

**CIRCULAR LETTER REGARDING CHANGES
TO OUR CONSTITUTIONS AND DIRECTORY
Accepted by the 57th General Chapter
Celebrated in Rome from Feb. 6-23, 2017**

Prot. No 114/2018

“Almighty God, who is unsearchable in His ways, and whose treasure of goodness is infinite, has blessed our Congregation. Mary, the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, our gracious patroness, has pointed out this present treasure to us. [...] God has caused this helpless Congregation to rise again. He sent us into the vineyard, poor and bereft of all human aid”. These words of Blessed George, the Renovator of our Congregation, borrowed from his “Circular Letter on the Constitutions” of 1924, give witness to his charismatic experience of the power of God’s grace regarding the fragility of our religious community that existed since its inception and which has found a similar expression in the writings of our holy Father Stanislaus (cf. *Fundatio Domu Recollectionis*, 1 [Founding of the Religious House]). The 57th General Chapter, celebrated in Rome from Feb. 6-23, 2017, following the teachings of the Church and the signs of the times, undertook in the same spirit the work of amending our Constitutions and Directory. The text of our newly edited by-laws, confirmed by the Chapter, was consequently delivered to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life which, after adding a few of its own comments, issued a decree on Sept. 8, 2017, ratifying the newly amended Constitutions and Directory.

The Grounds for Making Changes to the Constitutions and Directory of our Congregation

The main reason for undertaking the work of amending our Constitutions and Directory was the modern teaching of the Church addressed to all religious institutes, as well as the history of our Congregation over the past 30 years, that is from the moment of the ratification of our Constitutions in the aftermath of Vatican II. During his meeting with the Chapter members on Feb. 18, 2017, our Holy Father Francis stated, quoting the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “...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” (VC, 37).

The Capitular Fathers worked on the text of our Constitutions and Directory, previously ratified in 1986, as our response to the requirements of Vatican II, stipulated in its document “*Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life.” For the most part, the leading idea and reading of these Constitutions closely adhere to the Constitutions of 1930, composed by Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. From the time of the ratification of our post-synodal by-laws, our Congregation experienced special blessings: in 1987, Archbishop George, the Renovator of our religious community, was included among the Blessed by Pope St. John Paul II; in 1999, the same Pope elevated to the altars 108 martyrs of World War II, among whom were two of our confreres – Anthony and George; then, in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI declared our Founder, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński a Blessed. In 2009, we solemnly celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the Renewal and Reform of our Congregation, and in 2016, Pope Francis proclaimed the Founder of our Congregation, Blessed Stanislaus, a saint. This 30-year period, marked by an intense work of the Holy Spirit, brought about a deeper reflection on

the community's charism, a search for the sources of our identity, theological and historical studies, and numerous publications. During the same period, the Congregation saw a growth both in its communal and pastoral dimensions: new communities were established in different countries; the number of new vocations increased, while we began to run our pastoral works in closer adherence to our charism. Together with the Church's appeal *to rethink anew our by-laws*, this all laid the foundation for the decree of the General Chapter of 2011, which imposed on the Superior General an obligation to institute the Committee on the Constitutions and the Directory. The Commission was established on Feb. 13, 2012, and the fruits of its work were presented at the 57th General Chapter, as stipulated by the decree.

Therefore, the new perception of our identity is not only a manifestation of our self-awareness as a Congregation, but firstly our response to God's action in our religious community and the Church's appeal encouraging religious to "guard, deepen, and develop" this "creative prompting of the Holy Spirit," which guided our holy Father Founder on the paths of the Gospel (cf. *Starting afresh from Christ*, 20).

***Nova et vetera* (cf. Mt 13:52) – Caring for the Patrimony of our Congregation**

For the first time in the history of the Congregation, the full text of its Constitution and Directory is preceded by a "Preamble – *Invocatio Dei*," which sums up the purpose of these by-laws and delivers the profession of faith of the Congregation members.

The vast majority of the changes adopted by the General Chapter are contained in the first part of the Constitutions entitled "Patrimony and Spirituality of the Congregation" and they pertain to the first chapter called "Nature, purpose, spirituality, and character." The General Chapter's main concern was to interpret the Congregation's charism in the context of the present times and in fidelity to the founding spirit, as well as according to the patrimony shaped over the course of history, including the work of the Renewal.

Categories that have long been present in the teaching of the Church – such as charism and comments on the Congregation's spirituality in regard to the individual persons of the Holy Trinity – also appeared for the first time in our by-laws. Thanks to this, our Constitutions gained a fuller and up-to-date theological perspective, which is expected by the Church today. In this way, our charism could be expressed more clearly and presented in a separate, second article, right at the beginning of the Constitutions. Although this is a new article entitled: *The Essence of the Charism*, its main sentence has been almost entirely taken from the previous sixth article of our post-synodal Constitutions. The essence of our charism is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God; this charism gave birth to our identity and mission, that is everything that chapter I calls "the nature, purpose, spirit, and character" of our Congregation. Although this is a novel approach, yet the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God has always been present in our Community's charismatic journey. It found its expression primarily in the title of our Congregation (Marians of the Immaculate Conception) which has never changed, in the act of the *Oblatio* – that spoke of the original vision of our religious community, "impressed on the soul" of our holy Father Founder (cf. *FDR* 7, 9), as well as in the conduct and spirituality of our Blessed Fathers, that includes the writings and legacy of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, especially in the Instructions which he wrote (cf. *I* 12) and the Constitutions (*CM* 14), where he stated: "The Congregation's main Patroness is the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculately Conceived. [...] The Congregation's main celebration shall be the Feast of the Immaculate Conception."

The mission of our Congregation has been described differently than before, although two out of its three currently given elements – formulated slightly differently – already existed

in the second article of the Constitution of 1986. In the new reading, our mission is defined in terms referring to the Congregation's historical sources as well as the original words, used both by our holy Founder and the Renovator of our community – Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz. In this sense, the document reflects the founding spirit of our Congregation and as well as the tradition associated with its Renewal. Thanks to this manner of writing, it was possible to adopt an approach that might be called integral and consistent with the teaching of the modern Church, which instructs us “to keep intact its spiritual and apostolic patrimony” (*Vita Consecrata* 48; cf. also nos. 36, 42). The following articles present the charism and the mission of the Congregation in a broad theological and spiritual perspective: trinitarian, Marian, eschatological, ecclesial, apostolic, ascetic – always in adherence to the Constitution of 1986 and in conformity with the spiritual patrimony of our Congregation. In this key, the existing articles have also been re-edited; sporadically, completely new articles were added. The list of the Patrons has been extended.

As a consequence of altering the description of the Congregation's charism and mission, the General Chapter also added new wording to the formula of religious profession (see C 192) to conform it to the new approach and to better articulate it *expressis verbis*. We ought to remember that the formula of religious profession contained in the *Ordo Professionis Religiosae* (The Ritual of Religious Profession) of our Congregation and formerly ratified by the Congregation for Worship in 2009 on the basis of our previous Constitutions, became obsolete. The new formula of religious profession was lawfully ratified by the Holy See and, following the promulgation of the Constitution and Directory, it must be used to make the profession of both temporary and perpetual vows, as well as during the renewal of religious vows in accordance with the practice adopted in the Congregation (on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, during the days of recollection, etc.).

In the interest of complying with the Constitutions, as well as preserving the patrimony and emphasizing some of its aspects, new articles have been added to the Directory; among others, a new provision was made referring to the Constitutions (C 15), which concerns the rights and possible alterations of the Congregation's coat-of-arms (D 2); certain signs of the Marian identity were listed (D 7), along with “the white habit worn by our holy Father Founder in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary” included there as one of the elements of “the inalienable spiritual patrimony of our Congregation” (D 8).

In terms of religious discipline, the obligation was added to pray communally three times during the day: in the morning, midday, and in the evening (cf. C 79).

Also for the first time, an article was added to our Constitutions that deals with the associations proper to our Congregation. As a result of this provision and its approval by the Holy See, the Association of Marian Helpers and the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary have become, as it were, our modern third order, existing “within the frame of our Congregation,” while their “members living in the world, participate in the spirit and mission of the Congregation, leading an apostolic life and striving for Christian perfection and under the Congregation's guidance” C 128).

As to emphasize the continuity of the Congregation's existence and its fidelity to the patrimony, I decided to precede the text of our Constitutions and Directory with a chronological presentation of papal documents showing the approval of our community from its inception. These are the same documents that appeared in the Constitutions written by Blessed George and released in print in 1930. The only document that I added to Blessed George's Constitutions is the first papal approval of the Marian Constitutions of 1723, entitled *Statuta Congregationis Clericorum Regularium Marianorum* ... I hope this will make us further aware of the richness of our history, spirituality, and the continuity of

the Congregation, that is, of the same ideas that inspired the Marians working on the Renewal of our Congregation in composing the Constitutions of 1930, which continue to be one of our most important points of reference.

Corrections and Juridical Changes

The vast majority of the changes outside of the first part of our Constitutions and Directory have an editorial character and they consist of moving certain provisions of our by-laws which either directly quote or refer to the Code of Canon Law. This is done in compliance with the rule that all quotations or references to the Church law must be included in the Constitutions. Also, a certain number of our own by-laws were either further clarified or moved within the Constitutions and Directory in order to make the juridical text more consistent and understandable.

For the first time, a provision was added to our by-laws that speaks about decisions made collegially by the Superior General and his council. The provision concerns the instances when the Superior General acts jointly with his council fully present, which requires him to carry out decisions made by the council together with him. The General Chapter recognized that among such decisions must be those that entail serious consequences for the Congregation: e.g. expelling a perpetually professed member from the Congregation in accordance with CCL can. 699 §1; founding, dividing, and suppressing a province outside of the time of the General Chapter and managing the property of the suppressed province; and interpreting the by-laws. Other types of decisions made by the Superior General require either obtaining the council's consent or the councilors' opinion. Principles regarding a Vice-Province were also somewhat modified.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life ordered a few changes of a legal nature and they were introduced into our by-laws. Among these, the most important one concerns the election of the Provincial Superior. The Congregation stated: "We would like to remind you that the *universal vote*, executed by mailing the votes of all of the Province members in sealed envelopes to the Provincial Chapter cannot be considered an election, in the canonical sense, but only a consultation; hence the Directory's articles which concern this issue (see articles 272, 274, 275) should be either amended or deleted, in accordance with the wording of Canon 625 §3 of the CCL." As a result of this intervention of the Congregation, starting with the next Provincial Chapters, the election of the Provincial Superior will be done only by the Provincial Chapter in accordance with the principles adjusted as per this change and contained in our by-law, while the universal vote in the Provinces will only serve as a consultation.

Dear Confreres:

At this solemn moment of the promulgation of our Congregation's Constitutions and Directory, re-worked by the 57th General Chapter, we all feel the need for uplifting words of encouragement, not only because we re-introduce, as it were, our by-laws, but also that we may live them out daily; be guided by them, and fulfill them in our spiritual and apostolic life. How very significant, in this context, become the words of our former Superior General, Francis Bučys, as he promulgated the Constitutions of 1930: "Therefore, Dearest Confrere, read this book continuously, reflect on it, carry out its instruction not only faithfully but with love; for in this way, you will attain such a purity of soul that marked our Founder, Venerable Stanislaus, and our Renovator, the late George. This is the path to the heavenly homeland which they indicated for you, by following it, you shall attain eternal happiness and your highest goal." (Francis Bučys, in: *The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers*, p. XVI).

May the Mother of the Lord, whose spiritual sons we are, continue to implore for us for all the favors that we need, and may the mystery of her Immaculate Conception be the

strength and joy of our vocation. May our holy Fr. Stanislaus intercede for us in our faithful and charismatic fulfilling of our mission in the Church. May Blessed George implore for us the grace of renewing our faith, hope, and love. Let the example of the Blessed Martyrs ignite our zeal and courage in the service to the Church. Let us pray that our Patron Saints may empower us to give witness to holiness before the modern world – both as individuals and as a community –and thus to contribute to its salvation.

Rome, May 18, 2018

On the Solemnity of our holy Father Stanislaus

Fr. Andrzej Pakuła, MIC
Superior General