth of the whole person and to make our contribution to the recognition of each person's dignity. In all we do, we want to encourage the growth of community.

In this way, faithful to the inspiration which gave us life, we try within our limitations and with respect for our different cultures, to help our Societies to grow towards greater justice, truth, fellowship and peace, in accordance with God's plan for the world.

By following the lead which the Church gives us today, we share in the Church's witness and commitment, and in this way we fulfil our task.

**6.** Our mission is to the whole world, and it is our desire that by following Alix's inspiration we may continue to be creative in pioneering new paths.

We all take part in this mission, whatever our age, our state of health or our abilities, and we interpret life together in the light of the Gospel. There we find the revelation of the Holy Spirit showing which choice to make so that "*the Good News may be preached to the poor.*"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mt XI, 5



## COMMUNITY LIFE

*“Our Lord wills that the Sisters, who together make profession of loving and serving and following him, should imitate him principally in this, that just as he and his Father are one, so they should also be one heart and soul in God. This was what he desired and asked of his Father for the worthy Apostles and what the very first Christians in their fervour and ever increasing numbers practised among themselves . . . ”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Part 2, vii, 1)

7. Our Founders invite us to live in the same apostolic communion as the Twelve Apostles and the first disciples.

We are gathered together by the Holy Spirit and united into a Congregation to realise Christian communion among ourselves in accordance with the Father’s loving plan and to promote this same communion throughout the world. Our life in community, therefore, and our mission spring from a single source.

Jesus Christ, alive and present, is the centre of our community life, and in him we are *“truly sisters of one another and members of one body”*.

(Pierre Fourier, Const. 1640, 2nd edn., VII, 2)

8. We welcome this communion as a gift of the Holy Spirit who leads us and inspires our efforts. Wherever we are, we seek to make it a reality in all the different ways that his

inspiration suggests. This is how we share in the Church's mission of promoting unity, justice and charity throughout the human family.

**9.** We are sent out to the whole world and experience our cultural diversity as an enrichment and a summons to conversion. We listen to each other with respect for our differences.

**10.** Our life in community has constantly to be built and rebuilt. Each one of us should feel responsible for making the community a place of prayer and sharing, a place of discernment to inspire our apostolic activity. By our way of living and the welcome we extend to others, we want to witness to the fact that all are loved by God.

**11.** Our fidelity to the aims of the Congregation must be creative, requiring us to review our community life together and continually to re-evaluate our apostolate. We are called to widen the bounds of our community so as to reach out to those whose cause we have at heart and who in their turn can greatly enrich us. The means of social communication, used with suitable discernment, will help us to do this.

Our communities will take care always to be ready to welcome others, but also to reserve times and places of privacy for the Sisters.

**12.** Local superiors are at the service of their sisters, to encourage their active community and apostolic life.

They care for each sister and for their community as a whole. They are also open to the international dimension of the Congregation and encourage exchange of information about the life and work of the sisters. In this way all are drawn into ever deeper communion through their response to the apostolic call.

**13.** In the spirit of St Augustine, we strive to live a life of freedom and truth, of mutual trust and joy, sharing all we possess. This Spirit helps us to attain personal maturity and to respond to each new call as it comes in our lives.

Regard for others, mutual understanding, simplicity and humility are strengthened by forgiveness and reconciliation and are seen especially in our care for each other when we grow old or fall sick.

Whatever form our community life may take, the essential element in it is the quality of the relationships which unite us all.

**14.** The bonds that we forge are not broken at our death. Already in this life, the communities which we build together seek to be signs of the Kingdom, and when we pray for and with the sisters who have gone before us, we affirm our faith in the resurrection and our expectation of the Kingdom that is to come.



## PRAYER

*“... to sing the praises of God, to bless, glorify and thank him, and to treat with him of divers matters of great importance, namely the Kingdom of Heaven . . . and all that is necessary besides for this present life”.*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Part 2, viii, 2)

*“She devotes the greater part of her time to speaking with her God, to contemplating him, even while she is working...”*

(PETER FOURIER, Primitif Esprit, P.122)

**15.** The Holy Spirit, fount of life and prayer, leads us into the communion of Jesus with his Father and sends us into the world, like him, to make the Kingdom known.

**16.** Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc have handed down to us a form of prayer rooted in the Word of God, and directed to both the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbour. From this prayer we draw the inspiration we need for living the apostolic life.

**17.** God speaks to us both in Scripture and in the lives of the men and women of our time. Together with them we learn to deepen our contemplative vision and discover the paths we

must follow. There is an interaction between our life and our prayer, which become one as we learn to see life through the eyes of an apostle.

**18.** God chooses to show himself particularly in the person of the poor, calling us to enter more and more into the mystery “*hidden from the learned and the wise*” and “*revealed to mere children*”<sup>2</sup>, and to give our lives for a more just world.

**19.** We learn to recognise and celebrate God’s love through our life of prayer, which helps us to grow in generosity, thanksgiving and adoration. Each sister will make it her care to deepen her relationship with God and with others by her fidelity to personal and community prayer.

**20.** Each day, as far as possible, we spend an extended period of time in personal prayer (half an hour seems a desirable minimum) and we also take time to review our lives in the presence of God in order to discern the grace he offers and the response he invites. We wish to respect in each of our sisters the mystery of her personal dialogue with God and the demands of her apostolic life. We are responsible, personally and as a community, for the length of time we spend in prayer and for the times at which we pray. We are similarly responsible for our spiritual reading.

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<sup>2</sup> Mt XI, 25

**21.** During the year, in the same spirit of personal responsibility, each sister sets aside a period of time for solitude and retreat, to renew her allegiance to Jesus Christ.

**22.** We are brought together by the Holy Spirit and so we wish to celebrate as a community the mystery of salvation which is still at work in the history of the People of God. Every day, by celebrating Morning and Evening Prayer together whenever we can, we sing the praises of God and bring before him the needs, the distress, the hopes and the expectations of our brothers and sisters both near and far.

**23.** In the Eucharist, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, Supplication and forgiveness find their highest expression. Jesus Christ gathers us together and makes of us his Body. He teaches us to give our lives as he did. To enter more deeply into the reality of the paschal mystery, we are invited to take part in the Eucharistic celebration every day, if possible. We receive Christ's Body and adore Our Lord present in this sacrament.

In addition, we frequently receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in which we celebrate God's mercy and our conversion for the sake of the Kingdom.

**24.** Mary always supports our prayer with her presence.

*“They have already chosen her for their Mother, Mistress and Patron . . . because of the firm conviction they have always held that she herself conceived, brought forth, nurtured and provided for their*

*Congregation, and that she will continue to provide for it in the future and uphold and defend it powerfully and succour it in all its needs.”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Part 2, xi, 2)

As Peter Fourier wished, we love her “*dearly, tenderly and respectfully*”, and we do nothing of importance without asking her for “*counsel, guidance and help*”.

When we meditate on the Rosary or sing the Magnificat, we humbly join with her in welcoming the Holy Spirit and proclaim with her our faith in the mystery of our salvation.

**25.** Conscious of our poverty and ready to allow ourselves to be transformed directly by God and through the prayers of others, we represent the people of God in all its diversity and our prayer is that of the Church, expressing in our different tongues the wonderful works of God.

## THE VOWS

*“May God be your only love.”*

(ALIX LE CLERC)

**26.** Jesus Christ calls us to follow him so that, wherever we are, we may continue the work of his Incarnation and make visible the mystery of his love.

It is as Christians consecrated to God by our baptism that we answer his call and choose apostolic religious life, entering the Congregation of Our Lady and making public profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. This second consecration has its roots in the first, our baptism. It gives us our particular place in the Church, where all are members of a single community of faith and all are called to build up the Body of Christ through the complementarity of their different gifts and vocations.

**27.** It is our earnest wish to live our commitment in the Augustinian tradition, with its emphasis on the primacy of love and the quality of relationships. As we grow in love, we become more and more Christ-like, allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Gospel and by each new call of our mission. In all humility and in the joy of self-giving, we live the demands of our vows *“not as slaves as if we were still under the law, but freely because we are under God's grace”*<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Rm VI, 14

## CONSECRATED CELIBACY

*“Each of them has made an irrevocable gift of herself to Our Lord and his blessed Mother and to the Congregation.”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Part 2, i, 1)

**28.** Jesus Christ calls us to follow him in consecrated celibacy, for the service of his Kingdom. Our choice of this life has its beginnings in the mystery of our own being, our experience of communion with God, his gift of love and his call to build a world united in love.

We commit ourselves freely and by vow to a life of consecrated celibacy, for the sake of the Kingdom. For this reason too, we seek the perfection of chastity.

**29.** God takes possession of our whole person, with our gifts and our limitations. It is he who makes possible our response to his call and who leads us ever more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ who gave his life for the salvation of the whole world.

**30.** When we receive and recognise God's love through faith, its strength and tenderness awaken in us the desire to serve him, at the same time uplifting us and endowing us with the courage of apostles.

The form of life which we have chosen shapes our way of living and of relating to other people. The Holy Spirit purifies

our outlook, makes us listen more intently and increases our desire to be at the service of all human growth and development.

**31.** By living in sisterly communion and respecting the mystery of each person's uniqueness, we are helped to live out our celibacy and to grow into greater clarity of vision and affective maturity.

Shared joys and sorrows, friendship and solitude, are all sources of strength and equilibrium in our relations with God and our neighbour.

**32.** Christ gives us a multitude of brothers and sisters to love, and calls upon us to foster the growth of new relationships in the human community. In a world torn by many different forms of violence, aggression, broken relationships and loneliness, he sends us out to form close links of friendship, especially with the poor, the abandoned and those deprived of any basic necessity of life.

**33.** Through our personal and community prayer, and our communion with the Body of Christ, God continues to call forth our free response day by day, and gives us the grace of fidelity.

Through the sacrifice it demands, the solitude which it requires and the exercise of personal asceticism which it implies, the following of Jesus Christ in this way of life is a path of hope and joy.

## POVERTY

*“He became poor and needy for their sakes, from so rich to so poor an estate, and .. he has invited them to follow in his footsteps as closely as possible.”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Part 2, iii, 1)

*“We read in the Acts of the Apostles: ‘They shared everything in common (IV, 32) and ‘to each was given according to his needs’ (IV, 35).”*

(ST AUGUSTINE, Rule I, )

**34.** Jesus did not cling jealously to his *“equality with God”*<sup>4</sup>. He came to live in poverty among the poor and proclaimed to them the Good News of the Kingdom.

He calls us to follow him by living lives of poverty through giving up our personal goods and sharing all we have.

We are called to live our poverty in the apostolic life. We are sent by God to work for his mission and we rely upon him for all we need, like the Apostles who *“journeyed throughout the world without the assistance of any worldly power, being clothed solely in the power of Jesus Christ.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Ph II, 6

We commit ourselves freely, by vow, to depend on the Congregation for the use and disposition of material goods.

**35.** When our goods are shared, we respect the different needs of each person and we seek the general good of all in accordance with the spirit of St Augustine.

We put into the common purse all that we acquire and receive in the way of salary, pension, insurance, grants and Such gifts as may come our way. All this becomes the property of the Congregation.

As members of one body, we put ourselves at each other's service, contributing whatever we can, our gifts, our knowledge, our time, our affections, to the growth of the body.

**36.** Our life-style is simple and is to be in keeping with that of the people among whom we live and the apostolic work in which we are engaged.

As a sign of our consecration and as a witness to our poverty, we wear the habit of our Congregation according to the appropriate norms (Code of Canon Law, 669, 1).

We try to free ourselves from the temptation of the world's false values and to help one another to be faithful to a true Spirit of poverty. We strive individually, as St Peter Fourier says, "*to seek and find it for ourselves in all things*".

**37.** All kinds of poverty and wretchedness are for us a call to conversion and urge us to a solidarity expressed in practical action. We commit ourselves, in a spirit of sharing, to work for a more just world.

**38.** The Holy Spirit alone can create in us a truly poor and lowly heart, and can gradually transform our inmost being so that we can share what we have received and joyfully accept our need of others.

**39.** We legally retain the right to ownership of our inheritance and we can also receive other goods by way of bequest, but we renounce the right to make free use of such goods.

**40.** At the time of our temporary vows, or later when an inheritance comes to us, we hand over the administration of our goods either to the Congregation or to some other person of our choice, with instructions regarding how the money or property is to be used and to whom any revenue is to be paid.

**41.** Before making perpetual vows we make a will which shall be valid in civil law.

**42.** The Vicar may authorise a sister to alter her will, to change the person whom she has nominated to administer her goods or to change the use made of the income.

**43.** The Superior General may, with the deliberative vote of her Council, authorise a sister in perpetual vows to make a total renunciation of her inheritance or of a part of it by a document valid in civil law, where this is possible (Code of Canon Law, 668).

## OBEDIENCE

*“Listen to the voice of your God ... Listen then to him with love, with consuming eagerness to hear and learn and obey. Listen with your heart to his august words, as he speaks to you and indicates his holy will in his commandments, in your Rule and Constitutions and in the holy inspirations he sends you from heaven, and in the words of your Superiors ... ”*

(Peter Fourier, Const. 1640, Preface)

**44.** Jesus Christ came to fulfil the will of his Father *“in all things and for love of him only”*, always seeking what was pleasing to him. He *“became obedient unto death, death on a cross”*<sup>5</sup>, so that we might have life.

**45.** We are called to share in his saving mission, and therefore we submit our freedom to the service of his Kingdom. The Holy Spirit teaches us to listen and to accept lovingly the will of God which is revealed in Scripture, in all that happens in the world and in our own lives, and through the calls made on us by the Church.

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<sup>5</sup> Ph II, 8

**46.** In the Congregation, the will of God is made known to us through the mediation of our community and of those sisters to whom the service of authority and unity has been entrusted. By the vow of obedience, we freely bind ourselves to obey the decisions taken by our Superiors, according to the Constitutions.

**47.** We seek to do God's will courageously and fearlessly. In faith and with openness of heart, we welcome the decisions we have taken together in the Congregation and accept their consequences both personally and as communities. Obedience is a path of light which leads us by way of the Cross.

**48.** Our search for the will of God is made in the Congregation, which is listening to the needs of the different communities of the Church and the world. The Congregation will always be for us the place where we receive our inspiration, our call and our mission, and where their authenticity is confirmed. In consultation with each other, the local Church and those with whom we work, we discern our apostolic call. We accept our mission from the hands of our Superiors.

**49.** Each of us is called to develop her creativity and initiative, fully aware of her personal responsibility and mindful of the common good. We practise our obedience in a spirit of listening and willingness to communicate and in an atmosphere of trust and freedom, so that all our personal efforts contribute to the unity and effectiveness of our common mission.

**50.** As members of a religious institute of pontifical right and an international Congregation, we are particularly aware of the universal dimension of our apostolic vocation. In this spirit, and by virtue of our vow, we obey the Pope, guardian of unity and of the oneness of the Church. We refer to the Bishop of the local Church regarding the particular mission to which we are called.

**51.** We are aware that in the way in which we live our relationships, each of us possesses a certain power which can on occasion be used in such a way as to crush and discourage other people. We seek, therefore, to “*enter into the mind of Christ*”<sup>6</sup>, and to build relationships which free people and encourage their personal growth.

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<sup>6</sup> Ph II, 5

## FORMATION

*“Listen, daughter of Our Lady, to the teaching of your holy, wise and loving Mother; teaching which is gracious, efficacious and divine: ‘Do wholeheartedly whatever my Son, your Lord, tells you to do...’”*

(PETER FOURIER, Const. 1640, Preface)

**52.** To those who feel themselves called to dedicate their lives to God, to the imitation of Jesus Christ and to the service of their brothers and sisters, the Congregation offers a formation which will enable them, step by step, to enter into the apostolic religious life.

This formation is based on a practical experience of life seen in the light of the Gospel. In accordance with the spirit of the Congregation, it aims to foster in the candidate an attitude of faith, a clear awareness of her own motivation and the full development of her potential.

**53.** There are three stages of formation:

1. the first stage, leading to entry into the Novitiate,
2. the Novitiate, leading to temporary Profession,
3. the last stage, in preparation for final Profession.

## **ADMISSION TO THE FIRST STAGE (postulancy):**

**54.** In order to be admitted, the candidate must:

1. have good physical health and mental balance,
2. have received a basic education,
3. have had an experience of commitment in the Christian community.

**55.** A candidate must be free from any of the canonical impediments mentioned in Canon Law as regards entry to a religious congregation.

**56.** After talking with the candidate and consulting her Council and the sister in charge of the first stage of formation, it is the responsibility of the Vicar to accept the candidate.

## **THE FIRST STAGE (POSTULANCY):**

**57.** This stage presupposes in the candidate the desire to dedicate herself to God in order to follow Jesus Christ in his mission of liberation. The aim of this stage of formation is to deepen her call to live in the Congregation, and to learn its spirit.

**58.** To respond to this call, she must have:

- sufficient personal maturity to exercise responsibility freely and with full awareness,
- the ability to keep a commitment and to live in community.

In addition, our Congregation requires that the candidate show a concern for and an understanding of the poor, have the qualities of an educator and show in practice a desire for a form of prayer rooted in the experience of daily life and the Word of God.

**59.** Each Vicar must:

- make arrangements for the appointment of a sister to be in charge of the first stage of formation who would be capable of assisting in the discernment of the postulant's motivation, in keeping with the aims of the Congregation,
- select a community to receive the postulant.

**60.** The sister in charge of formation is to decide the length of this stage, in agreement with the Vicar, who will have consulted her Council. It must last for a minimum of six months and not longer than two and a half years.

**61.** If, after careful consideration, it seems clear that the postulant is not endowed with the qualities needed for this way of life, the Vicar, in agreement with the sister in charge of this stage, should ask her to discontinue her postulancy.

**62.** The decision to admit a postulant to the Novitiate is made by the Vicar acting in consultation with her Council and with the agreement of the sister in charge of formation. The Vicar, her Council and the sister in charge of formation should all have spoken with the community in which the postulant has been living.

Care must be taken to ensure that the candidate fulfils all the conditions laid down by Canon Law. The same applies to reception for temporary profession, for renewal of vows and for perpetual profession.

## **NOVITIATE**

**63.** The Novitiate marks the beginning of membership of the Congregation. Its object is to give the novice a fuller understanding of her own vocation and that of the Congregation, and Subsequently, an initiation into the apostolic religious life, leading to temporary profession.

**64.** In order to be valid, the Novitiate must be spent in a house designated for this purpose.

The Superior General is responsible for setting up, transferring or closing novitiate houses after taking a deliberative vote of her Council and in accordance with the suggestions of the Vicar concerned. Any such decision must be made known in writing.

**65.** a) The Vicar may permit the group of novices to stay for certain periods in another house of the Congregation to be chosen by her.

b) She may ask the Superior General in certain cases to authorise a novice to make her Novitiate in another house of the Congregation under the guidance of a competent sister.

**66.** To be valid the Novitiate must last for twelve months and take place in the novitiate community. The Novitiate is invalidated in the case of an absence from the novitiate house lasting for more than three months, whether consecutive or not. Any absence of fifteen days or more must be made good. A further twelve months may be spent outside the novitiate house in one or more apostolic initiatives, in agreement with the novice, the sister in charge of formation and the Vicar.

The Vicar may allow the period of Novitiate to be prolonged, but the total time spent in the Novitiate must not be longer than two and a half years.

**67.** Adequate time must be allowed during this stage for a programme comprising:

- formation in prayer,
- a growing understanding of Scripture and theology,
- an initiation into the spirit of St Augustine and of our Founders,
- study of the Rule of St Augustine and our Constitutions,
- the history of the Congregation,
- formation in the apostolic life,
- an initiation into the vows,
- formation in psychology and pedagogy.

This programme is to be carried out within the context of an awareness of current situations, local and world-wide, for without this it is impossible to be in touch with reality or to take fully informed apostolic action.

**68.** A perpetually professed sister is appointed by the Vicar, after a deliberative vote of her Council, to be in charge of this stage of formation (mistress of novices). The appointment must be ratified by the Superior General with the consent of her Council.

**69.** The sister in charge of formation will discern and test the novice's vocation. She will help her to integrate the various elements of her formation and to deepen her attachment to Christ and her desire to follow him both personally and as a member of the community.

**70.** When the period of Novitiate is completed, the novice should write to the Vicar to ask to be allowed to make her temporary profession. If, after discussion with the novice, the Vicar judges that she is ready for temporary profession, the Vicar will seek the opinion of the sister in charge of formation, take a deliberative vote of her Council and then make a decision.

Consideration should also be given to the opinion of the communities of the Congregation who have accompanied the novice on her way.

**71.** Profession means that the sister, consecrated to God by the ministry of the Church, publicly promises to follow Christ in his poverty and obedience, in the state of consecrated celibacy, and to live in community according to the apostolic aims of the Congregation.

The latter for its part pledges help and support to the newly professed during her life as one of its members (Code of Canon Law, 654).

**72.** The formula of temporary vows in the Congregation is as follows:

*“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the presence of this community of the Church, I, Sister N..., promise freely by vow for ... years, before you, Sister N... (the Superiors name and position are indicated), to live in poverty, obedience and chastity, in imitation of Jesus Christ, according to our Constitutions.*

*I make this promise in the Congregation of Our Lady, where, following the Rule of St. Augustine, we seek God together in fraternal communion and the sharing of possessions.*

*According to the spirit of our Founders, St Peter Fourier and Blessed Alix Le Clerc, I promise to take my part in the Congregations mission of education in the Church, in the service of young people for their salvation in Christ Jesus.”*

The sister may make additions if she wishes, provided that they have been submitted to the Vicar beforehand.

## **THE STAGE OF TEMPORARY PROFESSION**

**73.** The object of this stage is to deepen the sisters religious vocation in the Congregation by means of an educational apostolic task together with the pursuit of studies suited to her ability and call.

**74.** During this period each young professed will be accompanied by a sister who is herself finally professed. This sister will be appointed by the Vicar. Her task will be to help the young sister to evaluate and deepen her religious life.

**75.** This stage will last for three years. At the end of this time, the temporarily professed sister will write to the Vicar and ask to be allowed to make perpetual profession. After discussion with her, the Vicar will consult the sister in charge of formation. If the temporarily professed sister is judged ready, having obtained a deliberative vote of her Council, the Vicar will make the decision to allow her to proceed to perpetual profession.

**76.** Consideration will be given to the opinions of those communities of the Congregation who have lived with the sister and accompanied her on her way.

**77.** The Vicariate must ensure that the sister enjoys suitable conditions to prepare for her final profession.

**78.** The decision whether or not to admit a sister to final profession must be ratified by the Superior General with the deliberative vote of her Council.

**79.** If it seems advisable to prolong the period of temporary profession, this may be done. It requires the authorisation of the Vicar with a deliberative vote of her Council, in consultation with the sister in charge of formation and with the sister concerned. The Vicar may authorise a renewal of vows each year over a period of three years.

If it seems necessary to extend the total period of temporary profession beyond six years, recourse must be had to the Superior General. It cannot in any case be extended beyond nine years in all.

**80.** The formula of perpetual vows in the Congregation is as follows:

*“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the presence of this community of the Church, I, Sister N..., promise freely by vow for ever, before you, Sister N... (the Superior’s name and position are indicated), to live in poverty, obedience and chastity, in imitation of Jesus Christ, according to our Constitutions.*

*I make this promise in the Congregation of Our Lady, where, following the Rule of St Augustine, we seek God together in fraternal communion and the sharing of possessions.*

*According to the spirit of our Founders, St Peter Fourier and Blessed Alix Le Clerc, I promise to take my part in the Congregation's mission of education in the Church, in the service of young people for their salvation in Christ Jesus."*

The sister may make additions if she wishes, provided that they have been submitted to the Vicar beforehand.

## **SISTERS IN CHARGE OF FORMATION**

**81.** Those sisters entrusted with the various stages of formation are called to deepen their own relationship with God and their neighbour. This should lead them continually to make progress in the arts of listening and counselling, in the ability to share, and in dialogue and discernment.

## **CONTINUING FORMATION**

**82.** The process of formation must continue and deepen all through life. Aware of this need and in consultation with her Superiors, every sister should herself take the necessary steps to fulfil it. Superiors, at their various levels within the Congregation, must be ready to make continuing formation possible by allowing sisters the time and opportunity they need.

## **ORGANISATION OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE SERVICE OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE**

**83.** From the beginning, Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc wanted all the sisters to participate in the process of decision-making as fully as possible. This desire arose out of their conviction that the Spirit of the Lord was present in each person. They wished for a form of government which would ensure to the Congregation that unity which the sisters had so much at heart.

**84.** We, too, wish our structures to make it clear that we are all responsible for the unity of the Congregation and for the direction we take.

**85.** We want the organisation of the Congregation to serve the needs of the apostolic life while respecting the personal call of each sister, and to ensure the mobility which we need in order to respond to the various calls made upon us. We want it to help us to strengthen the bonds between us by encouraging communication and the sharing of goods for the benefit of our mission.

**86.** Therefore, with due respect for the requirements of Canon Law, our structures are designed to guarantee to the sisters a wide participation at all levels in everything that affects the life and commitments of the Congregation.

## **AT LOCAL LEVEL**

**87.** The organisation of our community life takes into account the mission of the Congregation and the directions indicated by each Vicariate. True community is based on deep union in Jesus Christ in which the sisters, in co-responsibility, seek to discern the will of God.

**88.** Each house of the Congregation is canonically erected. Each community is to have a Superior. Her mandate lasts for three years, and can be renewed.

Every community has a local Council. The statutes of each Vicariate are to determine its composition.

**89.** The local Superior cares for each of the sisters and has the unity and fellowship of the community at heart. She tries to facilitate communication between its members and to help them to keep their apostolic commitment alive. She ratifies decisions taken in community. It is also her responsibility to authorise spiritual talks for the community (Code of Canon Law, 765).

**90.** Local Superiors are appointed by the Vicar with the consent of her Council and after consultation with the communities concerned.

## **AT VICARIATE LEVEL**

91. A Vicariate is composed of a group of communities.

92. Vicariates are set up by the Superior General after consultation with the sisters concerned and with the deliberative vote of her Council.

93. The boundaries of a Vicariate may be altered by the Superior General after consultation with the Councils of the Vicariates concerned and with the deliberative vote of her Council.

94. Each Vicariate has its own character, depending on its composition and geographical situation.

95. Each Vicariate shall have structures of government and participation which reflect its own character. These are laid down in its statutes.

96. Before being implemented, the statutes of each Vicariate must be approved by the Superior General with the deliberative vote of her Council.

97. The statutes of a Vicariate shall lay down:

- the composition of the Vicariate Assembly and the term of office of its members (the number of elected members must be at least equal to that of the ex officio members),

- the method of appointment of the Vicar (this appointment must in all cases be ratified by the Superior General with the consent of her Council),
- the conditions and method of renewing the mandate of the Vicar,
- the number of Vicariate Councillors,  
method of appointing them,  
their term of office,  
the conditions and method of renewing their mandate,
- the method of appointing the Vicariate Bursar,  
her term of office,  
the conditions and method of renewing her mandate.

## **The Vicariate Assembly**

**98.** Assemblies of sisters are of great importance in the Congregation as they embody the principles of co-responsibility and subsidiarity.

The Vicariate Assembly is composed of the Vicar, the Vicariate Councillors and other members designated in accordance with the Vicariate statutes.

**99.** It belongs to the Vicariate Assembly:

- to draft the statutes of the Vicariate,
- to revise them from time to time, especially after each General Chapter,

- to elect delegates and substitutes to the General Chapter,
- to evaluate the life of the Vicariate,
- to decide the main lines of action of the Vicariate with regard to the mission of the Congregation, in accordance with any directions given by General Chapters and other international meetings.

## **The Vicariate Council**

**100.** The Vicariate Council is composed of the Vicar and the Vicariate Councillors.

Apart from those duties which are proper to the Vicar the duties of the Vicariate Councillors are:

- to promote unity in the Vicariate,
- to ensure the implementation of the directives proposed by the Vicariate Assembly,
- to coordinate the activities of the Vicariate as a whole,
- to foster the life of the Vicariate,
- to assist communication among the sisters and to encourage all of them to share in reflection and decision making.

In accordance with Canon Law and the Constitutions, certain decisions of the Vicar require, for validity, either the consent or the advice of the Vicariate Councillors.

**101.** When, in fidelity to the mission of the Congregation, the members of the Vicariate Council reflect upon the development of religious life, they will always be attentive to the needs of the Church, their country and the world.

**102.** The members of the Vicariate Council are elected by the sisters of the Vicariate according to its statutes.

**103.** The number of the Vicariate Councillors, the duration of their mandate and the conditions for its renewal are laid down in the statutes.

## **The Vicar**

**104.** The Vicar is the major superior in each Vicariate; she has authority over all the communities and sisters within it, while always respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Her authority is exercised within the terms of Canon Law and the Congregation's own norms.

**105.** The Vicar is answerable for the Vicariate in any dealings with the Congregation, the Church and the civil authorities.

**106.** To be Vicar, a sister must have made her perpetual profession at least three years previously.

**107.** The term of office of a Vicar is three years. The statutes of the Vicariate will lay down the conditions for renewing her

mandate, but no Vicar may serve for more than three consecutive terms.

**108.** The Vicar is, ex officio, a member of the General Chapter, the Extended General Council and the Vicariate Assembly.

**109.** The Vicar convokes the Vicariate Council, presides at its meetings and guides its deliberations. Her decisions are valid, when, in cases laid down in Canon Law and the Constitutions, she has obtained the consent of her Councillors or asked their advice.

**110.** The Vicar must work in close collaboration with her Councillors and consult them frequently.

**111.** After consulting her Council, the Vicar decides on:

- the transfer of sisters from one Vicariate to another; she then proposes this for ratification by the General Council,
- the transfer of sisters from one community to another within the Vicariate,
- the admission of a candidate to the first stage of formation,
- the admission of a postulant to the Novitiate,
- the non-admission of a novice to temporary profession,
- the non-admission of a sister in temporary vows to the renewal of her vows.

With the consent of her Council, the Vicar decides on:

- the admission of a novice to temporary profession and to successive renewals,
- the setting up of new houses, with the previous written consent of the local Bishop,
- the sale of temporal goods belonging to the Congregation, so long as their value does not exceed the amount determined by the Holy See, and they are not articles of outstanding value nor presented to the Church in consequence of a vow,
- the granting of permission to a sister to live temporarily outside a house of the Congregation; this permission should not exceed one year, except for studies, health reasons or an apostolate in the name of the Congregation;

appoints local Superiors, after consultation with the communities concerned;

approves the accounts of the Vicariate;

authorises sisters to publish writings of a religious or moral nature;

proposes for the ratification of the General Council:

- the appointment of those responsible for formation,
- the appointment of the Vicariate Bursar,
- the admission or non-admission of a sister to perpetual vows,

- the decision to prolong the period of temporary vows beyond six years, up to a maximum of nine years;

proposes for the decision of the Superior General:

- the opening, transfer or closing of a formation house,
- the closing of a house, after consultation with the Bishop,
- the termination or change in character of an existing work, with the consent of the Bishop,
- the authorisation in certain cases for a novice to make her Novitiate in a house of the Congregation other than the Novitiate house.

**112.** The Vicar decides all other questions relating to first and continuing formation according to the norms of Canon Law and the Constitutions.

**113.** The Vicar may authorise a sister to alter her will or to change the administrator of her capital or the use made of its proceeds.

**114.** In cases involving the departure of a sister from the Congregation, the Vicar shall act on the advice, or with the consent, of her Council, and in accordance with Canon Law; she shall send particulars of the matter to the competent authority.

**115.** The Vicar or her delegate visits the sisters of the Vicariate every year. She must keep the General Council informed of the life of her Vicariate by whatever means may

be the most suitable. These means are to be agreed upon between the General and Vicariate Councils.

### **The Vicariate Bursar**

**116.** The Vicariate Bursar administers the goods of the Vicariate under the authority of the Vicar and her Council. The duration of her mandate and the conditions for its renewal are to be laid down in the Vicariate statutes.

### **GROUPED COMMUNITIES**

**117.** Those communities which, on account of special circumstances, do not form part of an existing Vicariate constitute Groups directly dependent on the Generalate. An intermediate structure between the Group and the Generalate may be set up by the General Council in agreement with the sisters concerned.

Since the General Chapter 2014, this intermediate structure has been put in place, to be called a Delegation.

## **AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

**118.** All the members of the Vicariates and Groups make up the body of the Congregation.

**119.** The unity of the Congregation and its apostolic vitality within the Church are assured by:

- the General Chapter,
- the Superior General and her Councillors, who together make up the General Council.

## **THE GENERAL CHAPTER**

**120.** In the person of its delegates the Congregation periodically holds a General Chapter.

The General Chapter is the primary internal authority in the Congregation; as a sign of the Congregations unity it acts collegially and enjoys legislative powers. Its functions are:

- to keep alive the spirit of the Founders and develop our understanding of the spiritual traditions of the Congregation,
- to evaluate the life of the Congregation as a whole,
- to inform itself on world problems and to discern the most urgent needs,
- to decide the orientation and to define the priorities of the Congregation,

- to elect the Superior General and her Councillors (the first Councillor to be elected automatically becomes the Vicar General,
- to apply to the Holy See for authorisation to change one or several of the articles of the Constitutions after these have been approved,
- to revise the Supplementary Articles from time to time.

**121.** The General Chapter of elections and business must be convoked every six years.

**122.** If the Superior General is unable to complete her term of office, it is the responsibility of the Vicar General to convoke a Chapter which is to take place within six months from the time when the vacancy occurs.

**123.** To convoke an extraordinary General Chapter of business, a deliberative vote of the General Council is required. This should follow consultation with the Vicars and Vicariate Councils.

**124.** The General Chapter is composed of:

- the members of the general government, ie. the Superior General and her Councillors, the Secretary General and the Bursar General,
- the Vicars,
- those in charge of Delegations,
- delegates of the Vicariates and groups; it is the General Council's responsibility to establish the

number of delegates from each Vicariate and Group, in such a way that they are always in a majority over the ex officio members of the Chapter.

**125.** All perpetually professed sisters are eligible to be delegates to the General Chapter.

**126.** The President of the General Chapter is the Superior General or, in her absence, the Vicar General.

**127.** The Superior General or, failing her, the Vicar General, will read a report to the Chapter on the state of the Congregation and on the main events which have taken place since the last Chapter.

**128.** The Bursar General will then give her report on the financial state of the Congregation, having previously submitted it to the General Council for approval.

### **Election of the Superior General**

**129.** The Superior General must have been finally professed for at least ten years.

**130.** The Superior General is elected for six years. She may be re-elected for a further six years.

**131.** The election is by secret ballot and an absolute majority is required, in accordance with the rules laid down in the Supplementary Articles. The new Superior General takes up her duties after signifying her acceptance.

### **Election of the General Councillors**

**132.** After the election of the Superior General under her presidency, the election of the General Councillors shall be held at an appropriate time. They are to be elected individually by secret ballot and by an absolute majority at the first and second scrutinies, or by a relative majority at the third.

**133.** To be eligible for any of these offices a sister must be finally professed.

**134.** The General Councillors are elected for six years. They may be re-elected for a further six years.

**135.** The Secretary General, who may be chosen from among the General Councillors, is appointed for six years. She may be re-elected for a further six years.

**136.** The Bursar General is appointed by the Superior General with the consent of her Council for a mandate coterminous with that of the Superior General currently in office and of her Council. She may be reappointed for a further six years.

**137.** All Chapter decisions must be carried by an absolute majority. Normally the vote will be secret.

**138.** A two-thirds majority vote is required to alter an article of the Constitutions once these have been approved, and to apply for the necessary authorisation from the Holy See whose interpretation must be regarded as final.

**139.** The General Chapter has the power to give guidelines or directives which remain in force unless a subsequent General Chapter revokes them.

**140.** The completion of the General Chapter is to be the subject of a vote, after which the Superior General will formally declare it closed.

**141.** The Superior General will inform the Congregation of the results of the elections and of the decisions of the Chapter, which will come into force with this promulgation.

## **The General Council**

**142.** The General Council is composed of the Superior General and the General Councillors.

**143.** Apart from those powers which are proper to the Superior General, the members of the General Council are together responsible for the government of the Congregation.

**144.** Sensitive to the needs of the Church and the world, the Council will form a discerning community, in the service of the Congregation's mission.

**145.** The Council helps the Vicariates, Delegations and Groups:

- to preserve the spirit of the Congregation,
- to take full responsibility for the orientations and priorities defined by the General Chapter.

The members of the Council will have it at heart to foster the unity and vitality of the Congregation.

**146.** The Superior General and the Councillors will take special care to ensure that all share in the riches of the sisters' experiences in their widely differing situations. They will always keep this aim in mind when they visit the Vicariates, Delegations and Groups and will use all the means of communication necessary to accomplish it.

In this way the international character of the Congregation will be a constant source of vitality and renewal for all the sisters.

## **The Superior General**

**147.** The Superior General has authority over all the Vicariates, Delegations, Groups and sisters, due respect being paid to the principle of subsidiarity. She governs in

conformity with Canon Law and the Congregation's own norms.

**148.** The Superior General is answerable for the Congregation in all dealings with Church and civil authorities.

**149.** In her Councillors she will find the help she needs in accomplishing a task which requires a great ability to listen, to relate to others and to encourage and challenge them.

**150.** The Superior General convokes the Council and presides at its meetings. She guides its deliberations and makes the decisions. In those cases specified in Canon Law and the Constitutions she must first have the consent of her Councillors or have asked their advice.

**151.** In individual cases she is empowered to dispense from certain disciplinary articles of the Constitutions where the essential character of the Congregation is not in question.

**152.** She may delegate her authority in case of necessity, in accordance with the Constitutions and with Canon Law.

**153.** The Superior General or her delegate will visit all the communities of the Congregation every three years, or more often in case of need. These visits should last long enough for her to acquire a real understanding of the country she is visiting and to meet the sisters who are living there.

**154.** The General Councillors assist the Superior General in accordance with the Constitutions.

**155.** In the General Council, they play their full part in the working out of decisions.

**156.** For certain tasks, the General Councillors may be accorded specific powers delegated by the Superior General.

**157.** There shall be at least three General Councillors.

**158.** After consulting her Council, the Superior General ratifies the transfer of sisters from one Vicariate, Delegation or Group to another Vicariate, Delegation or Group.

With the consent of her Council, the Superior General

appoints

- the Bursar General and the Secretary General
- the Sister in Charge of a Delegation, after having consulted the sisters concerned

approves

- the statutes of the different Vicariates,
- the general accounts of the Congregation;

ratifies

- the election of Vicars,
- the choice of those responsible for formation,
- the choice of Vicariate Bursars,

- the election of delegates and substitutes to a General Chapter,
- the admission or non-admission of a sister to perpetual profession;

grants

a prolongation of the period of temporary vows for a maximum of three years (cf. 79);

in response to proposals from the Vicars, she decides on

- the setting up, transfer or closure of a Novitiate or other house of formation,
- the closing of a house,
- the termination of a work or its alteration;

convokes

- the ordinary General Chapters,
- extraordinary General Chapters for business,
- international meetings;

establishes

- the number of delegates to a general Chapter,
- the venue for a General Chapter,
- the number of delegates to general meetings of the Congregation which include delegates;

authorises

- a novice to make her novitiate outside the Novitiate house,
- the transfer of a sister to another Institute,
- the admission of a sister from another Institute,

- a perpetually professed sister to renounce her inheritance,
- the readmission to the Congregation of a former novice, or professed sister whether of temporary or perpetual vows, without repeating her novitiate, provided her departure was duly authorised;

grants

- exclaustation for a period not exceeding three years,
- an indult to leave the Congregation in the case of a sister in temporary vows.

**159.** A deliberative vote of the General Council is required in order to set up a new Vicariate or to alter the boundaries of an existing one; the same applies to setting up a new Group or a new Delegation.

**160.** By collegial vote, and in accordance with the conditions laid down in Canon Law, the Superior General and her Council may dismiss a temporarily or perpetually professed sister. (In such cases the Council must comprise four members in addition to the Superior General.)

**161.** The Superior General must forward to the Holy See the request of a perpetually professed sister to be secularised, enclosing with it a statement of her own opinion and that of her Council. Such a request should only be made after careful consideration, and for extremely grave reasons which have been weighed in prayer.

**162.** In all cases of separation from the Congregation, the Superior General will act with the advice or consent of her Council, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Canon Law (D.C. 684 to 703). She will send a dossier to the Holy See if this is required.

Whoever lawfully leaves a religious institute or is lawfully dismissed from one cannot claim anything from the institute for any work done in it.

The institute, however, is to show equity and evangelical charity towards the member who is separated from it. (D.C. 702)

**163.** Should the Superior General feel obliged to resign from her office, the acceptance or refusal of her resignation rests with a higher authority, namely the Holy See.

If the General Councillors judge, by a unanimous and Secret vote, that the Superior General is no longer capable of fulfilling her office, they are to inform the Holy See.

### **The Secretary General**

**164.** The Secretary General carries out her duties in close cooperation with the General Council.

The Secretary General:

writes

- the minutes of meetings of the General Council, which are then signed by the Superior General, and the General Secretary,
- records of matters relating to the business of the Congregation.

ensures

the filing and preservation in the archives of all documents, books and records concerning the history and administration of the Congregation.

### **The Bursar General**

**165.** The Bursar General carries out her duties under the authority of the Superior General and her Council. She may be invited to attend meetings of the General Council when the business in hand comes within the sphere of her responsibility.

The Bursar General:

participates

in all discussion and research for the promotion of justice;

administers

manages and supervises the goods of the  
Congregation at Generalate level, in accordance with  
the priorities which the Congregation has adopted;

coordinates

the sharing of goods at international level;

ensures

the continuing formation of Vicariate Bursars and  
their teams, keeps them informed and collaborates  
closely with them.



## **ADMINISTRATION AND USE OF GOODS IN THE SERVICE OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE**

**166.** Through our administration and use of temporal goods we seek to give practical witness to our desire to live simply and to share, both among ourselves and with our brothers and sisters, and in this way to promote a more just distribution of this worlds goods. It is in this light that we see the community of goods in the Congregation.

**167.** The Congregation, the Vicariates, the Delegations, the Groups and the communities are entitled to acquire, possess, administer and dispose of personal and real estate, in accordance with Canon Law and the Constitutions.

**168.** At each level, the administration of these goods is entrusted to a sister under the direction and control of the appropriate superior:

- the Community Bursar administers the goods of the local community,
- the Vicariate Bursar administers the goods of the Vicariate and oversees the accounts of the communities in the Vicariate,
- the Bursar General administers the goods of the Congregation as a whole, and oversees the accounts of the Vicariates.

The Bursars may, if need be, have a team to assist them.

**169.** All the sisters and all the communities either make a contribution to Vicariate funds according to their possibilities and the general need, or else they benefit from these funds. The Vicariates, Delegations and Groups do likewise as regards funds at Generalate level.

**170.** Permission from the Holy See is required before selling or otherwise disposing of articles of value or possessions of the Congregation exceeding in value a sum determined by the Holy See. This ruling also applies to the borrowing or lending of money in excess of that sum.

**171.** It belongs to the Superior General, with the consent of her Council, to give the necessary instructions for applying the norms of the Constitutions concerning the administration of temporal goods at Generalate, Vicariate and local levels.

## CONCLUSION

172. By our Profession we are committed to the Congregation, and these Constitutions, approved by the Church, are the charter by which we live. They express our particular way of living the Gospel, in fidelity to the charism bequeathed to us by our Founders:

*“They shall keep ever engraved in the depth of their hearts this most precious and divine saying: ‘QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE, do whatever my Son, and your God, shall tell you.’ Whenever they pronounce these noble words, let them hold it for certain that by them their Mother and Mistress teaches them to do promptly and thoroughly all that Our Lord tells them by his commandments, by their Rules and Constitutions, by his inspirations and through the bidding of their Superiors, who hold his place.”*

(PETER FOURIER)

Constitutions 1640, Part 2, xi, 7

Of the Duty of the sisters of the Congregation towards the Blessed Virgin Mary their most Noble and most Kind Mother)

*May the Lord grant us the grace  
of observing all these precepts with love;  
not like slaves,  
as though we were still under the law,  
but freely,  
since we are grounded in grace.*

(St Augustine, Rule VI, )

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