



Culture, Identity, Interculturality, Universality From the Perspective of the Kingdom

The XVI General Chapter has been an opportunity to contemplate, as a universal apostolic body, the pluralism and complexity of our world: multicultural realities, religious and spiritual diversity, great technological and scientific advances, redefining the role of women, new family structures, situation of youth, growth in inequality and injustice, new forms of solidarity, and environmental concerns

The presence, for several days, of twenty-five lay men and women committed to the educational mission of the Company and/or members of the Laity Network was an important experience that made it possible to reflect together on these realities.

We have analyzed the present day implications of dialogue with culture, science, technology, biotechnology, etc., the challenges of interculturality, universal responsibility, interreligious and intercongregational dialogue; the new steps required for a deeper commitment to our work with youth, the poor and excluded, women and the family; the importance of continuing to journey together, lay and religious, in order to serve the Kingdom through our charism and spirituality.

The fruit of the discernment process has been to together identify specific commitments for the coming six year period 2009-2015. It has been a deeply profound experience, an invitation to walk with Jesus and trust in His Word, with renewed vitality to work towards creating the future.

We have felt that the Lord has called us, counts on us and calls us to cast our nets anew.

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberius. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

(John 21:1-7)

The invitation to cast new nets is significant in all the gospels. *"Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but in your name I will lower the nets."*¹ *"Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something."*² The desire to cast the nets comes from the experience of having listened to the voice of the Lord. It is He who, in the midst of the darkness, opened a new horizon, making the catch abundant, resulting in a sense of hope. Thus, emptiness is transformed into a miracle and the faith of the disciples allows them to see what is fundamental: *"it is the Lord."*

At this moment in time, to "cast the nets" is to welcome anew the call to care for life, to renew our apostolic service and to allow it to echo the voice of Jesus, who strengthens our commitment and gives direction to our journey.

¹ Cf. Lk. 5:5.

² Cf. Jn. 21:6

“To cast the nets” together,
is to unite our strengths,
to expand the horizon of our mission
and be present
according to our specific identity
in the realities of our world
offering the sense of meaning
and what it means to be human

It is time to cast the nets!

1

Cast the nets to live our own identity

God’s call to Jeanne de Lestonnac gave birth to a dream of a project that entailed a particular style of life and a specific way of carrying out an educational mission.

Today, God continues calling us and his call **commits us to:**

1. “Be” and “do” in the style of Jeanne de Lestonnac: rooting ourselves in our charism so as to give witness with our lives and engaging ourselves in the building of the Kingdom, as Mary, the prophetic woman at the heart of history.
2. Nurture the experience of God so that we may be shaped by the values of the Gospel, be witnesses with our life and words of the Lord Jesus and his Good News.
3. Study at depth the meaning of Mary as the expression of our identity. Contemplate her as a woman and disciple so that she may be an inspiring presence in our following of Jesus.
4. Give in depth consideration, both laity and religious, to the meaning of the call to live the same spirituality. To walk with others strengthens, revitalizes and enriches our religious life and the lay option as Company
5. Live the meaning of the Universal Apostolic Body as a characteristic of our identity that empowers, strengthens and animates our mission in the Church.

2

Cast the nets as educators, in the style of Jeanne de Lestonnac

A Christian humanist education in a pluralistic world is, today, the response we want to give according to the initial insight of Jeanne de Lestonnac. This requires that we carefully accompany the person, contextualize the educational processes within each reality and continue prioritizing our attention to youth, women and the family. Our educational style **commits us to:**

1. Promote our common mission in co-responsibility, lay and religious, from the specific identity of each.
2. Offer a holistic education that enables others to:
 - Face today's challenges, discern and make choices.
 - Give priority to the value of life, human dignity, dialogue, justice, solidarity, responsibility, and the search for the common good.
 - Grow in ecological awareness, interdependence with the universe, and the commitment to care for the planet.
3. Offer opportunities for growth in the faith: educate for transcendence and announce the person of Jesus and his project. This education is a call to be witnesses, both personally and collectively, of the God of Jesus.
4. Promote plans and actions in all our ministries that form for interior growth, solidarity, justice and peace, and that these influence each of the areas of which they form part.
5. Renew the inspiration of Jeanne de Lestonnac: "*Women should save women*":
 - To deepen our understanding of our role as women and discern what kind of model we are as women transmitted through our presence and educational work
 - To commit ourselves to the struggle for the dignity and rights of women
 - To offer our identity as women in the Church; being actively present through our preparation and theological formation
6. Work together with families to assume the responsibility for the educational and faith formation. Know, respect and accompany the new family structures. Analyze how these impact the person and how we can assist through our educational charism.

7. Renew our option for youth:
 - Design and effect the processes of evangelization together with them that takes into account their perspective.
 - Create opportunities for coming together, where they can be accompanied in their faith life and their commitment to society.
 - Present religious life as a meaningful way in which to follow Jesus today. Establish communities that can be places of reference and open to young people.
 - Promote, combine, organize and share faith education programs that complement one another
 - Take on *Art, Humanism and Spirituality* as the pastoral formation program for youth; implement it at the local level
 - Offer volunteer opportunities that allow contact with situations of poverty and injustice and lead to commitment
8. Take responsibility for personal and professional formation, given its repercussions in our growth as persons and in specific apostolic tasks. Share with others, through our ways of relating, lifestyle, and accompaniment from an educational stance what we have received
9. Reflect and interiorize the educational reflections undertaken these last years and put them into practice according to each context.

3

Cast the nets in solidarity with the poorest, making the radicality of the Gospel visible

Contemplating the reality from the eyes of Jesus motivates us to live truly connected with the world of the poor, allowing ourselves to be affected by it, changing our lives and call for a compassionate response to the situation of suffering and exclusion. This call **commits us to:**

1. Make a clear and renewed option for the poor:
 - Enter into the realities of the new forms of poverty arising in the world today
 - Review in each context where our presence is most necessary
 - Open new ways of responding to the most urgent needs
2. Explore new ways to network between communities and works of the Company of Mary and other congregations, institutions and groups; promote activities and together search for bold and creative ways to influence reality.
3. Discern the places that should receive preferential attention, committing ourselves on a universal level:
 - Accompany and strengthen our presence in those places where it is weak, yet we wish to maintain
 - Establish solidarity networks between different works and realities for mutual benefit
4. Evaluate volunteer experiences so that they may continue to be opportunities of growth for the volunteers as well as those that receive their service
5. Promote the International Solidarity Foundation of the Company of Mary (FISC) as a channel, on the universal level, in the struggle against poverty, of cooperation in development and formation for solidarity and justice. Make it know and strengthen its presence in each context.

4

Cast the nets with those who share our spirituality and mission

Sharing the same spirituality and mission impels us, both the laity and religious, to unite our strengths and mutually help each other to grow in our commitment to the Kingdom. This conviction **commits us to:**

1. Accompany persons and groups that share our spirituality and educational-evangelizing project of the Company of Mary; are deeply committed to it and its implementation in various ways
2. Continue advancing on the journey with the Laity Network, promoting its development and/or consolidation in the different contexts, respecting the diversity of processes:
 - That the laity and religious adequately transmit the identity of the Laity Network to groups or communities that wish to live their Christian commitment through the spirituality of the Company of Mary
 - Offer the Laity Network as a personal option, independent of employment, to friends of the Company, collaborators, educational communities, alumni, etc.
 - Support the formation of lay coordinators and animators
 - Promote the communication and relationship among groups of the Laity Network, taking advantage of the possibilities made available through new technology.
 - Promote the relationship with the communities of the Company and groups of the Laity Network.
 - Create communication links between the diverse contexts so as to share journeys, experiences and resources, etc. and consolidate the Network from a particular perspective and common criteria
3. Encourage the intercommunication between the different lay groups that live the charism through many ways
4. Structure a plan of formation and study in the identity, spirituality and educational project of the Company of Mary that helps laity and religious live the charism, strengthening communion, the sense of belonging and a shared mission.

5

Cast the nets for dialoging with reality and strengthening communication and interrelationships

For the Company of Mary, from its origins and throughout its history, communication has been the apostolic channel and a means to maintain the unity of the Body. Conversation and dialogue with life, culture, science, etc. has been key, dynamic aspects of our educational project. This heritage **commits us to:**

1. Value each person and culture so as to live differences as richness and to establish a basis for a fraternal relationship between different persons and peoples.
2. Make ourselves apt for dialogue, incorporating in our way of life attitudes of listening, openness, and welcome to the world and the experience of others
3. Focus on communication as an element in the relationships between peoples, cultures, etc. and as a basic tool of our educational work
4. Offer opportunities of relationship and encounter in our communities and educational ministries where each person can express who he/she is in order to grow in identity and interculturality
5. Develop a plan of formation that addresses the historical moment (environment, bioethics, politics, economy, technology, etc.) that helps us dialogue with science and culture, to have ethical criteria, analyze reality with a critical eye, contribute a sound reflection , inspired in the gospel that should guide us
6. Enter into relationships that actively commit us with other Congregations, groups and institutions that, from different perspectives, work for interreligious dialogue, global responsibility, defense of life, dignity of women, fight for justice, human rights, etc.
7. Continue incorporating new technologies in our daily life, ministries, organizations, etc. as flexible tools of communication, interaction and information. To use them responsibly and with a critical attitude.
8. Work to reduce the technological gap in those contexts in which we are present or have influence, with the desire to share the

benefits that come from the new technologies and to put them at the service of others

9. Promote interchange through the use of technology; optimize resources, articulate actions and projects. Strengthen vital communication in the Universal Company

6

Cast the nets with persons of other confessions, religions, beliefs in order to seek the common good together

In our present day reality different religious confessions and spiritual tendencies co-exist. With them we share the search for the good of humanity and the planet. In Jesus God revealed himself to us as the incarnate God who enters into dialogue with humanity. This conviction **commits** us to:

1. Express our faith in Jesus authentically and genuinely through the spirituality which identifies us with the life style that this involves. To promote formation in theology and knowledge of other religions to permit dialogue that is well founded and which may be enriching for all.
2. Facilitate sincere encounter with people of other beliefs, so that it is possible to know, respect, accept, create bonds of friendship, and value their spiritual experience and to forge ecumenical and interreligious pathways in the search for transcendence, justice, peace and the common good.
3. Reinforce opportunities of formation in our apostolic works, which allow us to become acquainted, value and dialogue with different religious traditions; to build bridges where what we have in common may come together and be evident in a common spirit.
4. In each context participate in activities that prioritize inter-religious and ecumenical encounters and dialogue.

In the present moment of our history “to cast the nets”
from our identity as religious
commits us to be companions on the journey
and to live our vocation radically.

It is time to cast the nets!

7

Cast the nets together, in community, as sisters and companions who are followers of Jesus

The importance of community in our following of Jesus prompts us to live in search of the “magis” in our daily life. This demands that we evaluate our life style with all sincerity, be attentive to values of the world that have crept in and are not consistent with the gospel; identify the areas of emptiness and dissatisfaction that drain our vitality.

As General Chapter, we perceive that the Lord is calling us strongly to conversion, to re-order our life in order to go forward with a new impetus towards the horizon of the Kingdom. It is a call that **commits us to:**

1. Nourish what gives meaning to our life: the centrality of the Lord and the service of the Kingdom. It requires that we listen to the Word of God, be attentive to our life of prayer, a gospel focused view of reality, the Examen, review of life, formation, and reflection on the charism and spirituality of the Company.
2. Strive for community: to believe in it as a place of growth for all, where we share our experience of faith and mission.
 - To accompany and support each other in our following of Jesus: to let ourselves be formed in Him as sisters and companions.
 - Seek opportunities, times and means which channel our effort to build community and bear witness to it.
 - Strengthen the community apostolic project as a way that invites us to go beyond “I” in order to become “us”, and as a

tool that directs us towards our common goal and helps us review our life.

3. Reinforce a community dynamic of discernment that helps us approach the quality of our life seriously and in depth, so that it may be in accordance with the spirit of our vocation: apostolic service, relationships, the organization and use of time, use of mass media and information technology and communication. To take care that there is a balanced pace of life and that there is harmony between prayer, work, formation and rest... To review both the work overload of some sisters and the small amount of work of others.
4. Strengthen the sense of community and commit with each other in the following of Jesus: to make humanizing and educating relationships possible, nurturing trust, plus respectful and clear dialogue, dealing with conflict and personal and community difficulties, and be willing to live fraternal correction as a mutual help.
5. Keep in view the poor and excluded as our frame of reference and commitment, in a way that affects our life, challenges it and modifies it.
Take steps in our following of Jesus who was poor, on a personal level, as community and as an Apostolic Body according to the spirit of our Constitutions:
 - a basic and simple life style;
 - an atmosphere of austerity and openness in order to maintain our freedom in the face of the consumer society;
 - care for the poor and the defenseless;
 - discernment of the means used for the mission;
 - responsible use of personal and community goods
 - evaluate the locations where our communities are situated.
6. Re-focus authority and obedience in accordance with our spirituality:
 - Renew the role of the local superior and seek new ways for the Provincial Government to accompany sisters and communities
 - Form ourselves to live obedience, co-responsibility and the service of Government today.
7. Create solid communities, where life and mission can be serious consideration and help us to live different stages of our life in earnest. To take responsibility for strengthening them.

8

Cast our nets as a Universal Apostolic Body to broaden the horizon of our service and together promote the common project

The search for the “*magis*” for the Mission has motivated us to continue placing our “bread and fish” in common: personal availability, the creation of international and intercultural communities, new presences, sharing resources, the unification of provinces...this journey had made us more conscious of our belonging to an Apostolic Body and has given us, as Company of Mary, a wider, global, and universal horizon. Having a common project **commits us to:**

1. Trust in the future of the Company of Mary, in its permanence in time so as to continue extending a hand in the Church. Creatively look for ways to share the vitality of the charism and the meaningfulness of our religious life project so that others can resonate with it and incorporate themselves into the Institute.
2. Continue advancing with a global perspective of the Company which permits us to: establish common criteria, determine priorities, discern presences, projects and possibilities of new foundations, and/or revitalize existing ones.
Identify the most urgent needs of our reality and taking into account available personnel and economic resources, with the participation of various contexts, make future projections for the Universal Company
3. Consolidating the New Provinces:
 - Seek strategies which help weave a provincial identity: on all levels tend to interrelationships, information, communication; provide regional encounters, by activities, by generational groups...
 - Review, from the evaluation of the present experience:
 - o government structures, in view of the adaptations necessary in each context—delegation of the provincial superior’s functions, number of members on the provincial team and dedication to the service of government, the role of commissions and groups, channels for participation...
 - o economic costs brought on by the union of provinces. Analyze and study perspectives for the future in order to make the necessary provisions. To continue forming common criteria and modes of procedure

4. Be conscious of the fact that the community and the apostolic ambit are the principal and daily places of participation in the building of the Apostolic Provincial and Universal Body
5. Accompany the communities located in the new implantations and in the countries where the Company has few sisters.
6. Provide the means for advancing in interculturality in the Company:
 - Value the richness of each culture and share one's own culture for the good of the Apostolic Body and its growth.
 - Find effective ways to learn other languages that enable communication and interrelationships. The sisters sent to other countries should study the language with special interest and dedication as part of the process of inculturation.
 - Be open to different realities other than one's own, manifest signs of appreciation and interest in getting to know them. Initiate relationships that create bonds of proximity, especially among contexts geographically and culturally distant.
 - Continue promoting the translation of texts and publications of the Company into other languages.
7. Take responsibility for the goods of the Institute so that they are at the service of the life and mission of the Company, in favor of those most in need:
 - Conduct an analysis of our financial resources and a study of future projections as a necessary step in planning.
 - Keep the financial dimension in mind when discerning works, presences and projects. Make the necessary economic provisions before initiating new ones.
 - Seek sources of funding that help ensure a future for the priorities of the apostolic mission
 - Analyze the economic resources required by the new international projects and seek ways of funding them.
 - Prepare personnel for the service of administration.
8. Continue and promote the projects begun on the international level: *The Bordeaux Project, Art, Humanism and Spirituality...* Provide ongoing evaluation.
9. Continue cultivating at the community level the appreciation for our history and the responsibility of recording it as a way of building the present and the future of the Company:
 - Be responsible for and determine common criteria for the conservation of our historic and artistic patrimony.
 - Train people to take over the services of the secretariat, archivist and caretaker of patrimony.

9

Cast the nets so as to form ourselves and our way of being and how we relate to the world

Jeanne de Lestonnac was convinced that the future of the Company depended, in large part, on the attention given to formation.

To live as women journeying toward the evangelical goal of configuration with Christ prompts us to make formation a daily experience throughout our entire lives. It requires placing the means to achieve an integral formation that is consistent with who we are as Company of Mary, with its spirit and mission. This responsibility **commits us to**:

1. Personally live in a process of growth and learning, to make formation a style of life that helps us face diverse situations, relationships, works, etc. as daily opportunities enabling us to form our values and criteria according to the gospel
2. Promote in us the desire and need to undertake a process of continued formation that will help us live our vocation meaningfully, renew our spirit of availability and apostolic dynamism and to fulfill competently the task entrusted to us
3. Deepen our study of the Constitutions and other documents particular to the Company, allowing them to enlighten us and challenge our lives, helping us renew our option for Jesus Christ and the needs of the Kingdom.
4. Promote accompaniment as a means for spiritual growth and continued formation, giving special attention to the recently professed sisters
5. Recognize and encourage the local community as the privileged place for formation:
 - Ensure that each context has communities that, because of the depth of their lived commitment and the quality of the lives of those who form it, can act as apostolic formation communities—be an example for those beginning religious life and for young people
 - In the apostolic community projects, develop proposals and means for the formation of each person and the community. Structure ways to evaluate it.
 - Prioritize and schedule community meetings, taking care that they be opportunities for formation in life and for life
6. Develop a continued formation program in the provinces that meet the needs of the various stages in life and the different

apostolic ministries. Special attention should be given to the following stages: after solemn vows, mid-life and before retirement. Special events in one's life (silver or golden jubilees) should be privileged opportunities for renewal, reviewing one's life and openness to the next stage in life; taking care that these celebrations be according to our life option.

7. In initial formation:

- Give special attention to what is stated in the documents of the Institute. We should know them and make them our own as we are all responsible for the formation of people who join the Company and because the criteria found in them are an orientation for the formation in any stage of life. To commit ourselves to study the document, *Formation in the Company of Mary, our Mode of Procedure*.³
- Identify and form persons that can be responsible for the different stages of initial formation
- Give special attention to the formation of directors. Strengthen the relationship among formation directors of the different stages, both provincial and interprovincial in order to share experience and wisdom. Be attentive to the specific preparation needed to accompany persons from different cultural contexts
- Continue reflecting on the implications inherent in bringing together people from different cultural realities during the initial stages of formation
- Plan medium and long range formation and academic programs for each person in formation, including the learning of a second language. The program should combine the characteristics and strengths of the person with the needs of the Company

8. Prepare new proposals for formation in the charism of the institute: deepening our understanding of the Constitutions, Ignatian spirituality, the Foundational Documents, and study of the documents and publications of reflections undertaken by the Company.

³ Orden de la Compañía de María Nuestra Señora, ODN IV Centenario nº 1, 2006

“In your name...”
(Lk. 5,4)

We cast the nets “*in your name*” and our being becomes rooted and recreated, it deepens as it expands, it is shaped as it dialogues and shares.

At the sidelines and the edges, where the horizon is blocked by borders of exclusion, we cast the nets “*in your name*” and we place our hearts and our hands on the paths of solidarity

We cast the nets “*in your name*” as we journey across the reality of our world, offering and accompanying an educational project that looks for ways to make our world more humane and to care for life.

Our boat sails in the same sea with others. With them we cast our nets “*in your name*” and the shared dreams prompt us to go further.

Supported by the hands of sisters called to follow you, our nets, cast “*in your name*” reach further out, delve deeper, towards the center of the meaning of our lives dedicated to the service of others.

We cast our nets “*in your name*” to fulfill ours: Company of Mary Our Lady

We cast our nets “*in your name*” and each day, in the different corners of our wanderings, in the calm of the sunrise or the dark night seas, your voice resounds and calls out to us:

“Courage! It is I, do not fear.”

Rome, July 31, 2009
Feast of Saint Ignatius Loyola