



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE MARIAN CLERICS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 18 February 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers,

I am pleased to meet with you on the occasion of your General Chapter. I greet you warmly, starting with the Superior General, whom I thank for his words. Through you, I would also like to greet the entire Congregation which is committed to serving Christ and the Church in 20 countries around the world.

I have heard that one of the main goals of your General Chapter is to reflect on your Congregation's laws and regulations. This is an important task. In fact, there is "a pressing need today for every Institute to *return to the Rule*, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 37). I urge you, therefore, to carry out this reflection with fidelity to the Founder's charism and to the spiritual heritage of your Congregation and, at the same time, with a heart and mind open to the new needs of the people. It is true, we must move forward with the new needs, the new challenges, but remember: we cannot move forward without memory. It is a continual tension. If I want to go ahead without any memory of the past, of the history of the Founders, the great figures and also the sins of the Congregation, I cannot do so. This is a rule: memory, this 'Deuteronomic' dimension of life, which must always be used when we update the Constitutions of a religious congregation.

May the example of your Founder, Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, who was canonized last year, light and guide you on your path. He had fully understood the meaning of being Christ's disciple when he prayed with these words: "Lord Jesus, if You would unite me to You through

charity, who will wrench me from You? If you will join me to You through mercy, who will sever me from You? Let my spirit cleave to You, let Your most merciful right hand support me. May the unworthiest member cling to the Head, and may this small atom suffer along with the entire sacred, afflicted body” (*Christus Patiens*, III, I).

From this perspective, your service to the Word bears witness to the Risen Christ, whom you have met along your journey and whom, through your way of life, you are called to take wherever the Church may send you. Christian witness also requires a commitment to and for the poor, a commitment which has distinguished your Institute since its origins. I encourage you to keep alive this tradition of service to poor and humble people, through the proclamation of the Gospel in a language they can understand, with works of mercy and prayers for the dead; that closeness to people like us, simple. I like the passage of Paul to Timothy (cf. 2 Tm 1:5): safeguard your faith, which you received from your mother, your grandmother...; from the simplicity of a mother, a grandmother. This is the foundation. We are not princes, children of princes or of counts or barons. We are simple people, of the people and thus, let us approach simple people with simplicity, such as those who suffer the most: the sick, children, abandoned elderly people, the poor, everyone. This poverty is at the core of the Gospel: the poverty of Jesus, not sociological poverty but that of Jesus.

Another significant spiritual legacy of your religious family is the one your Blessed Brother Giorgio Matulaitis left you: complete dedication to the Church and to humankind, “boldly moving forward to work and to do battle for the Church wherever the need is greatest” (*Journal*, p. 45). May his intercession help cultivate within you this approach, which in recent decades has inspired your initiatives to disseminate the charism of the Institute in poor countries, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Today, the great challenge of inculturation asks you to proclaim the Good News with language and means that are comprehensible to today’s people, who are involved in processes of rapid social and cultural transformation. Your Congregation boasts a long history written by brave witnesses to Christ and the Gospel. In these footsteps, you are called today to walk with renewed zeal, to push yourselves with prophetic freedom and wise discernment — both together! — on apostolic paths and missionary frontiers, nurturing a close collaboration with Bishops and other members of the ecclesial Community.

The horizons of evangelization and the urgent need to witness to the evangelical message to everyone without distinction, constitutes the vast field of your Apostolate. Many are still waiting to know Jesus, man’s one Redeemer, and untold situations of injustice and moral and material difficulty are challenging believers. Such an urgent mission requires personal and community conversion. Only hearts which are fully open to the action of Grace are able to interpret the signs of the times and to understand the pleas of a humanity in need of hope and peace.

Dear brothers, following the example of your Founder, be brave in your service to Christ and the Church, responding to new exigencies and new missions, even though they may seem risky, from a human point of view. In fact, in the “genetic code” of your community, you can read what Saint Stanislaus used to say from his own experience: “In spite of innumerable difficulties barring the way, divine goodness and wisdom start and complete whatever they wish, even if the means, according to human judgment may be unfit. There is nothing impossible with God Almighty. It has been most explicitly proven in me” (*Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, 1). And this attitude — which results from the paucity of means, even from our own paltriness, also from our unworthiness as sinners, comes from there, but we have a vast horizon — [this attitude] is precisely the act of faith in the power of the Lord: the Lord can; the Lord is capable. And our smallness is precisely the seed, a tiny seed, which will sprout, and grow. The Lord waters it, and in this way it grows. But the feeling of being small is really the first step towards trusting in God’s power. Go; go forward along this path.

I entrust to your Mother and Patron Saint, Mary Immaculate, your journey of faith and growth, in constant union with Christ and with his Holy Spirit, that she may make you witnesses to the power of the Resurrection. I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to all of you here, to your entire Congregation and to your lay coworkers.