

**Message of the Holy Father, John Paul II, to the Marians
during the Special Audience for the Members of the general chapter
July 1, 1999**

Dearest Brothers!

1. I am very happy to hold out a cordial welcome to all of you, who are taking part in the General Chapter of the Marian fathers, and I thank the Superior General for the words with which he addressed me in your name.

I send a special greeting to the Marian fathers called to carry out the ministry of bishop: to Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius (Kaunas), to Juozas Žemaitis (Vilkaviškis), To Jan Olszański (Kamieniec), to Jan Pawel Lenga (Karaganda) and to all your Marian Confreres, in whatever part of the world they find themselves, especially to the sick and to the suffering.

In the life of a Congregation, the General Chapter constitutes an intense occasion of brotherly communion, in which, according to St. Basil: "The energy of the Spirit which is in one passes simultaneously to all." This encounter of ours took place earlier, in a certain sense, by my visit last June 8 to the Marian Shrine of Lichen. During the few moments that I was able to spend with your Confreres, I noticed the presence of young and old together and I knew that there were Fathers coming from diverse parts of the world. It was as edifying image of brotherly communion. The commitment to consolidate and deepen this communion was one of the objectives that your Congregation set for itself for the six-year term that is drawing to an end.

Continue, dearest ones, in that path! Let it be your constant care to liven up and deepen brotherly life in the Provinces, the Vice-Province, in the Vicariates, and in each of the Houses. Hold in front of you the example of the first Christians, who were assiduous in accepting the teaching of the Apostles, in common prayer, in participating in the Eucharist, in the sharing of the goods of nature and grace (cf. *Vita consecrata*, 45).

2. We have just celebrated the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Jesus called Peter to be the foundation of the Church, but at the same time He allowed that he, by experiencing his own brokenness, would understand how much more powerful than human weaknesses is the grace of God. Paul, too, was transformed on the Damascus road from a persecutor of Christians to an apostle of the nations.

How could one not think that, along with Jesus, the apostle Peter encountered the Blessed virgin? There was a day, above all, that Peter and the apostles lived through intensely together with Mary: the day of Pentecost, when the Church was born. Without a doubt the pouring out of the gifts of the Spirit at that time filled the heart of Mary, the Mother of Christ, constituting her also the Mother of the Church.

Dear Marian Fathers, it is very significant that your Congregation, the first founded by a Pole, have an outstandingly Marian character, being bound to Mary Immaculate. In the 1600's, when the crisis of the then powerful Polish State began to emerge, Bl. Stanislaus Papczyński looked for a support in the Immaculate. There's the direction he left you: in every difficulty have recourse to the Immaculate's help. In this he did not but accept the invitation of Jesus Himself who from the Cross pointed Mary out as mother to John the apostle.

Great be in you always the trust in Mary most Holy, as Bl. Stanislaus taught you by his example! Have recourse to her with fervor, especially when it's a matter of facing grave dangers or moments of crisis.

3. The Refounder of your Congregation, Archbishop George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, whom I had the joy to proclaim Blessed twelve years ago, had perfectly understood the deep bond that unites the Mother of Jesus to the Church. Among the twelve "Principles of firmness" of the renewed Congregation, he set in first place the recommendation to "maintain a strong and inflexible bond with the Church and its Head, the Bishop of Rome, and with all the Catholic hierarchy [...] through the Church and in the Church to belong to God and to our Lord, Jesus Christ, in order that he be the solid center of our life" (*The Guiding Idea and the Spirit of the Congregation*, 55).

He loved the Church and he left you this love as an inheritance. During his work of renovating the Congregation of Marians, he wrote in his spiritual diary: "Grant, O Lord, that we may be ruled by this one great thought: to work, to toil, and to suffer for the Church; that the Church's sufferings, trials, and wounds may become the sufferings and wounds of our own hearts" (*Journal*, October 27, 1910).

4. Thrusting in the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, prepare yourselves to participate generously in the new evangelization, that demands from those consecrated a full awareness of the theological sense of the challenges of our time (cf. *Vita consecrata*, 81). In an attitude of faithful agreement with the Magisterium of the Church, continue to cultivate your multiple activities in Poland, in other European countries, in both Americas, and in Australia. I encourage you to persevere and I bless the schools, the publishing houses, the parishes, the retreat houses, the shrines, the works of mercy, the ministry to emigrants, and the other charitable institutions of which you are in charge.

I am thinking in particular of the work of your Religious Family in Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, and I express my pleasure to you for all that you do in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, as well as for your five-year's work in Estonia. Many of your confreres paid with their life or with years in the gulags for their dedication to the cause of the Gospel. The commitment to continue and to consolidate this your difficult but important presence ought to constitute today one of your apostolic priorities.

May the Lord render fertile with spiritual fruit particularly your work in Africa, especially in tormented Rwanda, and, in the near future, in Cameroon, as well as in other frontier areas like Alaska, or other regions lacking in clergy. To go to the Churches dramatically bereft of priests, to be present in the difficult situations in various places of the earth: all that fully corresponds to your charism. It was your Blessed Refounder who traced for you precisely this path: you are to go "there where the Church finds itself in greater difficulty [...], where Christ is less known or even hated" (*The Guiding Idea*, 18).

5. Dear Marian Fathers, your commitment in the apostolate of the Divine Mercy and your pastoral efforts be ever accompanied by the witness of service to the poor: "Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life" (*Vita concecrata*, 82). This is why you are called to undertake courageous initiatives in answer to the signs of the times, following the footsteps of your Founder and of your Refounder. Be faithful, in particular, to your charism, adapting its forms, when it is necessary, to the new situations, in complete docility to divine inspiration and to ecclesial discernment.

Your Chapter, adhering to the recommendations of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (cf. N. 68), is about to approve the *Ratio formationis* elaborated during these six years for the entire Congregation. Formation is of significant importance for the very future of the whole Congregation. May God help you and may His protection constantly accompany you in the course of your Chapter work and in the election of the new General Administration.

On my part, I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer and, invoking the heavenly assistance of Mary Immaculate on your way into the third millennium, I heartily impart to all my Blessing.