

**LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 2014**

Prot. n. 186/2014

Dear Confreres:

In the current year, our titular feast of the Immaculate Conception falls at a special time. A few days ago, the Holy Father Francis initiated the *Year of Consecrated Life* in the Church, thus reminding us of the beauty, greatness, and meaning of our vocation both to ourselves and to the community of the Church. In a document entitled "Gospel, Prophecy, Hope," announcing the program for the Year, the Pope cites a very important sentence from the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "Consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it 'manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling' and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse" (VC 3). This vision of the consecrated life also includes our religious community together with our charism, mission, ministry, our personal and community advancement in becoming a sign of the Church-Bride striving for union with Christ. On this path, we are not alone: As sons of Mary, we always remember that she is at our side, "shows us the way and assists us. The mystery of her Immaculate Conception is and has been from the very beginning of the Congregation, a particular sign, strength, and joy of the Marian vocation" (C 6).

1. The Immaculately Conceived Mary as the Example of Perfect Consecration

In our faith understanding, consecration includes two essential elements: the original, free and gratuitous action of the God who in His love chooses a person that would henceforth belong to Him entirely, and the human response that expresses dedication to God in the fullness of faith and love. These two actions merge into one act of consecration, without prejudice to the freedom of any person (either divine or human), which becomes as such the glorification of God and the witness of mutual love. In the case of the man, this is not a one-time response, but it is extended over his entire lifespan. In His merciful providence, the unfathomable God also constantly adapts to the man and his choices; He supports him with His grace in the realization of the good and the quest for union with Him; He follows the man, never leaving him alone, as the latter digresses and becomes lost through sin.

We see the same dynamics of consecration in the person and life of Mary Immaculate. Mary's privilege of the sacred conception granted on account of the future merits of Christ is the sign of her being chosen by the Lord as well as the sign of the primacy of His initiative. It is also God's calling her in a personal act of love. In the context of Mary's consecration, we see that the mystery of her Immaculate Conception is not so much about freedom from sin, or even the fullness of grace and holiness – understood particularly in moral terms, but it is her relationship: deeply personal and intimate unity with God in the Holy Spirit. Chosen and fully loved from the first moment of her conception, Mary becomes a holy person in relation to the Divine Persons: she is the Daughter of God the Father, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and the Mother of the Son of God. Her unity with God and her constant focus on Him, which began in the sacred conception never ceased, but was steadily deepened and strengthened over her entire lifespan. That is why she was able to respond to God with love and the total entrustment of herself at the fullness of time (*kairos*) and to agree to the incarnation of the Word of God in her womb. At the hour of her Son's Passion and death, she remained faithful and trusting in the promise that for God, all things are possible, and she confidently remained in prayer amid the Church at the descent of the Holy Spirit. As our Mother and principal Patroness, she draws our eyes toward herself today as well, so that we may follow her example in living out our consecration, in accepting the grace of God – especially the difficult one, marked by the cross and suffering – and realizing it in our daily lives by devoting ourselves entirely to God: together with her and like her.

Mary's example of a consecrated life is very important today. It is sometimes easy to forget the primacy of God, His grace, and our duty to devote ourselves to Him in an act of love. There are more and more false prophets in the modern world who proclaim that we can arrange on our own a comfortable life for ourselves with sufficient entertainment, the means to relieve suffering and the lack of meaning in life. The example of Mary – the Mother of Jesus – who calls herself "blessed" or "happy" (Lk 1:48, the Greek phrase *makariosin me* literally means "they shall call me happy") reminds us that only God and obedience to His will are the source of our happiness and the meaning of life; that our consecration – just like the gift of the Immaculate Conception to Mary – is a task for our entire lives; by moving away from God – we die – we already begin to experience death. We must rediscover our belief that living out our religious consecration is really our way to happiness. And it is not only that distant, future happiness in heaven, but today, happiness here and now. We are not masters of our own lives and we cannot build the Kingdom of God without God and our total and unconditional surrender to Him. Faithful to our consecration, we call out to the Holy Spirit in the words of Bl. Stanislaus: "[Mary] was full of grace, full of

the Holy Spirit. O if this would be affirmed by your actions: that they proceed from the Holy Spirit, that they are made perfect by the Holy Spirit! Truly it is a great happiness to possess the Holy Spirit; – greater, to act according to the Holy Spirit; – greatest, to finish one’s own days in the Holy Spirit” (*Inspectio Cordis*, p. 285).

2. Consecration to the Mission in the Church The Year of the Marian Missions

As a religious community, we are consecrated to fulfill the mission of the Church. Although the witness of the consecrated life is the first and primary apostolate, yet – as a religious institute approved by the Church 341 years ago – we have a mission with its own ecclesial character that we call our charism. It is instilled in our Congregation and shall manifest itself on the one hand, in our spirituality, lifestyle, and pious practices; and on the other hand, in our apostolate. From the very beginning, we are an Institute devoted to apostolic works. Therefore, our fidelity to our consecration and our mission call for an analysis of our life and current activities in the light of our charism. In the last two years, I tried to pay greater attention to the importance of community life. This year’s General Convention was also devoted to this issue. I believe that it has produced fruits in the form of a greater sensitivity, possibly changes in lifestyle, or at least a reflection.

I would like to refer this year’s reflections related to our Marian charism to our apostolic activity in its particular aspect, namely: the Marian missions. Lately, a positive growth was noted of our understanding that the nature of the Church – including our Congregation – is missionary. Pope Francis recently reminded us of this in the following words: “The Church must step outside herself. To go where? To the outskirts of existence, whatever they may be, but she must step out. Jesus tells us: “Go into all the world! Go! Preach! Bear witness to the Gospel!” (cf. Mk 16:15). But what happens if we step outside ourselves? The same as can happen to anyone who comes out of the house and onto the street: an accident. But I tell you, I far prefer a Church that has had a few accidents, to a Church that has fallen sick from being closed” (Pope Francis, Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements, Saint Peter’s Square, Saturday, May 18, 2013 – from www.vatican.va)

In addition to Christ’s command to proclaim the Gospel to all, we must take on new challenges, especially wherever the need is greatest and a possibility is real, we the Marians should also be governed by a concern for the growth of our Congregation and its incorporation into the community of other local Churches. If we truly believe that in His mercy, God saved us from death using Bl. George Matulaitis, than it means that our charism is needed in the Church. Therefore, we must do everything possible to share it and to bring it to other cultures and nations.

An excellent example of this manner of thinking is found in the life of the Servant of God, Casimir Wyszyński. When the opportunity arose to transplant our community to Portugal, he faced considerable opposition, reserve, and a lack of understanding on the part of his own Congregation. In time, the religious appointed to carry out the task, among whom was also Fr. Jan Kanty, began to have doubts and did not want to leave the country. It was then that Fr. Casimir wrote to the Superior General: “It is therefore necessary to knock such scruples out of Fr. Kanty’s head. Let them already set out on their way for the love and honor of Mary the Mother of God, as long as everything seems to be to our benefit and the expansion of our Order. As for me, just to give an example, I am ready – after receiving the holy approval – to go immediately to Portugal, even if I do not have any money. I trust in God that, working for the honor of the Mother of God, I shan’t be lacking anything” (Servant of God C. Wyszyński, *Letter to the General Superior of July 6, 1752*). Another example of a courageous interpretation of the Church’s missionary needs was given to us by Bishop Česlau Sipovič who transplanted our Congregation to Brazil 50 years ago. It is worth remembering also because December 8 of this year marks the 100th Anniversary of his birth.

Thanks to God and the sensitivity of many of our brothers, we already run missions in several new countries and it seems to bear fruit. In Africa, we see a fairly rapid development of our two communities in Rwanda and in Cameroon. We undertake new causes in the service of the local Church and the Lord of the harvest sends candidates to the Congregation: this year we have 20 in formation (postulancy, novitiate, and seminary), including three deacons who were ordained to the priesthood. In Asia, the Congregation slowly takes root in the Philippines, where, contrary to the expectations of many, no rapid development of the mission occurred: presently, there is one seminarian. However, we must remember that we have been working there for only six years, and that from the beginning, one of the motives for transplanting the Congregation to that country was to provide formation for candidates from other Asian countries, where formation and pastoral ministry cannot be conducted freely due to the political situation. Thinking about the Congregation’s missionary activity, we shall not forget Kazakhstan – where the Polish Province founded and successfully runs a mission – as well as about Alaska, where one of our brethren from the American Province serves the faithful scattered over vast areas. As to future plans, I believe it possible to promptly create the conditions for Marian formation in India, where we have 19 candidates in the minor seminary; to take on in the near future a mission in Vietnam, and perhaps

even in another country of a similar cultural background. Some of these candidates would undergo formation in our religious houses in the Philippines. We plan for these initiatives in consultation with competent persons at the Holy See and we shall undertake them exactly as do so many other congregations that care for the transplanting of their charism, developing their religious communities, and proclaiming the Gospel, wherever Catholics are in a significant minority, while many other people may have never heard of Christ, the only Savior of the world.

In view of the above, I declare the year 2015, the Year of the Marian Missions.

Our already existing missions and the new initiatives that I mentioned above require our prayers and sacrifice. They also require the generosity of many, including those who support our missions financially. I wish to give my heartfelt thanks to all of you for even the slightest gesture of solidarity. Our Congregation – as we know – is one organism. The goods received by some out of the grace of God become the lot of the others – always within the community of the same charism and the same vocation. This is also a sign of fraternity, communal unity, and the participation of all in the new works of geographically remote, yet spiritually united communities.

Dear Confreres:

As we again celebrate our titular feast, let us turn our eyes to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord and our Mother, and let us see the inexpressible love of God toward man. This is a love that imparts itself wholly to man at an absolute risk. It is the love of God who, without prejudice to our freedom, awaits our response in tenderness. We have already given to the Lord our loving response, which was our religious consecration. Let us follow the path of that response in our daily lives, in our hardships and joys, our successes and failures. God is also present in the lack of understanding and the suffering of the cross just as He is in the celebration and the joy of the wedding at Cana. This is the same presence of His love for man, though expressed in a different way.

I am sending everyone my warm and festive greetings, but I particularly embrace with my prayer the elderly, the suffering, those who feel lonely, and those who are experiencing a crisis of vocation. It is particularly in such times that we must remember that "not as man sees does God see" (1 Sam 16:7) and that we are a fraternal community united by the bonds of Christ's love and endowed through the Holy Spirit by the same charism. Today, we renew our religious vows and once again entrust ourselves to the God who is beloved above all, in our service to Christ and the Church, under the maternal protection of Mary Immaculate.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!

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