

OUR LADY OF CHARTRES CONVENT
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INSTALLATION SPEECH
April 30, 2014

All through the 318 years of the Congregation's presence in the world (110 years in the Philippines), there has been only one task for all the Sisters, past and present, and that is to proclaim God's love for man, to proclaim Him as our Lord and Saviour. So, today it is Christ whom we celebrate, not the new Provincial Council and me. Our appointment finds its meaning only in the mission of evangelization entrusted by Christ to His Church.

A three-word question and a six-word response brought me to where I am now. On March 18, 2014, Mother Maria Goretti Lee, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres, told me that the General Council was appointing me Provincial Superior. A three-word question followed: "Do you accept?" In an instant I felt numb all over but found the courage to respond: "By God's grace, yes, I accept,." I am not exactly a person of few words, but during that brief moment which seemed an eternity, no other words could I utter. With the feeling of numbness was fear because of the enormity of what lay ahead and my heightened sense of inadequacy and unpreparedness. I was engulfed by terrifying questions, such as : Do I have sufficient intelligence to understand the complexities of our situation as a Province with its 498 Sisters, 42 schools, 13 hospitals and 7 Pastoral Centers, and to respond appropriately to the challenges and demands of the Church and of the world today? Do I have a heart big enough to accept, understand and love all my Sisters with their different characters and personalities, needs and concerns? Am I spiritually, physically, emotionally and psychologically healthy and strong enough to meet and endure the pressures of the office, the rigors of frequent travel to visit 65 local communities, to chair long board meetings,

to listen with patience and understanding to the Sisters, to bear the results of perhaps controversial, unacceptable, or difficult decisions?

All these filled my mind like a symphonic piece that has been playing in my consciousness day in and day out since I accepted the appointment. These challenging questions, however, were vanquished by my deep faith in God Who loves me, Who was calling me for a special mission of servant leadership and stewardship, a mission astounding and humbling and terrifying. Jesus' words to our patron St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, verse 9, invite me to put all my trust in Him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

Following the good example of our Blessed Mother, of St. Paul our Patron, and of the 11 Provincial Superiors before me, I accepted the appointment in humble obedience, firmly believing in the grace of office and the assurance that God Himself who called me to this position of leadership will guide, enlighten and sustain me with His abiding love.

What is it like to be Provincial Superior of the SPC Philippine Province? Is it the underlying high cost of discipleship which made some Sisters and lay friends greet me with "Is it 'Congratulations' or 'Condolence'?" We know that many who have been in key positions of leadership carry heavy burdens. Ronald Heifetz, author of two books on the demands and costs of leadership, offers an explanation: "... people give leaders power and authority in return for solving their problems." We see this in the Gospel scene after the multiplication of loaves. With that miracle, the people saw in Jesus their hope for a better future. But when He told them to ask instead for a different kind of bread, their hope turned to antagonism and people no longer walked with Him.

Following the lead of Pope Francis who asked the whole Christendom to pray for him when he was proclaimed as our new Pope, I ask all present here to pray for the new Provincial Assistants and me. Please pray with us and walk with us as we tread the path of leadership. Your confidence and trust, as well as the assurance of your prayers, will be sources of our courage and strength.

May the Lord give us the grace to understand the people we serve, especially you, my dear Sisters, and appreciate your fears and concerns, as well as your hopes and dreams. May we be united as a community in facing challenges. Please pray that we, your leaders, may be worthy animators of the spiritual and apostolic life of the Province, that we may be enlightened and guided in the implementation of the resolutions of the General Chapters and the decisions of the Superior General and her Council, obedient and faithful to the teaching of the Church, steadfast in our efforts to bring about one mind, spirit and heart in the Province (BL 85). Please pray, too, that we may be mystics and prophets as expected of every consecrated religious for, as Pope Francis has told the Major Religious Superiors of men and women: We are called “to announce the spirit of the Gospel, to be a light on the path of the Church.”

In conclusion, with the new Provincial Assistants, I thank Bishop Gabriel Reyes for presiding the celebration of this vocation of leadership, service and stewardship. We likewise thank the concelebrating priests; my beloved family, including my parents who have gone ahead of us and now beaming with pride and happiness at their only daughter, though it took them time to accept that she no longer belonged primarily to them but to God; all of you who have come from near and far; and those who are not physically present here but are with us in prayer and spirit.

In a very special way, I thank the preceding Provincial Superiors who prepared the way for this new Administration, particularly my immediate predecessor, Sr. Zeta Caridad Rivero, who for ten years, served as our Provincial Superior. May I ask the assembly to please join me in expressing our appreciation and gratitude to Sr. Zeta and Council by giving them a standing ovation and a big round of applause. We accompany them with our love and prayers to their next mission.

The seed planted in 1904 by the first seven Sisters who bravely came to the Philippines, has grown into a gigantic mustard tree of 42 schools, 13 hospitals and 7 pastoral centers recognized and respected all over the country. We are now reaping the fruits of the hard work of our congregation’s leaders. From them we draw inspiration and courage to

continue the mission of servant leadership and stewardship entrusted to us by our higher Superiors; to safeguard our primary call as consecrated persons; to be a reminder of the universal call to holiness; and to show by the witness of our life that we belong to the Lord by our way of being and acting.

Thank you for uniting with us today in this celebration of service and stewardship which find their true meaning in the mission entrusted by Christ to His Church, a mission that proclaims Jesus Christ is Lord. With the new Provincial Assistants, I therefore say: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your name give the glory!"

Thank you.