

**LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
DECEMBER 8, 2011**

Prot. n. 230/2011

Dear Confreres:

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, which is celebrated as our titular feast, is a yearly opportunity to deepen our prayer, to renew our vows, and to reflect on our identity and our fidelity to our vocation. I send my special greetings to all of you and entrust you in prayer to God, the Giver of every good thing. May He fill your hearts with the gifts that you most need to strive on the path of Jesus and to imitate Mary, our Mother and Patroness.

Along with some spiritual references to the mystery of Mary's holy conception, this year I would like to draw your attention to two events which, I believe, Divine Providence reveals to us as our Congregation's directions. They are: this year's General Chapter and next year's 25th Anniversary of the Beatification of Abp George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, the Renovator of our religious community.

1. The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception as the heart of the Marian charism

Today, our thoughts go primarily to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Our Lord. For the Congregation founded by Blessed Fr. Stanislaus, this mystery is the fundamental point of reference and, in a sense, its *raison d'être* – the heart of our charism. It is indicated by the very title of our religious community which is rooted in this mystery that defines the principles of the Marian identity. Through our faith, we perceive the original plan of God for us to be holy and unmarred by sin, the gratuitousness of God's grace which anticipates every human action so that no one may boast of his merits. In His gift-giving and His actions, our Lord is free. He found pleasure in man – the creation that He endowed with the breath of life and did not reject because of his sin, weakness, and confusion. The gift of the Immaculate Conception is a sign of God's fidelity and merciful love for men, which were present even before man's coming into being.

We are the Congregation of a Marian character and belonging to Mary. For this is the essential meaning of the Latin word *marianus*. The Marian feature of our spirituality was not only given to us by our Father Founder, but also discovered by all our predecessors who followed the path of the Marian vocation. The Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszynski also wrote in this spirit in one of his circular letters, stating that Mary was indeed the Foundress of our Religious Community. He wished in this way to accentuate Mary's privileged place in the Marian religious life.

The mystery of Immaculate Conception of Mary is of course a Divine and salvific mystery which reveals the preceding presence and action of God himself. However, at the same time it is a Marian mystery, therefore, a human one. For outside of Mary, there is no Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord. In a way, the sanctifying and salvific grace of the Lord, who gave Himself on the Cross for the salvation of every man, found its incarnation in Mary. We see her as a human response that is pleasing to God; this is the acceptance of the gift of grace and God's plan, a total entrustment and adherence to the Person and Will of God. It is finally, the reaction for changing one's own life plans in order to be available to carry out God's wishes. This is the attitude of someone who is always on the way; the attitude of a pilgrim, making his way to the house of the Father and having no permanent place here on earth, who believes that everything is possible for God because He is omnipotent and His ideas are different from ours. The modern Church reminds us of this attitude and names it one of the essential characteristics of the religious life: This is the attitude of continuous conversion. Blessed John Paul II thus expressed it in his *Vita consecrata*: "In fact the vocation of consecrated persons to seek first the Kingdom of God is first and foremost a call to complete conversion, in self-renunciation, in order to live fully for the Lord, so that God may be all in all" (35).

Gazing today at the salvific mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of our Lord, we shall not stop at the intellectual reflection; instead, drawn by our faith in God's preceding grace, we want to answer the gift of vocation. Just like Mary, after her example and with her intercession, we desire that God may be all in all.

2. Challenges flowing out of the General Chapter

This year's General Chapter produced fruits that may be considered essential for our Congregation's character and proximate future. Aside from my unexpected election to the office of the Superior General (which is just another proof that "for God everything is possible"), the Chapter made important changes in our laws and passed the documents that synthesize in great measure the events of recent years along with the accompanying reflections. I think here primarily of the Father Founder's Beatification and the

100th Anniversary of our Congregation's Renewal.

Alterations to the layout and content of our laws are intended to clearly emphasize the identity of our religious community. It was mostly a question of moving some paragraphs of the Constitutions which, now being placed in the part entitled "The Mission and Character of the Congregation," better reflect the Marian and eschatological dimension of our spirituality. On the other hand, the amendments made to our Directory – by adding new paragraphs – indicate the emphasis of our pious practices meant to express this character and to form us spiritually.

I should also mention two other novelties in our legislation. The first regards the new wording of article 15, which provides our religious brothers with an opportunity to wear the ecclesial garb after the manner of priests, without making it obligatory. In this context, individual Provinces and Vicariates ought to reconsider the time of vesting, while the General Liturgical Committee works out an appropriate rite. Another amendment is concerned with our economic matters. The Chapter added a new article to the Directory that defines the principles of the administration of goods, including the norms of ordinary and extraordinary administration. This is also our response to the requirements of Canon Law (cf. *CCL*, 1281). In the opinion of the General Chapter, the work on our laws is not yet finished and needs to be continued. For this reason, the General Superior was charged with the task of setting up a Committee for the Constitutions and the Directory.

From among the post-Chapter documents, I would like to point out two. They are: "The General Chapter's Message to All Members of the Congregation" and "The Priorities of the Congregation for 2011-2017." Both documents are worthy of your individual and communal reading and reflection. They indicate our community's present self-awareness especially in matters regarding the understanding of our charism and our communal experience of God's actions both throughout the Congregation's history and at present. In the Chapter's opinion, the priorities – worked out in five points – present "the direction of the Congregation's activity for the next six years."

Along with other resolutions of the General Chapter, all the above-mentioned documents were recently published in a book format that also includes the "Summing up of Results on the Survey into Matters Important for the Congregation." This book, printed in 500 copies, ought to find its way into every religious house and be available to every confrere. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Br. A. Mączyński for his work on publishing this book, and Fr. P. Naumowicz, Chair of the Pre-Chapter Committee on the Survey, for the work of processing and summing up the survey answers. I encourage all the confreres to read this book: The substance of the resolutions and the documents may become a source for spiritual inspiration and deepening our Marian identity.

3. The year 2012 – as the Year of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz

Next year is marked by the 25th Anniversary of Blessed George's Beatification. While on my General Visitation in Lithuania, I dispatched a special letter on this occasion to the National Conference of Bishops in Lithuania, asking them to proclaim the year 2012 a Year of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. The bishops granted my request. In the framework of the preparations for the event, together with the General Superior of the Sisters of the Poor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we established a working team, the goal of which is to prepare a program, appropriate documents, conferences, etc.

Therefore, our Congregation now has serious motivations to live out next year in this manner. We have no doubts about Blessed George's providential role in our history. Not only did he rescue our community from obliteration but – thanks his personal holiness – he managed to introduce enlivening inspirations to it: the authentic love of Christ, a spirit of service to the Church wherever her needs are greatest, and total dedication to God's causes – all in the spirit of Mary and the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. Those are the unmistakable signs of holiness, to which we are also called and of which – understood as our priority – we are reminded by the documents of our last Chapter.

In view of the above, I proclaim 2012 the Year of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz for the Congregation.

I encourage all of you to make an individual and communal reflection and to bow your heads in thanks for the legacy of our community's Renovator, especially during this time, along with commending the matter of his canonization in your prayer. Here, in the General House, we open the year of Blessed George exactly today. I do not plan any special festivities for our Congregation exclusively. Instead, I invite you all to participate in the celebrations to be held in Lithuania. I especially desire that we all gather at the annual celebrations at the tomb of Blessed George in Marijampole. The festivities will last a whole week from July 8 to 15, 2012, with the Solemn Mass on Sunday, July 15, 2012, at Noon, as their culmination. The participation of representatives from every Province and Vicariate would be a sign of our communal unity and the manifestation that the cause started by Blessed Stanislaus and renewed by

Blessed George lasts throughout the centuries and brings fruit, thanks to the grace of God which is more powerful than any persecutions of the Church. There are strong expectations on the part of the Church in Lithuania as to our involvement in various pastoral activities; therefore, I established a Committee, which is chaired by Fr. Vytautas Briilius. Should he ask for the help of confreres from other countries, I ask you to kindly meet his requests. This will be a sign of our solidarity and a witness to our community's union. The celebration of the year of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz ought to find an expression in our monthly days of recollection, retreats, renovations, conventions, etc. I trust that it will reignite in our hearts the action of the Holy Spirit and reawaken the forces that helped Blessed George to faithfully respond to the grace of his Marian vocation and which led him to holiness.

Dear Confreres:

Today's Solemnity is very special to us: We renew our vows, mutually embrace one another with prayer, kindness, and care. Let us remember particularly our elderly and sick brethren, and those who departed from this world this year, passing to the House of the Father. As a religious community united by the bonds of faith, hope, and charity, let us follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. May our special Patroness, Mary, the Immaculately Conceived One, show us the way. Let us also recognize such signs in our community's historical events through which the Lord speaks to us.

Today I particularly commend all of you to God and to the intercession of the Saints, while asking you to pray for my intentions so that I'd be able to fulfill everything to which God calls me in the next six years.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

Andrzej Pakuła, MIC
General Superior