

**Circular of the General Superior
for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Closing the Year of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of the Founding
Father
and Opening the Year of the Jubilee, the Centennial Anniversary of the
Renovation
and Reform of the Marian Congregation
7-8 December 2008**

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Let's allow the Holy Spirit to reform us!

Dear Brothers:

1. Today, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when we unite in a communion of hearts and minds, I extend my greetings to each and every one of you, starting from the oldest confreres and ending with those who for the first time celebrate the Patronal Feast in our Community. I am grateful for your faithful abiding in Jesus, which is the greatest treasure of the Congregation, and for your daily duties, which is frequently humble and inconspicuous.
2. The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a miracle of the Holy Trinity: a sign of the total love of God the Father; the perfect expression of the redemption performed by Jesus Christ; a life completely open to the Holy Spirit. Contemplating this mystery, we experience an ever deeper admiration for our Marian vocation. This admiration breeds, in turn, inexpressible confidence, joy, thankfulness to God, and makes us desire nothing more, but that He would do in each of us what he did in Mary: *to make us holy and blameless in his sight* (Ephesians 1:4), to proclaim to the world the merciful love of God which is mightier than any evil, which makes everything new. At the same time, we are saddened by our sin which leads to death and blemishes the Church. Yet, in the Immaculate Conception we rediscover the beauty of truth and love, and we find the path to God. Thus, today let us call from the depth of our hearts: *Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salut et protectio*.
3. Today we are closing the Year of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of our Founding Father. The time has come to make a first recapitulation. Our particular greetings go to our confreres in the Philippines who carry the heaviest burden — the creation of a new mission as a sign of our thankfulness for the Beatification. The very first months proved that the mission requires a lot of sacrifice, and trust in God in the face of numerous uncertainties, but it also brings hope and opens new horizons for us. Let us keep the missionaries who work there and those who are getting ready for the mission in our prayers and care. In a separate letter, I will inform the confreres about our plans in the Philippines and the participation of the Marian communities and institutions in the realization of this work.
4. We have set a lot of our hopes on the Beatification. Maybe we have believed that it will solve all the problems of the Congregation, overcome the crises, cause an immediate growth in our religious community, and in particular, increase the number of new vocations. All this has not taken place. We are coming to realize that something more important is at stake, not an apparent change or false pride that we are becoming more numerous, that we are getting involved in more spectacular apostolic works. God wants to compel us to a profound change and a return to the sources, that is, to following Jesus Christ and living out the original charism. The Beatification of Father Papczynski is a gift for the Congregation to open a new page in our history. Is such a conviction an illusion, or a sign of wishful thinking? Or perhaps through the Beatification of the Founder, God rather wants to draw our attention to something that the future of our Congregation depends on?
5. We have been trying to answer this question throughout the entire year during the retreats, academic sessions and readings of the Founder's texts. To bring together our experience and once more make us think about the issue, I have asked all of the confreres to write a testimony concerning the Founder and his Beatification. During the General Convention, which is taking place during these days in Rome, we would like to recognize a particular *kairos*, which the Beatification of the Founder has been for us, and to formulate precise suggestions as to how to respond to this *kairos*. Even the first voices which have come seem to confirm that through the Beatification, God is inviting us to return to the charism, that is spreading the cult of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, caring for the deceased and broadly understood evangelization understood in a broad sense. All seems to prove that recognizing this particular sign of the times would have an impact on our future.
6. Today we are opening the Year of the Jubilee, the Centennial Anniversary of the Renovation and Reform of our Congregation carried out by Blessed George Matulaitis. The miraculous deliverance of our

Congregation from death a hundred years ago and its reform seems to have been the strongest experience of God's mercy in our history, an important confirmation that God cares for us, that our charism is valuable for the Church. After a century, we want to return to these events to give thanks to the Lord for the gift of His Mercy. Moreover, we want to look back on the hundred years to thank God for all that has been born out of the spirit and has borne good fruit, and to apologize for our sins which have damaged us and our community. Above all, we want to ask God today to breathe His Spirit into each of us and into the entire Congregation so that transformed with His might, we could fulfill our vocation in the Church and the world. For we are not only to talk about our charism, but to live it as well.

7. The Centennial Anniversary of the Reform of the Congregation is also an opportunity to put into perspective and to review which elements of the reform still enrich and interpret our charism and the style of life and work, and which were only a consequence of the historic necessity of adjusting the Congregation to living in conspiracy and which nowadays have lost their validity. To do this, in the Year of the Jubilee, we want to undertake a critical and unbiased historic and theological study (the Symposium in Lichen). It turns out that not only have we hardly known Father Papczynski and his writings, but we also do not know enough about the circumstances of the renovation and the works of Blessed George on the character and spirit of the Congregation (including the First Principles and the First Instructions) which, as the Blessed admits, were supposed to complement the Constitutions which he had prepared. Thus, I invite you in this Year of the Jubilee to an everyday, even short reading of the works by Blessed George before one of the common meals.

8. The first generations of Marian in the renovated Congregation called Blessed George a reformer. Such a name seems more adequate than renovator. In the tradition of the Church, two processes have been called a reform. Nowadays, it most often denotes changes in the external shape of the institutions of the Church. That was exactly the case with our Congregation at the beginning of the 20th century. It is worth mentioning, though, that until the 11th century, the word reform referred exclusively to a man who was to be formed in the image of Jesus Christ. This can be performed only by the Holy Spirit. Each work of God and true reform in the Church comes from the Holy Spirit and starts with the transformation of the heart and mind (*metanoia*), that is, the conversion of man. Although the word *reform* may bring negative associations today, nevertheless, through the first eleven centuries, it expressed the essence of conversion in the Church. Blessed George prayed in this way: *Just light, oh Lord, our hearts with the flame of Your love. Grant us your Holy Spirit so that, having truly renounced everything, we may devote ourselves completely to Your glory and Your Church.* God heard his calling and made him participate in the reformation work of the Spirit.

9. So today, when we start the Jubilee Year of the Renovation and Reform of the Congregation, I am turning with a request to myself and to each and every one of you: *Let's allow the Holy Spirit to reform us!* It is from the Holy Spirit that the gift of conversion originates. This is the Holy Spirit who has the power to make us like Christ and to enlighten the Marian charism within us. This is the grace of the Holy Spirit which enables us to receive a brother in love, a difficult one in particular, and to show him mercy in forgiveness. The drama of the human heart lies in the fact that not only does it refuse to consider wrongly putting one's hope in one's capabilities and leading a life according to one's own plan, but it also does not sense the good which Jesus Christ may offer to it. It is possible to live in the Congregation and to be far from God. Those who believe that religious vows and consecration assure salvation once and for all are mistaken. The same goes for those who, busy with their own successes, live as if they did not need God. It is possible to live in a congregation and to have no spiritual life. Isn't it confirmed by the fact that so often we excuse ourselves from common and individual prayer, from meditation, listening to the word of God, examination of conscience, keeping silence? While prayer, the main source of our spiritual life, should be the last thing we give up. Isn't our spiritual life replaced quite frequently by a social-entertainment network through the internet? Isn't our life in the Holy Spirit replaced by excessive activism? One can even lead an honest life based on one's own strength, but no one will be able to follow Jesus Christ without the power of the Holy Spirit. One can work nicely, by human measure, but unless his works are born of the Holy Spirit, they will not have any influence on the salvation of others.

10. One can also live in the Congregation and lead a worldly life. Father Founder expresses it succinctly: *What will you achieve when on the outside you will pretend to be a religious while inside you will be worse than the worst man of this world* (IC, 146r). According to Blessed Father Stanislaus the spiritual condition of a person who chose a religious path and does not follow it is the most tragic and pitiable; it is even worse than that of people wandering through the devious paths of the world.

11. *Allow the Holy Spirit to reform you.* I extend this request also to those who have gotten trapped in various sins which destroy their joy and enthusiasm in following Jesus. I extend this appeal to those who experience a crisis of faith and may even consider leaving the Congregation and set their life along their own paths. The vows, once professed, should be kept. It is an illusion to believe that our service for the Church will be more fruitful somewhere else. The moments of difficulties, intense temptations or crises, the periods of depression and infidelities, either in our private or communal life, should be viewed as purifications given by God alone, demanding our deeper reliance on Him. In times of crisis we cannot

persist in our grey flimsiness, in our mediocrity. We will either take a step closer to God or we will die. There is no third option during a time of crisis.

12. Each community has received a program of the celebrations for the Year of the Jubilee which has been prepared by Fr. Janusz Kumala in cooperation with the General Council. I am asking all the confreres to get acquainted with it and to contribute to its realization faithfully and willingly. Most of all, I encourage you, and I request that our Jubilee be a time of intensive prayer to the Holy Spirit and for submission to its work. A hundred years ago, God not only saved our Congregation from death, but with enormous power breathed His Spirit on it. Let's ask the Holy Spirit today to ignite in us *the flame of His love* again. The same *flame* which was ignited among the Apostles gathered in the Cenacle and which gave rise to the Church; the *flame* which was ignited in the heart of Father Stanislaus and gave rise to our Religious Community; the *flame* which took over Father George and impelled him to renovate and to reform our Congregation.

13. I entrust each one of you and the entire Congregation for this time of Jubilee to the mercy of God the Father, the healing power of Jesus Christ and the rejuvenating flame of the Holy Spirit. I beg Mary in her Immaculate Conception to intercede for us, her spiritual sons.

Jan M. Rokosz, M.I.C
General Superior