

**CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY 2017**

Rome, December 8th, 2017
Prot. N. 216/2017

Dear Brethren,

As we celebrate our titular Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, we recall that this year was marked by events of great importance, both for the entire Congregation and for its individual Provinces and Vicariates. First of all, in February, we held the 57th General Chapter, during which we not only elected the General Government, but also made changes to our Constitutions and Directory. During the Chapter, we were granted an audience with Pope Francis, and his speech on this occasion should provide us with spiritual inspiration in the future. Subsequently, the Provincial Chapters were held, which elected the Provincial Governments for the next six years. At the start of the new term in office, we commend to the care of Our Immaculate Lady and of our St. Stanislaus all the newly elected officials as well as all of our brethren.

1. The pending release of the revised Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation

The changes to our by-laws accepted by the General Chapter primarily affect their first part, entitled until now, "Nature of the Congregation" and now called "Patrimony and Spirituality of the Congregation." Other changes are essentially the adaptation of a number of our provisions to the Code of Canon Law and to the new reading of the first chapter, now entitled "Nature, Purpose, Spirituality and Character." In accordance with the intentions of the Capitular Fathers and Brothers, the new version of this chapter of our Constitutions presents an interpretation which is up-to-date and better suited to our self-awareness of the *identitas* of our religious community. It is also a response to the teaching of the Church: (...) *there is a pressing need today for every Institute to return to the Rule, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church(Vita Consecrata, 37)*. The General Chapter responded to this appeal and the fruits of its work will become a signpost for the entire Congregation in the coming years. Recently – only at the end of November – we have received the decree of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life approving the changes in the Constitutions. The Congregation for Religious has also introduced some adjustments of a legal nature. As soon as the Polish, English and Portuguese texts of the Constitutions are promulgated, I will send an appropriate circular letter, in which I will explain in detail both the amendments adopted by the General Chapter and those indicated by the Congregation for Religious. The time to introduce the new by-laws into practice will depend upon the completion of their translation into other languages. These translations must also be submitted to the Congregation for Religious. The text of the Constitutions was approved in Polish. I hope for the prompt promulgation of our by-laws.

2. The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the essence of our Congregation's charism

One of the new issues considered by the General Chapter was the charism of our Congregation. Thus far, this concept did not exist in our law, even though the Church's teaching on consecrated life has suggested that religious institutes should define their charism. This year's General Chapter decided to define the charism of our Congregation in article 2 with the title: *The essence of the charism* at the very beginning of the Constitutions (article 1 speaks of *The nature and place of the Congregation in the Church*). This new article reads as follows: *The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the essence of our Congregation's charism and has always been since its inception the particular sign, strength and joy of the Marian vocation. The identity and mission of our Congregation flow out from this mystery*. In fact, the main sentence in this article is, to a large extent, taken directly from article 6 entitled, *Marian character* of our Constitutions, approved in 1986. However, using the same sentence with the purpose of describing our charism changes the meaning and essence of the wording. Now it indicates that if the essence of the charism is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord, then the rest flows out of it, that is, our mission and identity, or everything that Chapter I calls the *nature, purpose, spirituality and character* of the Congregation. This approach does not appear to be a total novelty, although our Congregation's self-reflection has not always interpreted the *identitas* in this manner. From the very beginning, the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception was a never-contested point of reference, which found its expression in the unchanged title of our Congregation (Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception); in the act of the *Oblatio*; in the

description of the original vision of our religious community, which was imprinted on the soul of the Founder (cf. *FDR* 7, 9), in the attitude and spirituality of our Blessed Fathers, including the written works and legacy of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz (cf. *Constitution* of 1930, art. 14: *The principal Patroness of the Congregation is the Immaculately Conceived Blessed Virgin Mary. [...] The main solemnity of the Congregation shall be the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*) However, in recent years, we have observed a gradual growth of spiritual and theological reflection on the identity of our Institute due to the inspiration of the Church's teaching on religious life, as a result of the beatification of our Fathers and the canonization of the Founder (we can safely speak here of God's extraordinary intervention in the history of our Congregation). We began to perceive the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord not only as Mary's privilege of being conceived without original sin and her fullness of grace, but also as the manner of the actions of the Holy Spirit, which also concerns our lives, since we are spiritual sons of Mary, marked spiritually by the mystery of her holy conception. And for this reason, we see the essence of our charism in the mystery of her conception: our rapport with the Most Holy Trinity and her work in the history of our salvation, our response to the gratuitous and anticipatory actions of God, our mission in the service *for Christ and the Church*, and finally our manner of living by faith, hope and charity. I hope that the new wording of the Constitutions regarding the charism of the Congregation will bring about a new and necessary reflection on our *identitas* and its vital expression in our spiritual life, prayer, asceticism, pastoral ministry, work, etc., in other words, in everything that constitutes our daily life.

3. Recognizing December 11, 1670 as the date of our Congregation's inception

The General Chapter, guided by *the earliest convictions about the inception of our religious institute, and aware that determining the moment of the beginnings of any religious community has an effect on its consciousness and identity*, adopted a solemn declaration stating the following: the profession of the *Oblatio* by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, which took place in Krakow on December 11, 1670, is to be considered and presented as the beginning of the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The same declaration contains also other dates which it describes as *important for the founding and the renovation of the Congregation*: a. September 8, 1671, in the chapel of the Karski in Lubocza, Fr. Papczyński put on the white habit to honor the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; b. On October 24, 1673, Bishop Stanislaus Jacek Świącicki approved the first house of the Congregation in the Korabiew Forest; c. On April 21, 1679, Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski of Poznan erected the Marian Order with simple vows of diocesan right; d. On November 24, 1699, a rescript of the Holy See was issued, approving the Marians as an Order of pontifical right with solemn vows; e. On August 29, 1909, Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz professed his first vows, which is considered as the date of the Renovation of the Congregation.

The Declaration, quoted here almost entirely due to its significance, was promulgated with an *Explanation* in the *Documenta Capitula Generalis Congregationis CC. Marianorum A. D. 2017 Romae celebratum*. This is a collection of all the legal documents endorsed by the last General Chapter, with the exception of the Constitutions and the Directory. The resolutions were released this year in book form in four languages: English, French, Polish and Portuguese. It is accompanied by *The Address of the General Superior to Pope Francis during a private audience* and the *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants of the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Marian Clerics of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary I*, both in Italian. I encourage you to read all the documents.

The reasoning for the *Declaration* that defines the inception of our Congregation as December 11, 1670, does not contain any new matters that would not have been present in the past. It is rather an expression of the discovery of many, thus far unknown historical sources. In this way, the *Declaration* is more a continuation of the early traditions than a new change. According to historical studies, published by *Ephemerides Marianorum* pp. 369-391, No. 1 (2012), the date of the founding of the Congregation was given differently. The year 1673, clearly given as the date of the inception, which had been thus far accepted and valid for the last decades, refers to the approval of the first Marian monastery. However, earlier – both before and after the renewal conducted by Blessed George – the date of December 11, 1670 was given, connected with the profession of the *Oblatio*. The reasoning contained in the *Declaration* of the last General Chapter, speaking more theologically than historically, points to two documents: *Vita Fundatoris* (The Life of the Founder) by Leporini from 1705 and a brief of Pope Innocent XII from 1786. However, we know that in the early days of the renewed Congregation, there was a conviction that the profession of the *Oblatio* by the Founder signified the inception of the Congregation. This is supported, among other documents, by the *Annuario Pontificio*, the yearbook of the Holy See, which for a certain period of time (1936-1941) provided the date of the Congregation's inception as 1670. In the opinion of the Capitular Fathers and Brothers, who have approved the *Declaration* and its *Explanation*, the date of the inception of our religious community is not subject to legal regulations. It is a matter of tradition of the given religious order and its recognition of a particular event defining the origin of the Order with which this religious community identifies itself best (the first vows of the Founder, the investiture with the habit, the formation of the community, the episcopal or papal approval, and others). The Chapter members were convinced that *The Declaration reinstates the conviction which existed in the Congregation from the beginning that the founding act was done by the Oblatio of St. Stanislaus. This is, therefore, the reinstallation of the original self-consciousness of the Congregation, not making it anew. The confirmation by Bp. Świącicki, issued on October 24, 1673, is an act of approval*

(aprobatio) of the Congregation, rather than its founding (fundatio), and should be presented as such. Also, the Declaration brings about a new perspective of celebrating the forthcoming Jubilee of the 350th Anniversary of the Founding of our Congregation. Thus, the main celebrations will be held in 2020. The program of the celebrations will be prepared by the specially appointed Jubilee Committee and will be announced in due course. Likewise, the superiors of the individual provinces and vicariates shall also appoint appropriate committees. The celebration of this jubilee may become our chance for spiritual renewal.

Dear Brethren:

Today's feast has a special meaning for us: we renew our vows and mutually embrace each other with prayer, kindness, and care. Let us especially remember our elderly and sick confreres, as well as those who passed away from this world this year, going to the House of the Father. Let us support with our prayer, with a nice word, and a kindly deed all those who feel lonely or who are experiencing a vocational crisis. As a religious community, united by the bonds of faith, hope and love, let us follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, and may our special Patroness, Mary, Immaculately Conceived, show us the way. May the events of this year, especially the decisions of the General Chapter, encourage us to discern the signs through which God speaks to us.

Today, in a special way, I entrust all of you to God and to the intercession of the saints, especially St. Stanislaus, our Founder and Blessed George, our Renovator. Please pray for me so that in the next six years I may fulfill the tasks for which you have called me.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio !

Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, MIC
Superior General