

**OPENING OF THE 25TH GENERAL CHAPTER**  
**2016 Session**

Dear Sisters and friends,

- A year ago, Pope Francis rocked the world by publishing *Laudato Si'*. He put into practice what he had been preaching during the Year of Consecrated Life: *"Wake up the world!"*. In spite of the prevailing cynicism, governments and influential people, whatever their motivation, have begun reevaluating the situation and now it can be said that they are manifesting a certain concern for the state of our common House.
- He shook the world with a wakeup call... He listened... He gathered people together... He used his voice and his influence for a cause of immense importance, one which, today, affects our whole lives as a human community.
- We are being realistic and we are very conscious of our limits: we are aging, our numbers are diminishing, we have become fragile through sickness, a few younger members with a promising future within our midst have decided to orient their lives in other ways, etc.
- Are we also conscious of our blessings in order to live in gratitude during the good days as well as the difficult ones and to continue to be a blessing for our world? Do you know that our Congregation is blessed with 8 women who have reached 100 years of age, one in the USA and 7 here in this very place, the Pavilion? Do you know that in all, with the sisters of temporary vows, the novices and postulants, we are blessed with some fifty young women in initial formation, who for the most part, are deeply convinced of their call and of their place in Holy Cross?
- And here we are, called and blessed by God, both rich and poor, we, the Sisters of Holy Cross, coming from all horizons, gathered for the first session of our 25th General Chapter! Why are we doing this?... And for whom are we doing it?... Whom do we want to wake up?
- We have chosen to reorganize our structures and to join forces. Down deep, why do we really want to do this? For whose benefit do we want to bring our strengths together? Indeed, who will profit from our reorganization?
- Since the forum of 2009, we have become aware of our rapidly evolving identity, an identity that is more diverse; we are about 450 Sisters from different countries, different cultures and different ethnic groups even within the same country. Are we ready to testify that these 450 women of different cultures, languages, countries and different ages... can come together, pool their efforts, be open to others, weave convivial alliances; **alliances at the service of a life shared in abundance with all beings** in a recognized interdependence?
- This is the reason why, as women of faith, rather than a simple restructuring we have chosen to embark on a spiritual adventure of transformation. As Sister Carole Zinn, an American Sister of St. Joseph, said to us at the UISG last May, to be bearers of the future we need to accept a triple transformation: transformation of the spirit (of thought and intelligence); transformation of the heart (of relationships); transformation of the will (relinquish individual power to risk fruitful alliances). This strangely resembles Paul's exhortations to the Romans: *"Be transformed by the renewal of your intelligence...your relationships...your consorted actions to defeat evil..."* Rm. 12
- This transformation of our whole personal and collective being is the Space of irruption of the Spirit; the place of radical shift from where Mary Magdalena, the disciples of Emmaus and all the others were propelled out of their own tombs of discouragement and defeatism, in order to choose, without fear, the road back to Jerusalem; that very city where prophets were vilified and killed, where despair swallowed up all hope: « *And we who were hoping...* ».

- This transformation, this radical shift cannot take place without a profound encounter with the OTHER, with the Resurrected One who takes on the face of the Other. Have we really met Him? Has our intelligence really been enlightened by the Word of the Other? Has our heart really become burning within us while the Other was helping us to understand more clearly the events which challenge us and empty us of all our hope? And since then, whom have we invited to our table to share our bread? With whom have we really broken bread, as meager as it might be? With whom do we choose to break bread? In other words, *“Who benefits from our consecration?”* (Mary Sujita, snd, from India, UISG 2016)
- Without this encounter with the Gardener, this sharing with the STRANGER, our eyes will not open to a new perception of reality, our heart will not lead us to the existential peripheries of our world where life is threatened, and it will be impossible for our will to risk any new alliance at the service of the resurrection of LIFE and of our sharing of this life in our world. There will not be a *“different way”* which bears life in abundance for us and for all creation.
- Last April, we focused on these questions during the “Umbrella Congress” and we will carry them during our Chapter. We will also carry them during the Mission Congress following the first session of the Chapter. We will also carry these questions with 7 younger members, in conversation during 6 weeks in Pierrefonds this summer, as they reflect on their recent or upcoming perpetual commitment. After all, it is our inner coherence that will make all the difference.
- As someone commented at the UISG meeting, our new structures, as perfect as they may appear, are like a boat built to make the crossing. If the structures are not animated from within, even in the midst of our tempests, Christ will end up by falling asleep.
- During this time of our numerous passages, Jesus invites us to board the boat with Him, to remain in conversation with Him, to invite Him to our discernments. He urges us to turn our gaze away from ourselves, away from our little world, from our empty tombs and our journeys without horizon. He calls us to look up, to see higher, to see further, to see HIM, and to recognize Him in the Gardener, the Stranger, in all who are seeking LIFE. This is the way we can avoid what was said in Hosea: ***“My people are dead set against conversion...Called to look upward; no one knows how to lift their heads and raise their eyes.”! (Hosea 11, 7)***
- This morning, I am inviting you once again to pray for the whole Congregation- for it is the whole Congregation which is in Chapter -; pray that we may look up and recognize HIM. As did Mary Magdalene, *“if we search for Him from the depth of our heart, He will let Himself be found...”* (Jeremiah 29, 13-14).
- At the end of our celebration, you will receive the leaflet of our Chapter journey which will be sent to the whole Congregation as well as to our Associate Members and to those of New Forms of Consecrated Life. Our electronic bulletin, e-Current, will also keep you informed during our stay in Pierrefonds.
- Therefore, on this 25th of June, 2016, I declare open the 25th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of Holy Cross convoked through circular letter number 4, dated February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and which is legitimately assembled in conformity with the norms established by the Constitutions of the Congregation.
- The calendar of solidarity gave you the opportunity to pray for all of us who will be living this moment of the Spirit in Pierrefonds. Today, I invite you to receive all the capitulars present, to confirm their mission; a mission of attention, of *“bien-veillance”*, of common research, of listening to the Other so that our hearts may be filled with fire and passion, be *“obedient”* to God’s Life projects as we go forth ***“together... on the pathways of Resurrection of the world”***.