

**LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL  
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN  
MARY**

Rome, December 8, 2013  
Prot. n. 121/2013

Dear Confreres:

In His goodness, Our Merciful Lord has once again given us an opportunity to live out our titular feast - the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. in prayer and reflection. We turn our thoughts to Our Lord's Mother in the mystery of her holy conception, trusting that we shall draw from it the *strength and joy* of our vocation (cf. C 6). In a special way, we embrace with a fraternal prayer today our entire Congregation: our Confreres of all generations and countries, but particularly the elderly, the sick, those afflicted by suffering and those struggling to overcome various crises. We appreciate that - as a fraternal community - we are linked by the bonds of Christ's love and endowed through the Holy Spirit with the same charism. Today we renew our religious vows and once again entrust ourselves to Our Most Beloved God in our service to Christ and the Church, under the maternal guidance of Mary Immaculate.

This year's Feast is celebrated under particular circumstances which are noteworthy: October 24th marked the 340th Anniversary of the Episcopal approval of the first Marian community; we are living out the Year of the Marian Community; two weeks ago, Pope Francis issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, by which he set a direction for the entire Church for the near future. These circumstances serve as guidelines for my present reflections.

**1. The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God as the foundation of the Marian identity. From the mystery of salvation to the discovery of the Person.**

The 340th Anniversary of the founding of our first monastery in the Korabiew Forest inclines me to reflect on the beginnings of our Congregation. Thanks to the research of our Marian historians and theologians, today we know the basic idea that guided Blessed Father Founder and which he nurtured in taking the first steps towards the founding of a new religious community and which he called a *Divine vision imprinted* on his soul by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Fundatio domus recollectionis* - FDR 6, 9). This idea was the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, which found its expression both in the title and in the "immaculist" character of our Congregation. This fundamental idea of our Founder can be clearly seen from the first moments of his founding activity. What is essential is that the spiritual experience must have come to him long before he left *the Congregation of the Pious Schools, which was more dear to him than his life* (cf. FDR 2). For this reason, and in spite of *enormous uncertainties, scruples, doubts, anguishes, and fears*, while accepting the indult of departure, he made an act of *Oblation*, previously prepared in writing upon a suggestion *from the Divine Majesty* (cf. FDR 3). Father Founder remained faithful to this vision until the end of his days. In difficulties, which seemed insurmountable at times, that spiritual experience, which pertained to the founding of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Our Lord, gave him the strength to overcome all obstacles and to remain faithful to the Holy Spirit.

Pondering the life and the writings of our Father Founder today - as well as of other saintly Fathers of our community - we must emphasize that the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception is not abstract and does not apply to events, but refers to the person of Mary. On account of the work of salvation and the future merits of her Son, this mystery has been subjectivized in her. We find in Mary the privilege and the gift of being preserved from original sin, and we observe God's love anticipating all human deeds. We find in Mary the absolute primacy of God and His grace. However, in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, this grace finds such a distinctive reflection and embodiment that in Lourdes, Mary would say to Bernadette: *I am the Immaculate Conception*.

Therefore, by reflecting on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and growing in our Marian charism, we are always brought to discover the person of Mary, giving her our filial love, and entrusting ourselves to her with confidence. How very eloquent in this context becomes the confession that Blessed George recorded in his *Journal* a year and a half after making his religious profession in our community: "I thank You, Lord, for having given me such extraordinary feelings of love for the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the past, I found this prayer difficult. But now, how sweet it is to fall at her feet and to immerse myself in prayer! Overwhelmed by these feelings of incomparable sweetness, my soul swoons and my body is filled with wondrous, incomprehensible, and inexpressible tremors" (January 13, 1911). Do we not find in this entry Father Renovator's deep rooting in the charism of the Congregation he joined? To rephrase: Do we not notice in that sincere declaration of a new Marian the signs of the action of the Holy Spirit who leads Blessed George to fully live out the charism of the Institute he recently joined in order to save it from dying out? This process of discovering one's own

spiritual identity and then growing in the Holy Spirit - who first plants the charism in the heart of the Founder and then in his spiritual sons - is a task for the lifespan of the entire Congregation and its individual member. This is the path of spiritual maturity and a condition for producing *fruit that will remain* (Jn 15:16). On his path, *the Immaculate Virgin Mary*, the Mother of our Lord and our Mother, *shows us the way and assists us* (see C 6). Thus, let us pray, together with Blessed George, taking his words as our own: "Most Blessed Virgin Mary, I ask you to obtain from your Son the grace to love you more, to have ever more confidence in you, and to cherish your glorious protection more and more. Take our Congregation under your powerful protection, O Mother. Accept us, unworthy though we are - so destitute, such spiritual beggars - if for no other reason, than, at least, because of the name we bear. Grant that our lives be pure and untainted" (J., September 7, 1911).

## **2. The Religious Community and Evangelization. Continuation of the Year of the Marian Community in 2014.**

On October 24, 2013, the Holy Father Francis issued the Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii gaudium* regarding the joyful proclamation of the Gospel in the modern world. The Pope has provided certain guidelines there which are useful to encourage and to direct the entire Church towards a new stage of evangelization, filled with zeal and dynamism. As a religious community, as well as each one individually, we want to follow the Pope's teaching and to more fully and sacrificially commit to the Church's work of evangelization.

By attentively examining Pope Francis's words, we begin to realize at least two dimensions of evangelization. I would call the first of them the evangelization of one's own heart or the surrender of one's life to the action of the Gospel. The other aspect is the service to evangelization. In the context of our religious life, I would like to draw your particular attention to a passage which speaks of surrendering one's life to Christ and His Gospel. This passage is also important in the context of the noticeable crisis of the communal life of which I spoke in my letter from last year. At that time, I proclaimed the year 2013 as a Year of the Marian Community. I am grateful to the communities which have undertaken this task with faith and understanding both on the provincial/vicariate and local levels. These communities saw my encouragement as an opportunity not only for prayer and reflection, but primarily as a challenge to try to build a communal life which is more conscious and faithful to the vocation that God has granted to us. Many of us realized, probably not for the first time, that a community cannot be regarded as an area of shared works and common interests, even the noblest ones. A fraternal religious community is a value in itself as a living reflection and special realization of the communion of the Church immersed in the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, fraternal life in the community has a fundamental significance. It is a place of faith and sharing with the brethren from other *peoples and nations* united by the same charism. The fraternity is a basic and primary means of evangelization. Indeed, truly "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Evangelii gaudium* 7). Therefore, the task of a religious community is to create a place for such an encounter with Christ, because it is a community of life and it embraces all of life's dimensions, especially the experience of faith. Only afterwards, "Thanks solely to this encounter - or renewed encounter - with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?" (*EG*, 8). Thus, faith has the power to create communities; the experience of God inspires to us to abandon selfishness and the closed circle of one's own interests. These are fundamental directives for our religious life, especially because of the visible crisis.

### **In view of all of the above, I decided to proclaim the year 2014 - the Year of the Community, as well.**

I believe that prolonging in this way, our communal and individual reflection on the principles of vocation, would give us all an opportunity to more deeply examine our Marian reality so that we would not cover up our sins and drawbacks which are both communal and individual, but, assisted by the latest teaching of the Church and the influence of our patrimony which is always alive, we would courageously abandon the closed circle of our selfishness, thus overcoming the mentality of the modern world. For this very reason, in consultation with the General Government, I decided to dedicate the upcoming General Convention to the matters of the communal life. The Convention will take place in Lichen, Poland, from April 7-12, 2014. Its main topic shall be **The Marian Community of Life Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow**. The goal of this Convention - according to our rule of life - is to scrutinize the quality of our religious life in its various aspects. Although the foundation of the increasing crisis of the religious life varies from province to province and vicariate to vicariate, its manifestations are very similar. It seems to me that its essence is aptly described by the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: "Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal

freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor. These are three evils which fuel one another" (EG, 78). This is an unsettling picture, which, unfortunately, concerns us, as well. Therefore, we must courageously and truthfully examine our problems and challenges and to ask the Lord for the grace of conversion. By taking on the toil of transforming our lives, we should pray with the words of Blessed George: "Grant that our lives be pure and untainted." I trust that, as a result of the communal reflection and prayer, the General Convention will bear fruit in the form of surrendering our hearts to Christ and His Gospel, as well as marking out the path for our sacrificial commitment to evangelization.

Dear Confreres:

God speaks to us through various circumstances and events. May we heed His voice and may we not let our hearts become hardened (cf. Ps 95:8). The 340th Anniversary of our Congregation's founding, the current teaching of the Church expressed particularly in the Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, as well as the open recognition of the crisis of the communal life are signs of Divine Providence speaking to us. We wish to understand them properly as an opportunity for conversion and our response to God, speaking to us in the present moment. As we know from the history of our personal life of faith, a crisis is also an opportunity for growth. However, it must be well diagnosed first so that actions - appropriate for the problem and based on the faith and love of Christ - may be taken. I wholeheartedly encourage all of you to continue your personal and communal reflection on the problem and to pray for abundant fruit at the upcoming General Convention. I entrust the entire Congregation to the Most Blessed Virgin Immaculately Conceived and her powerful protection, as well as to the intercession of our Blessed Father Founder, Blessed Father Renovator and the Blessed Martyrs, Antony and George, along with all our Confreres who - having completed their earthly pilgrimage - now rejoice in the glory of heaven.

May Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you on the path of faith and love, in your toil for conversion and faithfulness to our charism under the unfailing protection of our Patroness.

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