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Rome, December 8, 2021
Prot. No. 190/2021

**LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN 2021**

Dear Confreres,

The “Providence of our most gracious Father,”¹ which St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, our Father and Founder bequeathed to us in his Testament watches over us, guides us and allows us to celebrate the titular feast of our religious community once again. We celebrate it as part of the ongoing Jubilee, pondering at the same time the events from 350 years ago that accompanied the founding of our Congregation. We fix our eyes on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Our Lord to draw strength and joy from it. In union with the Church, we reflect on synodality in order to further deepen our *sentire cum Ecclesia*. Today, we wish to renew our vows to revive our relationship with God and with our fellow men, in the service of our Immaculate Mother and Patroness.

The Signs of Mary’s Immaculate Conception

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady is the focal point at which come together all the elements of the charism and the spirituality of our Congregation from the very beginning of its existence. For this reason, too, this mystery is included in the very title of our community. Moreover, in his *Oblatio*, which is the “starting point” of our community, our holy Father Founder not only mentions this privilege of Mary, but also declares his readiness to defend it, even laying down his life if need be; we call this act “the blood vow.” The main motivation for this attitude is a mystical experience, largely unknown to us, to which St. Stanislaus returns in the most important moments of his life. In the *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, he writes: “[...] that divine vision, which had been engraved upon my soul regarding the foundation of this Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M., impelled me to this goal.”² Yet, in addition to his mystical experiences, the writings of our Father Founder reveal a theological concept that led him to the realization that the Mother of Our Lord is conceived immaculately. For the main argument, he took the reasoning that the scholastic theologians called *ex consequentibus*. In short, our holy Father believed that the cause may be inferred from its effects, that is, from the consequences that occurred in Mary’s life – especially from her lack of any inclination to sin and because of her freedom from the effects of sins – it is possible to infer her freedom from original

¹ S. Papczyński, Second Testament, 12, in: *Selected Writings*, Warsaw-Stockbridge, p. 938.

² S. Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, in: *Selected Writings*, pp. 903-904.



sin. Above all, however, the words addressed to her by the angel during the Annunciation testify to the fullness of grace in every moment of her life, from the very moment of the conception. Our Father writes about what this grace is in *Inspectio cordis*: “The Most Holy Virgin Mary is with child, the Son of God, through the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery, a grace, and an article of faith. Indeed, it is justly said that she conceived through the Holy Spirit; she who was full of grace and full of the Holy Spirit.”³

In the spirit of this reasoning, the gift of Mary’s Immaculate Conception is therefore the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which was revealed through external signs, among others: Mary’s receptivity to all of the manifestations of God’s presence in her life and in the world, and her lifestyle resulting from it – which the Marian Fathers followed and then promoted through their ministry; Her openness to the work of the Holy Spirit and readiness to obey His actions; Her total dedication to God and His plans in all circumstances of life; above all, however, her extraordinary ability to receive the Word of God, which thus became Flesh in her. Therefore, the grace of God – although signifying God’s spiritually giving Himself to man – takes on an external, material dimension, corresponding to the nature of man, which is both material and spiritual. The mystery of the Incarnate Word proves this. The Deity dwells bodily (cf. Col 2: 9), it is expressed through the external sign of the Body of Christ. Hence, looking at Mary, we may infer *ex consequentibus*, i.e. from the external signs in her life, in her thoughts, actions, choices, priorities, and behaviors – which were described in the pages of the Gospels – and especially from her acceptance after the Annunciation of the Eternal Word that God gave her a special gift of intimacy and union with Himself, which Mary herself named in Lourdes as the Immaculate Conception.

In a similar key to that presented above, St. Stanislaus envisioned our lifestyle, including the role of the Congregation of Marian Fathers’ own religious garb, that is, the habit. While religious dress is, as a rule, a sign of religious consecration, for our Father Founder, the habit had to express something much deeper, namely the charism and identity of the Congregation. In the *Norma Vitae*, he stated it clearly: “All of these [garments] will be white in color, in honor of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady.”⁴ In his concept, the habit of the Marian Fathers was meant to signify *candorem Immaculatae Conceptionis*, that is, “the splendor of the Immaculate Conception.”⁵ The logic behind this thinking is consistently built on the conviction that it is possible to infer her Immaculate Conception from the external signs in the life of Mary, thus the same external signs of her spiritual son who bears her name – a Marian of the Immaculate Conception of Mary – should express both his own nature as well as the nature of the whole religious community, which derives its identity from her [Mary] and from her mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

³ S. Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart*, in: *Selected Writings*, p. 346.

⁴ S. Papczyński, *Norma Vitae*, IV 4, in: *Selected Writings*, p. 66.

⁵ *Positio*, p. 523.



This year marks exactly the 350th anniversary of St. Stanislaus's putting on the white habit. In the *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, he writes: "[...] with the knowledge of the holy Apostolic Nunciature, during the Octave of the Birth of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, I offered myself, already dressed in white, as a new candidate in eternal service to this Mother."⁶ This event took place in the chapel in Lubocza, before the miraculous image of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, most probably on September 15, 1671, i.e. nine months after the act of the *Oblatio*.

Synodality – *sentire cum Ecclesia*

On Sunday, October 10th this year, during a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, the Holy Father Francis opened the Synod assembly on the Synodal Path of the Church. Similar events took place in particular Churches on October 17th of this year. The Synod is entitled "For a Synodal Church – Communion, Participation and Mission". Then, on October 7, 2021, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life sent a letter to all religious communities informing them about the opening of the Synod assembly on the Synodal Path of the Church and the need for institutes of consecrated life to join in. On October 9th of this year, the Conference of Superiors General sent a letter to the Superiors General, asking them to conduct consultations in their own institutes and to prepare a synthesis on synodality. Walking together with the whole Church and in a spirit of obedience, I have sent a circular letter to all Provincial and General Vicariates Superiors. I asked them to hold at their earliest opportunity – a Convention or other similar meetings in their Province / General Vicariate – to conduct consultations and to provide answers to the questions posed by the Conference of Superiors General. On the basis of the responses delivered to the General Curia, we will prepare a synthesis and submit it to the appropriate offices, as per the requirements of the Holy See.

By opening ourselves to an attitude of the heart which is called *sentire cum Ecclesia*, let us accept with faith the words of Pope Francis, as he was opening the Synod on synodality, in which he said, among other things: "Let us experience this moment of encounter, listening and reflection as a *season of grace* that, in the joy of the Gospel, allows us to recognize at least *three opportunities*. First, that of moving *not occasionally but structurally* towards a *synodal Church*, an open square where all can feel at home and participate. The Synod then offers us the opportunity to become a *listening Church*, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer. Today how much we miss the prayer of adoration; so many people have lost not only the habit but also the very notion of what it means to worship God! To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground. Finally, it offers us the opportunity to become a *Church of closeness*. Let us keep going back to God's own "style", which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way. If we do not become this Church of closeness with attitudes of compassion and tender love, we will not be the Lord's Church. Not only with words, but by a presence that

⁶ S. Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, 7, in: *Selected Writings*, p. 904.



can weave greater bonds of friendship with society and the world. A Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today's problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God."⁷

We can see that the above reflections of the Pope, as well as the internal logic of synodality, accepted in faith, can revive our communal life and our religious structures which already contained a certain "religious synodality". I am thinking here about community meetings, conventions and house, provincial and general chapters; community retreats, quarterly meetings with superiors, visitations, etc. If, in their implementation, we allow ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit and surrender ourselves to His work, both in our personal life in the Spirit as well as in our community "walking together", we can contribute to the evangelistic revival of the entire Church and our religious community.

Dear Confreres,

Today's solemnity, which we are celebrating during yet another year of global pandemic, is a special time for us. On this day, we not only renew our vows, but also wish to show mutual kindness and fraternal love: especially towards the elderly, the sick and those who passed away from this world, going to the Father's House in the past year. Let us support with prayer, good words and good deeds those feeling lonely, or experiencing a crisis of vocation.

Although the global situation prevents us from carrying out the Jubilee program, next year, we should hold local chapters in preparation for the General Chapter, which will take place in February 2023. I hope it can be celebrated in Rome. A detailed program will be sent to you shortly.

As a religious community, united by the bonds of the same charism, let us resolve to follow in the footsteps of Jesus on the path that is shown by our special Patroness, Mary, Immaculately Conceived and St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, our Father and Founder. May the members who have been declared Blessed from our Congregation intercede for us. Let us draw from them what they have manifested in their lives totally devoted to God: let Blessed George, Bishop and Renovator of our Congregation, teach us to constantly renew our vocation, and let Blessed Anthony and Blessed George, Martyrs, obtain for us the grace of daily giving our lives in the service of our brothers.

Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!



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Fr. Andrzej Pakuła MIC
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⁷ (<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html>).