



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF  
MARIANS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**

*Thursday, 1 July 1999*

*Dear Brothers,*

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to all of you who are taking part in the General Chapter of the Marian Fathers, and I thank the Superior General for his words on your behalf.

I extend a special greeting to the Marian Fathers who have been called to the episcopal ministry: Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius (Kaunas); Juozas emaitis (Vilkaviškis); Jan Olszański (Kamyanets); Jan Paweł Lenga (Karaganda), to all your Marian confrères wherever they may be in the world, and especially to the sick and the suffering.

In a congregation's life the General Chapter is a strong moment of fraternal communion in which, according to St Basil's words: "The energy of the Spirit in one is communicated at the same time to all". Our meeting in a certain sense was anticipated by my visit 7 June last to the Marian Shrine of Licheń. During the few moments I was able to spend with your confrères, I noticed the presence of young people and the elderly there together, and I learned that there were priests from various parts of the world. It was an edifying image of fraternal communion. The task of strengthening and deepening this communion is one of the goals that your congregation set during the six-year period now coming to an end.

Dear friends, continue on this path! May it be your constant concern to enliven and strengthen fraternal life in the provinces, the vice-provinces, the vicariates and the individual houses. Keep before you the example of the first Christians who were assiduous in accepting the teaching of the Apostles, in common prayer, in celebrating the Eucharist and in sharing whatever goods of nature and grace they had (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 45).

2. We have just celebrated the feast of Sts Peter and Paul. Jesus called Peter to be the foundation

of the Church, but at the same time allowed him to understand, by experiencing his own weakness, how much stronger God's grace is than human weakness. On the road to Damascus Paul, too, was transformed from being a persecutor of Christians into the Apostle of the Gentiles.

How can we think that the Apostle Peter, at Jesus' side, did not meet the Blessed Virgin? There was one day in particular that Peter and the Apostles spent intensely with Mary: the day of Pentecost, when the Church was born. Certainly the outpouring of the Spirit's gifts filled the heart of Mary, Mother of Christ, in a special way, making her also the Mother of the Church.

Dear Marian Fathers, it is very important for your congregation, the first founded by a Pole, to have a distinctly Marian character, given its bond with Mary Immaculate. In the 17th century, when the crisis of the then-powerful Polish State began to unfold, Fr Stanislaus Papczyński sought the help of Mary Immaculate. This is the counsel he gave you: in every difficulty seek the Blessed Virgin's help. In doing so, he accepted Jesus' own invitation who, from the Cross, gave Mary as a mother to the Apostle John.

May you also have great trust in Blessed Mary, as Fr Papczyński taught you by his example! Turn to her fervently, especially when you face serious danger or moments of crisis.

3. The reformer of your congregation, Jurgis Matulaitis-Matulewicz, whom I had the joy of beatifying 12 years ago, perfectly understood the deep bond between the Mother of Jesus and the Church. Among the 12 "*Firm Principles*" of the renewed congregation, he gave priority to the recommendation of "maintaining a strong and unbending union with the Church and her Head, the Bishop of Rome, and with the whole Catholic hierarchy.... of belonging through the Church and in the Church to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ, so that he is the total centre of our life" (*The Guiding Idea and Spirit of the Congregation*, n. 55).

He loved the Church and left you this love as a legacy. During his work of renewing the Congregation of Marians, he noted in his spiritual diary, "*God grant that we may be seized with one great thought: to work for the Church, to bear burdens and sufferings for her sake, to be concerned with the things of the Church to the point that her sufferings, cares and wounds become the sufferings, cares and wounds of our heart*" (*Spiritual Diary*, 27 October 1910).

4. By trusting in the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, you are preparing to take part generously in the new evangelization, which calls for consecrated persons to be fully aware of the theological significance of the challenges of our time (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 81). With an attitude of faithful adherence to the Church's Magisterium, continue your great work in Poland, in other European countries, in America and in Australia. I encourage you to persevere, and I bless the schools, publishing houses, parishes, retreat houses, shrines, works of mercy, services for immigrants and the other charitable institutions in your care.

I am thinking in particular of the work of your religious family in Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and am pleased with all you do in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, as well as your work for the past five years in Estonia. Many of your brothers paid for their devotion to the Gospel cause with their lives or with years in the gulags. The commitment to continue and strengthen your difficult but important presence must be one of your apostolic priorities today.

May the Lord make your work, particularly in Africa, rich in spiritual fruit, especially in tormented Rwanda and, in the near future, Cameroon, as well as in other frontier areas like Alaska or other regions where clergy are scarce. Meeting the needs of the Churches which have been tragically deprived of priests, being present in difficult situations in various parts of the world: this corresponds fully to your charism. Your blessed reformer marked out this path for you: you must go "wherever the Church is in the greatest difficulty ... wherever Christ is least known or even hated" (*The Guiding Idea*, n. 18).

5. Dear Marian Fathers, may your commitment to the apostolate of Divine Mercy and your pastoral work always be accompanied by the witness of serving the poor: "*Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life*" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 82). This is why you are called to undertake courageous initiatives in response to the signs of the times, following in the footsteps of your founder and reformer. In particular, be faithful to your charism, adapting its forms, when necessary, to new situations, in complete docility to divine inspiration and ecclesial discernment.

Your Chapter, in conformity with the recommendations of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (cf. n. 68), is about to approve the *Ratio formationis* worked out in the past six years for the whole congregation. Formation is especially important for the very future of the congregation. May God help you and may his protection accompany you constantly throughout the work of your Chapter and in the election of the new General Government.

For my part, I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer and, as I invoke the heavenly presence of Mary Immaculate on your journey towards the third millennium, I cordially impart my Blessing to you all.