

Spirituality and Intercultural Dialogue

Introduction

The General Chapter of 2000 invited us to search for the best way to respond to the call it addressed to us to participate in transformative education, collaboration in reciprocity, and dialogue among cultures. With the presentation of our spirituality, the Chapter challenged us to reinterpret and rearticulate our spirituality, and concluded with the affirmation that: “The journey continues...”

Eight years later, we find ourselves in a world that seems no nearer to solving its problems of poverty and injustice, of racism and war. Instead, we have seen new and greater acts of violence and exclusion that increase the fragmentation of the human community. At the same time, we are aware of the deep thirst for God that lies hidden behind so much striving for a false security. Human beings pursue this search incessantly and in many different and sometimes puzzling ways. Men and women of different cultures, religions and spiritual traditions search for God and work to make of our world a habitable place with a future for humanity and all of creation.

As part of this human search, the Church also seeks for ways to respond to the cries of those who suffer. In its daily activities in local ecclesial communities and in the witness of martyrs, religious, priests, bishops, and so many anonymous brothers and sisters in many continents, it has shown its desire and its commitment in favour of a world in which we can find justice and peace as visible signs of the presence of God in history. In this context, conscious that our charism is a gift of God in the Church for the world, we have sought to deepen our spirituality through intercultural dialogue, the theme of this General Chapter of 2008.

This dialogue is rooted in the testimony of all the provinces. As General Chapter, we have been inspired and challenged by the lived experience of all of our sisters around the world and everyone with whom we are in communion in life and mission. The reports of the Provincials and of the Provincial Chapters have formed the point of departure for what we have experienced and tried to discern in a joyful experience of our *Cor Unum*.

We participated around the table, the fire, and the well; we welcomed our vulnerability and fragility with reverence in an atmosphere of mutual listening, confidence, and joy, nourished by the symbols from our different cultures and our communal prayer. With a heart that discerns, we asked ourselves: where and when do we live our spirituality in daily life and in our many and varied contexts? We found the key in an intuition from Chapter 2000: “*We are convinced as a Chapter that our lives, given in love, are the strongest expression of our spirituality.*” How do we want to give our lives in a way that continues to respond to the one who has first loved us?

Five priorities emerged in our exchange with surprising unanimity: dialogue, relationships, communication, and networks; contemplation; community life; justice, peace, and integrity of creation in solidarity with those who are most vulnerable; and the focus on young people. We have recognized these five priorities as five doors through which to enter our spirituality. We are convinced that the Spirit makes all things new (Rev 21:5) and when we live them in acts and words of daily life, we experience our spirituality with a new and present strength.

The Chapter experienced a strong call to revitalize the gift that we have received, to discover and reveal the love of God in a life that is wholly contemplative and wholly apostolic. From the contemplation of the open heart of Jesus we draw the power that inspires us to live in communion with all people, to bring others to participate in this communion, and to commit ourselves with our whole being, in the Church and with many others, to work to bring about a world that is more just and more united.

This is the invitation and the challenge that we wish to communicate to the whole Society and to all those with whom we share friendship, work, or community in the spirit of the extended family of the Sacred Heart, so that, little by little, we give life to the desire of Jesus “*that all may be one.*” (Jn 17:11)

The General Chapter has chosen these five priorities that are for us the visible expression of our spirituality. In light of these priorities, we have recognized some intuitions that will help us to find new ways of communication and of organizing ourselves.

In the way in which the results of our dialogue are presented, we see reflected the richness of our diversity and our unity.

Dialogue toward Communion: Walking with Humanity

Gathered around the table of life, where each one offers her bread as nourishment for all, we recognize dialogue as the way to a more human world, a life with Spirit. During the Chapter, we have journeyed together not only as RSCJ, but with all of humanity, searching in communal discernment how to be the Heart of God in the world. We have entered into a rich and deep experience of dialogue, convinced that dialogue is the way for the world today.

The context of our encounter has been especially meaningful: the life of the Peruvian province among the Peruvian people which has spoken to us in dance, music, cultural diversity, and joy in the midst of poverty and exclusion. They have welcomed us. They have shown us their perseverance, joining hands and sharing as sisters and brothers.

Throughout the Chapter we have lived a process of deep intercultural dialogue. Dialogue has given us a way and a process to live each day, sharing beyond words, with laughter and tears, expressions of tenderness and intimacy, care and attentiveness, weaving communion together. Holding the Chapter in Peru has helped us better to understand realities previously unknown to us and now we are more aware that to understand others and journey with them we must enter into their reality and let ourselves be changed by their lives.

For decades the Society has followed Western ways, but in this Chapter we have been more attentive to other cultures, especially those of the East, and to other religions such as Buddhism and Islam. This open dialogue has enriched us and we have perceived the possibility of communion in a profound experience of God.

Our interculturality has been a richness. Through our different cultures, we have been able to express ourselves with words and in other ways. We have felt heard, welcomed and valued. We have received much from each other and this experience will change us. Also, in this diversity we have once again become aware of the power of language. Language is not only a means of expression, but a way of thinking, which can dominate over minorities. In this sense we wish to grow in sensitivity and creativity to use language as a means of communication, a vehicle for encounter, a medium for each one to express herself and contribute from her cultural identity. Seated around the table, we offer what we have and learn from each other.

We recognize dialogue as dynamic experience, not static theory. That is to say, dialogue invites us to move and discover the context from which we speak and express our ideas, choices and feelings.

We are faithful to the spirit of Sophie, a woman of relationships and dialogue. From her we learn the value of nurturing, intimacy, patience and love as attitudes of the heart which draw us into communion. With a contemplative heart inhabited by the Spirit, we listen to the world as it shares its hopes and suffering. Here we find the Heart of Jesus incarnate in history, which calls us to new relationships with others and with all creation as one body.

This requires of us that we change our way of seeing ourselves and our way of situating ourselves in today's world, as part of the common human search for:

- dialogue that is inter-cultural, inter-religious, inter-generational, as an act of justice which impels us to share life in harmony and peace;
- community as the way to live our humanity at the local, provincial, regional and international levels;
- contemplation as the loving gaze which discovers, welcomes, nourishes, and fosters life;
- the meaning of life that is deeper, more sensitive, more human, especially toward the young.

This commitment to life reminds us that the Spirit is alive in history, and that our vocation to discover and manifest love moves us into an ongoing reciprocity: to live, journey, and share among ourselves and with others. We discover that true communion happens when we touch the heart, and there recognize the presence of the Spirit.

In dialogue, we risk sharing our word and our very self which speaks in gestures, symbols and choices. We bring to the table all that we are, and our charism as a gift for the world. We are renewed in welcoming others. This process implies understanding ourselves in all honesty, reverencing the other, conversion, self-emptying, opening ourselves to being changed and entering into silence.

We realize that dialogue is difficult and we often break it off. From the local level to the world-wide there is abuse of power of some peoples over others and of humanity over nature. Again we are called to choose dialogue as a way to bring new life. This is a deep experience of the Paschal Mystery which inspires us to say with those at Emmaus, "*Don't go. Stay with us.*" (Lk 24:29)

All of this is happening in a world where the rapid advances of technology have allowed instant and easy communication during this Chapter through the Society website, thus contributing to the participation and enthusiasm of the provinces and others interested in our Chapter process. These media can facilitate communication, participation, dialogue and reciprocity, and are a particular way of bringing us closer to the world of youth. At the same time, we acknowledge that there is inequality of access to and use of these resources. The excessive volume of information available on the web does not guarantee correct analysis and interpretation, and can produce non-communication and isolation.

We believe that networking is a way of participating in structural change with other groups who have formed in response to the cries and hopes of the world. Networks link us in a deep sense of sharing life with others. We have discovered that networks can draw us into relationships beyond functionality. These relationships happen when we let down our defenses, our securities, and our desires for power, recognizing the equality and dignity of each person and culture. We enter into dialogue from our own vulnerability and searching, with a stronger desire for communion and to transform reality from within.

Chapter 2000 invited us to move from meeting to dialogue of cultures. Throughout the intervening years we have been taking steps and discovering that new life is emerging in the world and in the Society. We feel called to continue nurturing these processes of dialogue which give birth to new life, in simplicity and joy.

Contemplation

Today, as women rooted in the heart of Christ, we reaffirm our heritage of contemplation that springs from *“a compelling love written in our hearts by the Spirit”* (§24).

This urgent call challenges us to keep hope alive in a world of violence, fragmentation and woundedness that threaten the survival of our planet. The future of humanity depends on a spiritual rebirth. The beauty and the suffering of our world and of nature, and the wisdom of other religious traditions touch and affect the quality and depth of our contemplation.

The Word of God manifested in the Scriptures and echoed in the cry of people around us resonates within us and we welcome it as a prophetic impulse. Many in our world today are searching for the meaning of life. Together, and especially with people who are poor and most vulnerable, we long for the transformation of reality. This movement calls us to revitalize our spirituality of the heart and to discover the gratuitous presence of the love of God in humanity.

We recognise that activism and dispersion diminish the quality of our life. Instead we are called to stop, to choose silence and to open and let ourselves be opened to our inner depths where the Spirit of God allows us to feel, see and understand life and reality with God's heart. When we allow our bodies to be silent, our senses awaken and we are able to hear the voice of the Spirit within us. Then in the secret place of the heart the Spirit gradually transforms our feelings and responses, and draws us into an intimate relationship with God. The Spirit attunes us to the heartbeat of our people to discover the presence and love of God in everyday life. We recognise the gratuitousness of this experience. When we contemplate the heart of Christ we enter into the

movement of the Spirit who develops in us a listening heart, bringing us closer to God's reality, with the desire to promote justice, peace and the care of creation.

The life of Madeleine Sophie, who wished to live always by the Spirit, of Philippine, "the woman who prayed always," and the lives of so many of our Sisters remind us that giving time and space to prayer will help us to be the heart of God in our world. From them we learn that contemplation is at the core of our spirituality and leads us to discover the depths of our humanity. Through all stages of our life our prayer invites us to the depths of God. The desire for interior life finds a home in us and draws us to abide in God. When we are united to the Vine (Jn. 15) we let ourselves be pruned by the Spirit. Only in this way can we bear fruit. This dynamism purifies us and brings us closer together as sisters. As the grapes are made into wine, our hearts will become more compassionate and understanding. Our personal and community life will be more unified. We will recognise the new life which rises up within us from our thirst for God. Our contemplation allows us to hear the cry for relationships that reflect human dignity. Being contemplative women will give colour and warmth to life.

As communities all over the world seeking to live more deeply our contemplation and discernment, we are all invited:

- to provide welcome in our communities where, with others, especially youth, we can grow in this contemplative attitude;
- to ensure that our formation which continues all through life strengthens our contemplation and interior life;
- to communicate among ourselves and with others our search for and experiences of God during times of prayer and the sharing of our lives from a faith perspective;
- to engage in ways of dialogue with Christian and other religious traditions and cultures with whom we share "the treasures of faith" and from whom we receive new inspiration;
- to cultivate the contemplative attitude with our partners in ministry, in our educative institutions and projects and with groups of persons who strive for greater justice and peace for our people.

The contemplative experience invites us to enter into the Paschal Mystery. In the Eucharist we celebrate the fidelity of God and experience communion with all of creation.

Community – A Central Value in our Life

The reports from Provincial Chapters and from the Provincials preparatory to the General Chapter show honest acknowledgements of the difficulties we have experienced in community. There is also a strong desire to build community. Convinced of the fact that from fragility new life emerges, we continue to search for ways to be sisters, to grow in accepting our vulnerabilities and giftedness and to assist one another to take life giving risks. Community is a place where we are called to continual personal and communal conversion.

As RSCJ we are called to follow Jesus in community, in the manner of Sophie. Deeply rooted in our relationship with Jesus, we reaffirm that life in community is a fundamental expression of our spirituality.

Community is a basic way of organizing ourselves, a space where we take decisions together for our lives and mission. Community on all levels is both mission and for mission.

Recognizing that we are part of the universe, of creation in all its abundance and of a fragmented humanity that yearns for new ways of relating, we are convinced that living in community models an alternative way of being together in this world. We strive to witness that love, hope, justice and peace are possible.

Conscious that the destruction of the environment will have the greatest impact on those who already suffer from poverty, hunger and the lack of water, we know that living in community and sharing our goods in common has the potential to reduce our consumption of the world's resources. In this context we reaffirm our commitment to live more simply.

We desire communities that are open to all, sharing life and faith, dreams and struggles, our goods and resources.

We are invited to weave threads of connectedness, drawing on the richness and challenge of interpersonal, cultural and ethnic diversities, in regions and provinces, and as an international Society.

We sense the urgent invitation to revitalize:

- the quality of our relations which are basic to community
- how we create humanizing spaces for ourselves and others
- how community can be a place of searching, of contemplation and discernment.

Valuing the richness of the material on Apostolic Community in our Constitutions and other Chapter documents, we are encouraged to return to these primary documents in order to let them challenge us to live more radically. Within the realities of our provinces we need to continue to look courageously at:

- how the social context influences our attempts to live community
- whether there is congruence between how we desire to live as expressed in our documents and our lived reality.

Our experience of the joy in living and celebrating together as sisters creates energy within us for building community among ourselves and others wherever we are.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Solidarity with Those Who Are Most Vulnerable

Journeying with peoples of different contexts, races, and cultures, and listening profoundly to the joys and suffering of humanity have allowed us to be touched by the poverty, inequality, exclusion, violence, and environmental destruction that are present in today's world. We recognize with greater clarity the interconnectedness of global realities and the impact that these

have on our local situations. We are more aware of the marginalizing effects of globalization and of cultures of dominance and exclusion.

How do I develop a critical awareness of the interconnectedness of the whole of creation with the events which mark our world?

We suffer the pain of our peoples. With them, and from this depth, we enter into the Open Heart of Christ, the wellspring that satisfies our thirst. From our contemplation of the Pierced Heart of Jesus in the heart of wounded humanity flows the desire to commit ourselves with greater passion and compassion to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

How does my prayer urge me to live my commitment to justice, peace, and integrity of creation? In what way does this commitment enrich my prayer?

We are convinced that “to educate is in itself an act of justice” (*Letter of the General Council, Feast of the Sacred Heart, June, 2006*). We take the responsibility to orient all our educative endeavors towards creating relationships of equality, inclusion, non-violence, and harmony, believing that to have life, and life in abundance, is the deepest desire of God. In whatever apostolic activity we may be engaged, our educative mission makes visible our solidarity with those who are excluded.

How can I deepen my awareness and appreciation that justice is rooted in our spirituality from which flow our various ways of being educators?

The pursuit of justice, peace, and integrity of creation permeates all aspects of our lives. We want to include these in the criteria we use for discerning our relationships, ministries, and commitments. In so doing, all our choices will be marked by Gospel values.

*On behalf of whom do we live, work, and act?
To what new actions or ways of being are we called?*

Taking on this commitment in daily life:

- calls each one of us to a change in our personal and communal lifestyle, in our mentality and attitudes, and in the way we make choices
- offers us new ways of living our vows more congruently
- impels us to search for different ways of living our community of goods, inclusiveness, and communion
- invites us to relate in a new way with ourselves, with others, and with all of creation.

*What do we need to change in our personal and community lifestyles?
How do I live my daily responsibility with regard to non-violence and the environment?*

In whatever may be our apostolic engagement, in our relationships and involvement, the advancement of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation unites and orients us as a Society and energizes us towards the future. This effort provides us with a “common space” for collaboration

in dialogue and reciprocity within the Church, with different religions and philosophies, with other cultures, and with organizations and networks in civil society. It is here that we encounter youth whose contribution enriches us. With them, we will discover new ways of expressing and sharing our spirituality.

What is the invitation to establish or participate in new relationships and groups in my immediate locality?

With gratitude, we celebrate the daily efforts of men and women in search of a better world. With them, strengthened by the Spirit, we want to continue finding the face of God in the future towards which we journey. We find hope in initiatives towards solidarity and reconciliation, gestures of sharing goods and of caring for life, and words that console and challenge us. In the beating of these human hearts in accordance with the rhythm of life, with joy we discover the love of the Heart of Jesus.

How do we celebrate and share the gifts of life together with others?

Our internationality is for us a gift and a responsibility. We desire to put it at the service of life, responding to the challenge coming from the birth pangs of humanity and the whole of creation.

How do we allow ourselves to be touched by the needs beyond the borders of our province, especially in those places where life is most threatened? How are we called to respond?

The following means will be of help. We recommend that we:

- undertake educative processes at personal, community, and provincial levels that transform us and allow us to own our commitment to justice, peace, and integrity of creation.
- integrate justice, peace, and integrity of creation as a priority into our personal and community goals, in our initial and ongoing formation programs, as well as in our plans at the provincial, regional and international levels.
- explore alternative forms of communication and information so as to expand our analysis of reality and its local and global implications.
- make available to persons and groups, especially to youth who want to commit themselves to service among the most poor, educative processes and concrete channels for expressing and deepening commitment to people who are poor.
- identify two or three priorities which could help us to unite our efforts with those of others working for justice, peace and integrity of creation (e.g. hunger, migrants, non-renewable resources).
- explore and pursue, at provincial, regional, and international levels, creative, generous and courageous ways of putting our community of goods at the service of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

Our Priority for Young People

From the depth of our contemplation we are called to see the world through the pierced Heart of Jesus and there we encounter both the strength and the fragility of life. Sophie's vision of 'forming adorers' passionate for life who would change the world touches our own longing. Each province has shared its context with all its complexities, crises and calls, and we recognize that this is a critical moment - for the young, for us, and for the world. This impels us to renew our commitment to young people with a new passion.

We want to continue to walk with young people. Many have a passion for justice and a concern for the future of the planet. Others are marginalized, lost and have no sense of any future for their world or themselves. Some have a desire to give their lives generously in the service of others. We need to be present with them all in their search for God, meaning and the value of life.

As Religious of the Sacred Heart we want to respond with the heart of an educator. We do this with others in a variety of ways: in schools, movements, communities, NGOs, civic associations, colleges and universities, networks, parishes and projects, in cities, villages and barrios, with young people of different classes, ages, religions and cultures. Now we see ourselves called anew with more zeal.

We feel that our spirituality has something important to say to the world today and we want to share this in creative and life-giving ways, conscious that many thirst for an experience of God's love. Young people are the agents of change in their own lives and we can learn from each other. We hear a strong invitation to walk with them, sharing our thirst and aspirations in a common effort to build a world where the desires of God will become a reality.

Each province, community and RSCJ is urged to look deeply into their context and to find ways to respond, particularly to youth. This means that we may need to make new choices. Some of these may include:

- inter-generational dialogue among ourselves, which is an important step to enter the world of youth. This opens us to new ideas, initiatives and projects.
- being systematic in the planning and evaluation of our projects and discerning how best to accompany youth in every setting, whether formal or informal. Reflection on our educational philosophy will enable us to respond to the calls of youth more effectively.
- using all the means of communication and technology that are available to reach out to young people
 - have a section for youth on the provincial and international web-pages.
- developing networks with other organizations and collaborators in our countries, provinces, regions and internationally.
 - e.g., networks of volunteers, Associates, alumnae, North-South project, schools, educational projects.
- evaluating what is happening regarding vocation ministry in each Province (cf. the whole section on Vocation Ministry in the Chapter 2000 document, p. 42).
- responding to the needs of young people and taking seriously the work of how to accompany them. We emphasize the importance of serious formation in the

accompaniment of young people in their human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions, through workshops, formation, educational philosophy, etc.

- evaluating our commitment to youth in 2-3 years at the provincial level, sharing this at the regional and international levels, and assessing if there is a need for a coordinator to promote this work at all levels.

Questions for Reflection

- Are there ways that our communities can be more open and welcoming, places where young people can feel at home? In what ways do we need to change our lifestyle and attitudes?
- How do we learn to share our faith and prayer with young people in new and creative ways?
- How can we enter more deeply into the world and culture of young people?
- How are we empowering young people to take leadership?
- How do we deepen what it means to have the heart of an educator?

From General Chapter 2008 to Sacred Heart Friends and Colleagues

For many years there has been collaboration between the Religious of the Sacred Heart and our colleagues and friends who have shared our spirituality, life and mission. General Chapter 2000 called us live this in reciprocity.

In many countries the collaboration has greatly expanded in the last eight years with a dynamism we might not have been able to foresee. In all our educational undertakings, both formal and popular, our colleagues carry the mission and charism for us, with us. In some provinces, Associates continue to develop. Others have found different ways of sharing our spirituality and life, as alumnae/i volunteers, groups of young people, prayer and reflection groups.

At our General Chapter 2008, we have recognised the many ways in which you are a part of the Society of the Sacred Heart. You encourage us to continue to walk in the way of Sophie. Her heritage belongs to us all. With you we try to listen to the heartbeat of God in the reality of our world. Together let us continue to strive for a world where no one is excluded and each one has a rightful place.

We have been moved to reach out to you in gratitude for all the ways in which you walk with us. With you we embark on the next stage of the history of the Society with courage and confidence.

ECOSOC Status at the United Nations

The Society of the Sacred Heart will apply for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

That the General Council discern and implement the best way possible of coordinating JPIC at the international level.

Sacred Heart Educational Institutions

Appreciative of the work done in many places to communicate our spirituality and philosophy of education and recognizing that many of our colleagues are today carrying forward our educational vision, the General Chapter asks that the General Council:

- encourage the provinces and regions to create opportunities for RSCJ and colleagues in our educational institutions to express and deepen our spirituality and pedagogy as Sacred Heart educators;
- call on our educational institutions to continue exploring creative ways to dialogue, communicate, and share resources among themselves, and to support each other in our educative mission.

We affirm their desire to draw from our rich tradition and to move forward together towards the future.

Facilitation of International Volunteers

In order to facilitate and encourage exchange of volunteers internationally, we ask that the General Council name a coordinator of information at the international level. This coordinator would promote communication between the rscj who have responsibility for these projects, with a view to ensuring that there be a match between the conditions required by the countries receiving volunteers and those of the countries sending them.