

**CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
DECEMBER 8, 2006**

N. 230/2006

Dear Brothers:

1. On our Patronal Feast Day, let us turn our eyes towards the Immaculate Virgin Mary, our Mother and Patroness. We want to give her our filial love, and to ponder the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. The Solemnity is also an opportunity to give thanks to God for the gift of our vocation, and for the signs of His work in the life of each one of us, of our Communities, and of the entire Congregation. This year, we have received innumerable signs of God's blessing. However, I would like to recall just two of them.

2. Filled with great joy, we give thanks to God for the recognition of the miracle, through the intercession of our Father Founder, the Venerable Servant of God, Stanislaus Papczynski, by the *Congregation for the Causes of Saints*. This allows us to hope for his prompt beatification. I would like to take this opportunity to announce that in January 2007, in all Marian Communities throughout the world, we are going to begin a *Year of Prayer* for the Founder's prompt beatification, along with preparations for this event, regardless of the date on which it will actually take place. I will pass more detailed information on to you in a separate letter. Another joyful occurrence is the unification of our two American Provinces into one new one, under the title of the B.V.M., Mother of Mercy. We rejoice, not only from the fact of unification, which might have been just an administrative action, but for the gift of unity experienced by the Marians from the U.S. and Argentina during their first unified Chapter. For the first time in our history, the Chapter assembled delegates and members from all the Marian communities in those countries. Today, uniting in prayer with our confreres from the new Province, under the leadership of its Provincial Superior, Fr. Mark Garrow, let us implore God's abundant blessings on this new Province. For these and for all of the other signs of God's care bestowed on us this year throughout the Congregation, we can echo the *Magnificat* of Our Lady, "...for the Mighty One has done great things for [us] and holy is His name."

3. The present Feast is a good opportunity to ponder and to consider, the road on which Divine Providence guides us. I would like to direct your attention to some special circumstances, which the Lord foresaw for us at this stage in our history, and to invite you to consider, in the light of these circumstances, the manner in which we can respond to God, for these particular gifts of His love.

The Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M. as the Inspiration for our Lives

4. Let us first take a look at Mary, Immaculately Conceived. This unusual privilege of hers proclaims above all, the absolute primacy and tremendous power of God's grace, which is both greater than sin, and than any dark force. In the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, Mary is first and foremost, a witness to the presence of the living God. She never draws attention to herself; rather, her entire life is directed towards God and His works. Unlike Mary, we came into this world marked by the stain of original sin and later became burdened with our own, personal sins. However, we may also, like Mary, (albeit in a different way), experience the mighty and gratuitous grace of God. In the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, Mary was the first to experience the completely gratuitous grace of God. We likewise experience God's grace, in His merciful love for us sinners. God did not grant the privilege of the Immaculate Conception to Mary because of any merit of her own. He granted to us the gift of cleansing from sin and adoption as His own children in the Sacrament of Baptism. He also bestowed upon us the gift of our Religious and Marian vocation. What is more, He does not cease to show us His mercy, through His constant outpouring of the grace of forgiveness.

5. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. is a sign of hope for us. Many of us meet with various difficulties in the course of our work. Some Marians find themselves working in a hostile environment, or even worse, in an environment in which there is indifference to the Gospel, in which they suffer from resistance and a lack of understanding. It may at times provoke in us, a feeling of fruitlessness in our life of service. Aside from those outward problems, we may be affected by our own weaknesses and sins, leading to trials because of our apathy. In these and in similar situations, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception becomes a challenge for our continuous renewal in faith and hope. It is a demonstration of the fact that the reign of evil and sin is not total, and that the last word belongs to Christ, who conquers evil in its every manifestation. The sign of hope, which Mary represents for us, can help us in overcoming the temptation to apathy and doubt in the face of our inward and outward problems. It is the sign that continuously calls us to come to Christ, and to receive His love anew, the love that transforms our whole life.

A Need for Courageous Choices – the Appeal of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI

6. The greatest attention should be given to the first address directed by Pope Benedict XVI to Consecrated persons, through their General Superiors. It seems to me that his words are most amazingly in tune with our Feast Day. The Holy Father reminds us of the essence and foundation of a religious vocation. But not exclusively. In a very forceful manner, this man, to whom the Holy Spirit has entrusted the leadership of the Church today, warns the members of Religious Orders, about menacing dangers and he calls for a radical change of lifestyle.

7. I invite all of you to carefully read the entire address. Allow me, however, to quote today, just a few excerpts:

Consecrated men and women of today have the duty to be witnesses of the transfiguring presence of God in a world that is evermore disoriented and confused, a world where toning down has substituted sharp and distinctive colors.

The ability to look at our time with the gaze of faith means to be able to look at men and women, the world and history in the light of the Crucified and Risen Christ, the only One able to direct "men and women as they strive to make their way..."

In these last years, consecrated life has been re-examined with a more evangelical [...] spirit; but we cannot ignore that some concrete choices have not offered to the world the authentic and vivifying face of Christ. In fact, the secularized culture has penetrated the mind and heart of not a few consecrated persons, who understand it as a way to enter modernity and a modality of approach to the contemporary world. As a result, in addition to an undoubted thrust of generosity capable of witness and of total giving, consecrated life today knows the temptation of mediocrity, of middle-class ways and of a consumeristic mentality. In the Gospel, Jesus warned us that there are two ways: one is the narrow way that leads to life, the other is wide that leads to destruction (cf. Mt 7:13-14). The true alternative is, and will always be, the acceptance of the living God through obedient, faithful service, or the rejection of Him.

One priority condition to the following of Christ, therefore, is abnegation, detachment from all that is not Him. The Lord wants men and women who are free, not bound, able to give up everything to follow Him and to find in Him alone their very all.

Courageous choices must be made, both at the personal and communal levels, which give a new discipline to the life of consecrated persons and bring them to rediscover the all-encompassing dimension of the sequela Christi.

8. Don't you think that the words of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI speak about our Marian present-day reality? I have no doubt that dedication to God and faithfulness dominates our lives. However, it would be a manifestation of bad will or blindness, if we overlook some of the disturbing attitudes and habits which the Holy Father mentions in his address. It seems as if the Pope invokes the image of two paths: the narrow one leading to life; and the wide one leading to perdition, to make us aware of the fact that no one, not even a Religious, has a guarantee of salvation, unless he will follow Christ in a radical manner in accord with his vows. *Belonging to the Lord* means to be on fire with His incandescent love, to be transformed into the splendor of His beauty – this is the only alternative for every Religious.

Some Special Gifts of our Merciful God to Assist our Renewal

9. In reflecting on what should become the Congregation's priorities during the present General Government's term of office, one's attention may be drawn to, (besides the Address of the Holy Father), an array of occurrences, that have an important meaning for our lives. They are: 1) The 250th Anniversary of the death of the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszynski. Through his love for Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski, the initiation of his beatification process and the radical implementing in his life of all the instructions left for the Marians by their Founder, Fr. Casimir contributed to the growth of the Congregation and to its missionary expansion, at a time when the Community was going through a serious crisis; 2) The expected beatification of our Founder, Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski, which has been anxiously awaited for over 300 years. The preliminary preparations for this historical event have shown that the person of our Founder and his writings are fairly poorly known within the Congregation; 3) The 100th Anniversary of the renewal of our Congregation by Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. Thanks to this reform, almost 100 years ago, not only has the work of Fr. Papczynski been saved, but our Community has also adapted to new conditions and has been enriched with new charismatic elements, thus gaining a new impulse for growth.

10. Each of these events, considered separately, bears an important message for us. The fact that their celebrations fall in close proximity to one another, brings additional significance. I believe these events to be gifts of the Merciful God for us today, and that they are accompanied by the promise of an exceptional grace for the renewal of each one of us, and of the entire Congregation. I further believe that God will

keep His promise, not because of our merits, but for the sake of His love for us. This love once inspired Fr. Stanislaus to found our Congregation. The very same love inspired Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz to miraculously save and renew our religious family. Today, this love uses His Holiness, Benedict XVI, to awaken our consciences, in order to help us achieve conversion and the renewal of the grace of our religious vocation. I believe that today, this love wishes to renew each one of us and our entire community, in every aspect of its life and apostolate.

Priority Tasks of the Congregation

11. In the light of all these special circumstances and opportunities for grace facing our Congregation at this time, I sense that this is a special *kairos* moment given us by God. As we read the signs of the times in which we are living, I believe this is a holy moment in our Congregation's history, filled with meaning, new opportunities and choices. The words of our Holy Father referred to above and the examples of Fr. Founder, Fr. Renovator and Fr. Casimir, can inspire us to a deeper conversion and to decisive action.

In my opinion, the most important task that each Marian, and that the entire community face today, is the necessity of giving a whole-hearted response to the Holy Father's appeal and to the gifts of grace which God showers on us, in this time of our history. Our response refers to our conversion, a renewed look at what the essence of our Religious vocation is, and reading and fulfilling the charism of Fr. Founder and Fr. Renovator. Our model should be Mary, in the scene of her Visitation. We want to identify specific priorities for the whole Congregation and for each confrere, and to respond to these priorities following the example of Our Lady. Every single confrere's response will have both a very personal as well as a communal dimension, because that is the character of the religious life. The following may be of help towards this:

1. *The adaptation of a proper spiritual attitude.* Each Marian is invited to awaken in himself a desire, for the fullest possible experience of graces which the Lord wishes to bestow on each of us, and on the whole Community, because of the beatification of Father Founder and the 100th anniversary of the renewal of our Congregation. May this desire be accompanied by a readiness to give one's life to God, as well as to place our faith and trust in the fact that, in His great mercy, God can accomplish His plan, despite our weaknesses and sins. All of the confreres are invited to embrace this attitude of trust, particularly those who feel weak, enslaved by sin, or are going through a crisis of vocation; as well as those who deem themselves "perfect", while in fact, they may be unresponsive to the actions of the living God in their lives.
2. *Cooperation with the grace of God, through making concrete decisions and deeds.* God's exceptional gifts demand a whole-hearted response. Each Marian and each community is invited to make "courageous choices ... which give new discipline" (P. Benedict XVI) to the life of every member and the entire Congregation. It is a matter of imitating Christ more fully, through faithfulness to our vows and detachment from every sin and from everything that does not lead to Christ. An extensive review of our lives can unmask the habits of a lay lifestyle and mentality, which turn the religious life into a caricature and decrease the power of its witness. Also, the new discipline has to be based upon a perfect fidelity to prayer, to the formal and ascetic practices such as: the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Liturgy of the Hours, our daily meditation, daily particular and general examination of conscience, making prudential use of the internet, good use of our time and the practice of silence. Additionally, we should consider abstinence from hard liquor and from tobacco according to the desire of our Founder.
3. *Thoroughly getting to know the person and path of faith of our Founder, in order to establish a personal spiritual unity with him.* By studying his founding charism that he left to us, his spiritual sons, we can discover Fr. Stanislaus in ourselves and accept his charism as our own. When it is reflected in each Marian, the founding charism of our Founder, takes on a specific "color." By discovering and reviving the charism in ourselves, our Marian and religious identity will be strengthened and we will also deepen our sense of belonging to the community. This in turn, will become a source of joy in our vocations and a driving force for evangelization. A similar reflection, as proposed here regarding the person of our Founder and his "founding charism," ought to be made in regards to the person of our Renovator and his "renewing charism."

Priority Tasks for the General Government

12. The most important task for the General Government is to help all the confreres and Congregation's Communities, to fruitfully accept the gift of renewal in every aspect of our lives. The following ought to be implemented towards this end:

1. Initiation and coordination of the spiritual and organizational preparations for the Beatification of Father Founder and the 100th Anniversary of the renovation of our Congregation. Towards this goal, we plan to use primarily, all of the formative means prescribed by our Constitutions: days

of recollection, retreats, renewals, as well as symposia, appropriate publications, etc. In the fulfilling of this goal, the General Government shall have recourse to the assistance of individuals and teams already appointed, in close cooperation with the Provincial and Vicariate Superiors.

2. Creating a synthesis of the Marian charism, (Founder, Renovator), along with indicating its essential elements and its practical implications for our lives. Undertaking an analysis in order to discover the extent to which every community and each individual member, stays faithful to our charism: to find the elements that have been lost, weakened, or possibly never noticed. I am thinking here primarily about promoting the Immaculate Conception and praying for the deceased, which are two of the fundamental goals among the many goals facing the Marians, and which are not sufficiently present in our life and work today. The fruits of this study shall be presented in a book entitled, *The Charism of the Congregation of Marian Fathers and its Significance for the Modern World*. This book shall serve as an *instrumentum laboris* for the next General Chapter (Charism Commission).
3. Defining the trends of the Congregation's growth and its achievements. Verification of ongoing apostolic works and missions and their strategies. Abandoning works and missions that have ceased to be up-to-date, in order to undertake new ones, which better respond to the needs of the Church and the spirit of the Congregation. The implantation of our Congregation's roots in Asia (India, the Philippines) as a token of our gratitude for the expected beatification of our Fr. Founder and for the 100th Anniversary of our renovation. Achieve a greater involvement of each and every community in the carrying out our missionary efforts.
4. Care for learning, popularizing, and preserving our Marian Heritage. Making basic sources which speak of our history, charism, and spirituality available in all of the languages used in the Congregation (Institute of History and Spirituality). Defining the principles regarding the function and profile of the Central Library of our Congregation in Rome, as well as preparing its electronic catalogue. Putting in order and cataloguing the Congregation's General Archives in an electronic format.
5. Conducting the restructuring of the Congregation. This primarily refers to the Provinces with low membership. The organizational structures are meant to be a help, not a burden that unproductively swallows up time and energy, while making further growth difficult. Also, defining the kind of help each Province may need (personnel, administrative, financial) and what help it can give to others. A fraternal sharing with poorer communities which emphasizes solidarity.

A revision of the methods of administration of the material goods (regarding competence, diligence, and honesty), in order to use our goods more justly and fruitfully. This regards Provinces, Vicariates, and single Religious Houses.

13. These presented priorities are the fruits of consultations, which were conducted in Balsamao on October 25, 2005, with the Superiors of Provinces, Vicariates and our Missions, as well as the deliberations of the General Government. I thank everyone for their creative input. I am fully aware that the realization of those priorities will be possible only with the assistance of every confrere, especially the Major Superiors. The wonderful cooperation we have experienced up till now, sets the foundation for good work in the future. I entrust to Our Blessed Mother, to Father Founder, and to Father Renovator, the fulfillment of our priorities.

Closing

14. Dear Brothers, today we renew our religious vows! I cordially invite you to live out this act, not only as a pious and beautiful tradition, but primarily as our whole-hearted response to God for His love for us. Let us renew our vows with a new readiness to follow the pure, poor, and obedient Christ, choosing His logic, which is *the logic of the cross*. May our act today, of the renewal of our religious profession, express in a particular way, our acceptance of God's plan of salvation in the life of each one of us, and in our Marian community. May it signify our readiness to enact the religious paradox, mentioned in the above quote from the Holy Father's Address, so that we will know how to *give up* everything, in order to *re-discover* everything, in Christ.

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