



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS, SERVANTS OF MARY IMMACULATE

Tuesday, 6 July 1999

Dear Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate,

1. I am very pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your General Chapter. I offer a cordial greeting to each of you and gladly extend it to all your sisters. This meeting, although brief, enables me to express my spiritual closeness to you, praying with you for divine wisdom to enlighten your discernment and goals during the Chapter. It intends to focus attention on the theme of *formation*, to draw up norms in relation to the distinctive features of your congregation, which was founded in Ukraine a little over a century ago and is the first institute of active life in the Byzantine- Ukrainian rite.

2. Regarding the fundamental task of formation, I would like to remind you that it is called to cooperate with the action of God the Father, who through the Holy Spirit moulds people in the image of his Only-begotten Son. The delicacy of this task requires first of all that you select qualified and skilled *formation directors*, who can combine spiritual and human wisdom in a harmonious balance, as well as ensure that they are in full harmony with the way of the entire Church.

Formation has an intrinsic *community dimension*: in the community one learns to rejoice and to work together, and to accept others with their particular traits and limitations, to share one's gifts for the benefit of all. One also learns to face and examine apostolic experiences, drawing a valuable lesson on personal attitudes.

3. Every institute is invited to develop a *formation programme* inspired by its original charism, which will clearly and dynamically present the path to follow, so that its own spirituality can be fully assimilated. This programme must recognize that the formation process has a very intense *initial*

phase but is not limited to this. Initial formation must be joined with *continuing formation*, so that every consecrated person may be guided by a programme for her whole life. No stage of life can be considered so secure and fervent as to rule out the opportunity for specific attention to guarantee perseverance in fidelity, just as there is no age that determines the end of a person's growth.

You have a long and glorious tradition of fidelity to Christ and the Church, having known sufferings of every kind during the long years of oppression under the communist regime. In looking at the example of the sisters who were able courageously to endure the hard period of the 'catacombs', you take great pride in raising high the torch of your ideal of giving yourselves totally to God in daily service to your brothers and sisters. The Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, in fact, is the first institute of active life in the Byzantine-Ukrainian rite, and its primary task is to educate people's hearts, going wherever the need is greatest.

In your efforts to renew your formation plan, bear in mind your original charism, as you seek to adapt it to the needs of the present, so that you can act effectively in today's world. Let it be your concern to remain faithful to your Eastern identity by updating your Constitutions in the light of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, which I promulgated in 1990. May you be spurred in your work by the anticipation of the Great Jubilee, for which you want to prepare yourselves actively, so that all the congregation's religious can draw abundant spiritual benefits.

4. Dear friends, you are called Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate. In whom, then, if not in Blessed Mary, can you find the perfect model of consecrated life, discerning also its connatural dynamic dimension? Yes, Mary is Immaculate from the very first moment of her existence and at the same time she became 'full of grace' through the merits of her Son's redemptive sacrifice, a sacrifice to which she united herself in body and soul, following Jesus throughout his mission to his Passion and ultimate sacrifice on the Cross.

Mary's earthly life is a journey of faith, hope and love, an exemplary way of holiness which began with the enthusiasm of her '*fiat*', the exultation of the '*Magnificat*', contemplative reflection in everyday life, perseverance in the dark night of the Passion until she could share in the joy of her divine Son in the radiant dawn of the Resurrection.

Dear sisters, by living this way in daily intimacy with Blessed Mary, may you find in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception *an inexhaustible source* of conversion, growth and sanctification. While welling up continually within you, this source will spur you with the urgency of love to proclaim and bear witness to Christ to everyone, wherever Providence calls you.

This is my wish for each of you and for the whole institute, and I cordially accompany it with a special Apostolic Blessing.

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