

CIRCULAR LETTER GENERAL COUNCIL FIC

**To be Witness to God's Love:
Live in Joy and Communion**



*“Whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love”
(1 John 4:8)*

Maastricht, May 2015

Dear Brothers and Associated Members,

We are all aware that the year 2015 has been declared by Pope Francis as the year of consecrated life. It is also a “divine-coincidence” that in this very same year we celebrate the 175th anniversary of our Congregation, 50 years of our mission in Ghana, and 95 years in Indonesia. This year is therefore a good moment for us to reflect on the way we live out our call as consecrated people. In the words of Pope Francis it is the time to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope.

In connection with the year of consecrated life 2015 Pope Francis sent us an apostolic letter in which he expressed among others his expectations to the consecrated people like us. Furthermore the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life also sent us a similar letter entitled “Rejoice”. It is in fact a message derived from the teachings of Pope Francis on consecrated life. Both letters show us the expected way to live out our call as religious persons. In this jubilee year of our Congregation I invite you to reflect on some expectations of the Pope to all consecrated

people, which is very consonant and supportive to our primary belief that God is Love (cf. Constitutions art. 2). We are all challenged by the Pope on how to be a witness to God’s love in a concrete way.

To be man of joy

The particular expectation of the Pope is that consecrated people *live in joy*. “There is no holiness in sadness”, he said when he met seminarians and novices; and he continued: “Do not grieve like others who have no hope” (cf. 1Thess 4:13). Moreover it is our deep desire, just like everyone else, to live in the deepest and perfect happiness (cf. Constitutions art. 1). Despite all troubles and disappointments we encounter in day to day life, *we are called to give witness to the joy that arises from the certainty of knowing we are loved, from the confidence that we are saved.*

Indeed it is true that like everyone else we have our troubles, our dark night of the soul, or disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older, etc. In all these things, however, we should be able to rejoice in the knowledge that we are being conformed to our Lord Jesus who, out of His love to us, did not refuse the sufferings of the cross.

In connection with giving witness to the joy of being consecrated persons, the Pope said that “the consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because

the young people we meet find us attractive, *because they see us as men and women who are happy*". Similarly the effectiveness of our apostolate is above all depending on the eloquence of our lives; the lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full. Further the Pope said that consecrated persons are not expected "*to be a hostage to our own problems*". Our problems will be resolved if we go forth and help others to resolve their problems. "You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, and love by giving love". We are expected to come out of ourselves and go into the real world, especially the world of the poor, the elderly, sick and abandoned, the marginalized and those in need.

To be man of communion

Again and again we should remind ourselves that "*we call ourselves brothers and earnestly desire to be brothers to one another and to all humankind both in receiving and in giving love*" (cf. Constitutions: Essential Reflections + art. 6). This is exactly what Pope Francis also expects of us: to be experts in communion. He says that communion should be lived first and foremost within our communities.

This implies for us a willingness to make every effort so that the ideal of fraternity pursued by our co-founder Bro. Bernardus Hoecken, namely that "brotherly love is the queen of the Congregation", becomes a reality. In this regard we are expected to have the ability to listen to other people and to seek

together ways and means for the sake of peace and unity. Despite the fact that we are imperfect beings, we keep striving after this ideal.

The spirit of communion should also grow among the members of different institutes and Congregations. Likewise we are also called to true synergy with all other vocations in the Church and all people of good will. In a polarized society, where different cultures and groups experience difficulties in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters. In this respect we are expected to be men of communion who are bringing people to unity in mind and spirit, not an uniformity.

Reflection

With the background of the apostolic letter of Pope Francis, in this jubilee year of the 175th anniversary of the Congregation, we need to ask ourselves first of all about the way we live out our call as brothers FIC. Are we happy with our lives as a religious? Do our lives radiate joy to the people around us? There is an old saying that "where there are religious, there is joy". Is that true in our community and in our apostolate? In case that is not true, what is then the cause of it? What can we do to make our lives happy and radiate joy?

Secondly we need to ask ourselves on the way we relate to our fellow brothers and people from different cultures and backgrounds. How can we enable each member to express freely what he feels and thinks, to be accepted with his particular gifts and limitations, and yet to become a fully co-responsible member of the same Congregation or the same apostolate? Do my fellow brothers and people working with me feel at home and accepted? Do they feel motivated to build a better environment of peace and unity?

Dear brothers, we believe that the Gospel is the absolute rule of our lives, whereas the other rules are means of living the Gospel to the full. As religious we desire to live the Gospel radically and sincerely. The Gospel is demanding. Jesus asks us to put his words into effect in our lives. “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). “As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds” (James 2:26). I wish you all the best in being good and doing good for the people entrusted to us.

Bro. Martinus Handoko
General Superior FIC

