

## **OPENING REMARKS**

2014 Formation Program for Superiors

June 5-7, 2014

Good-morning, dear Sisters, and welcome to the 2014 Formation Program for Superiors. This is the first assembly for Superiors organized by the new Provincial Council. In this light, I and the members of the Provincial Administration, are happy to meet all of you in our capacity as your spiritual leaders and animators in the next five years. Please bear with us and excuse whatever may be lacking in what we have prepared for you for this two-day and a half assembly.

You are 61 superiors all in all, with 16 serving their first term, six their second, four, their third, and three their fourth. We profoundly thank those who have been serving as superiors for the second, third and fourth term in the same community. Serving their third term are Sister Cirila of the S.H. Cruz for Mount St. Paul, Sister Rosario Piguing for SPS of Aparri, Sr. Rosita Racoma for St. Paul Academy in Goa, and Sr. Estelle Marie Camagan for General Santos Doctors' Hospital. On their fourth term are Sr. Fe Irene Villanueva for SPU Quezon City, Sr. Vivina Margarita Init for St. Michael College in Cantilan, and Sr. Mary Aquinas Lluch for the SPC Pastoral House in Pagadian City. May the Lord bless and reward your generous heart. Dear Sisters. And let us welcome to the fold the neophytes: Sr. Mary Maynard Paglinawan, new superior of the local community at SPU at San Miguel, and the youngest of all superiors, Sr. Honorata Sahlee Palijo (10 years after PV), superior of the local community at SPU Surigao.

As you all know, I went to Rome to participate in the Formation Program for newly appointed Provincial and District Superiors. With me in the formation program were Sr. Lugarda Seo of the Daegu, Korea Province, Sr. Joanna Cheung of Hong Kong Province, Sr. Marie Denise Morton of the Antilles-Guyane Province, and Sr. Corazon Enricuso of the Peru-Colombia District. Mother Goretti Lee and all members of the General Administration were our speakers. Each Assistant was assigned a topic to discuss with us. In my talk with you this morning, I shall share with you some significant highlights of what they shared with us. Please imagine that our higher Superiors were also speaking to you through us.

In her Welcome Message, Mother Goretti put us in peace by exhorting us not to be afraid, saying that in reality the appointment is from the Lord Who will always be with us. So, in spite of the difficulties encountered, she told us not to be afraid and not to be discouraged, for in these experiences we shall receive God's grace and that with and through our mission as superiors, the Sisters in our Province will also receive the same grace. She further said that it is our role to show God's goodness and mercy to our Sisters, those who are difficult to live and work with in the community.

She posed to us this challenge – “According to your attitude or your manner of acting, the Sisters in your Province or Community will be happy or not.” Mother Goretti added that in her experience, the Sisters are always expecting motherly hands filled with compassion from the Superior.

One of the most important functions of Provincial, District and Regional Superiors is the spiritual animation of the communities of her Province, District, or Region. Each Superior is called to be an animator and promoter of a "mystic and prophetic" consecrated life, strongly committed to the realization of the Kingdom of God. This fundamental and important role must be shared in by the Local Superiors. Therefore, the formation of the Local Superior is one of the foremost concerns of the Provincial, District, and Regional Superior and her Council. It is for this reason that we, the new Council, tried our very best to prepare carefully the program for this assembly

Let us therefore, together, make it our prime concern to help our own Sisters seek Christ above all else and to place ourselves generously at the service of the Gospel. May we never tire of taking every possible care of the human, spiritual and cultural formation of the persons entrusted to our care.

To animate is to move the soul to action. Spiritual animation is a ministry of inspiration and can only be accomplished under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. The Superior must therefore be a person of prayer, a person who is docile to the Holy Spirit, as Mama Mary was and as St. Paul, our Patron, was.

Another important function of the Superior is service. Pope Francis stressed this element in his message to the International Union of Superiors General. He said that “we must not forget that true power, at whatever level, is service, “which has its luminous summit on the Cross.” Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI points out that for man, authority is often synonymous with possession, dominion, and success.” But for God, he said, “authority is always synonymous with service, humility, and love.” It means entering into the mind of Jesus Who bends down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. Angelus, January 29, 2012).

We are reminded that exercise of authority also means accompanying, understanding, helping, loving, embracing all, especially those who feel alone and excluded. Who among the Sisters in our community belong to this category? How do we relate to them? How do we treat them? Do we stretch our patience and kind understanding of their personal concerns and allow them sacred space to be themselves? I particularly like what Mother Goretti told us: “Do not be afraid of their wounds. See Jesus in them, especially in those who suffer.”

I pose some questions related to the thrusts and directions of the 2013 Capitular Acts to challenge all of us Superiors in the coming years in our capacity, foremost, as consecrated religious, and secondly, as Superiors, charged with servant leadership and stewardship in the Congregation and the Church.

Related to the first act of the 2013 Capitular Acts, I present this question. “In this moment, what thread are we Superiors called to weave in order to become prophetic and mystic Sisters of St. Paul?” If we want to walk faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, of Paul our Patron, of our holy founders, heroes and saints of our Congregation who have gone before us, we need to cultivate the “mystical dimension” of our Consecrated Life, that is, always keeping united to God through prayer and contemplation.

In connection with the second Capitular Act, “What are the spiritual and apostolic areas that constitute other threads to be woven and inserted into the tapestry of our day-to-day consecrated life, interpersonal relationships, and apostolate that could possibly be our “new areopaghi”?

And related to the third Act, “How can we communicate God’s love with words and concrete gestures to build authentic fraternal communion with our Sisters in community?”

As superiors, we are strongly tempted to distance ourselves from intimacy with our Lord and from the bonds of fraternal communion by allowing ourselves to be overly solicitous of daily administrative duties and concerns. All the more we should attach ourselves to the Lord when beset by these time- and physically and emotionally energy-consuming concerns.

The authentic mystic and prophet is not concerned so much to achieve and accomplish works, which undoubtedly are important, but in reality are not essential. Above all, the mystic and prophet Sister tries to be a witness of God's love, seeking to live it in the midst of the realities of the world, even if her presence can sometimes be "uncomfortable" because she offers and incarnates values that conflict with the values of the world. The authentic religious is a counter-witness, a counter-sign to the materialistic and self-centered values of the world.

In summary, being a Superior is a commitment – a commitment to Christ, a commitment to love our Sisters, and a commitment to search God’s will together so as to promote the reign of God (B.L. #6).

Dear Sisters, be certain that I follow and accompany you with loving and respectful affection. I pray for you, but you also please pray for me and the Council. Please greet the Sisters in your community on our behalf, especially the sick and young Sisters. I send all my encouragement to follow with courage and joy the Gospel of Christ.

May our feminine identity “be a living presence of the tenderness and the mercy of God.” Only in the strength and profundity of the living out of the charity of Christ can our religious communities respond effectively to the challenges of the New Evangelization and become a living message and sign of communion that flows from the mercy and tenderness of God.

Thank you very much, dear Sisters. *Caritas Christi Urget Nos!*