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Reflection of Sr Hermin

For the last time, I am now writing a short word for the Briefing. It is a different word from what you are used to from me. For the past 12 years, I have enjoyed working on the future of the Congregation. Of our international congregation where different cultures meet and work closely together and which always gave me a sense of belonging. It were 12 years of fine meetings with you, deep conversations and listening to everyone's wishes. They were also 12 years of caring for everyone's well-being and of thinking how we could move into the future in a fruitful way. That care was put to the test by the pandemic that did not leave the congregation unaffected either. Several sisters died while we as board members could not be close by. That did not feel right, but we could not do otherwise.

After the pandemic, the world started looking different. That has consequences, including for our congregation. This was discussed at the Chapter and promising lines were set out, which will be implemented by the next General Council. For me, it is time to say goodbye to you. Thank you very much for your trust and the opportunity I have had to be of service to the Congregation.

On September 1, the board transfer will be on. I wish the new board much success and wisdom.

You may have heard stories about the General Chapter in recent weeks. Perhaps you haven't. Perhaps you have read the website or watched the livestream of the opening or closing celebrations. For anyone who has received fragmentary information, we will give you a brief description of the chapter. The official chapter report will then follow in a few weeks' time.

Opening

After all the participants of the chapter had found a place on 3 July in 'Kloosterhotel ZIN' in Vught, the general chapter began on 4 July with a Eucharistic celebration in the Congregation Chapel in Tilburg.

It was a solemn celebration in which Theo te Wierik MSC presided and the project choir led by Rikie Bansberg graced the celebration.



After lunch, the chapter in Vught started with an opening speech by Sr Hermin Bu'ulölö in which she expressed her regret that the British/Irish sisters were no longer part of the general chapter for health reasons.

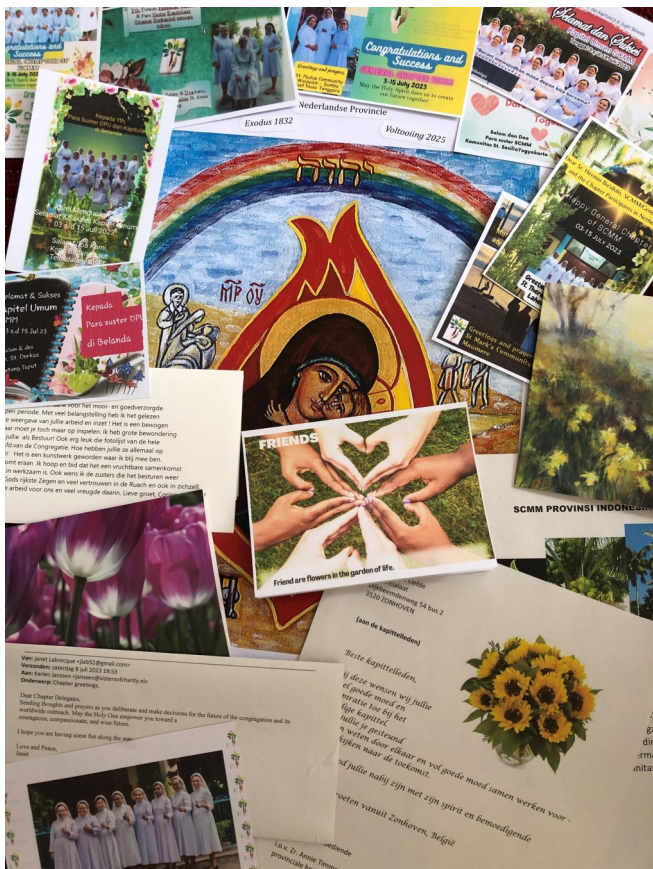
Sr Hermin called for the coming days to see what is happening in the world and where our opportunities lie. Our core values and spirituality brings us together; one of heart and mind, which should lead to disinterested service (Const. Art. 26) as God's instrument of love and peace. Then we dare to work together for a fruitful future.



Broer Huitema CMM and Ms Anne Stael facilitated the chapter and asked all chapter members to write down their expectations for the chapter. These were shared and hung as a 'leaf on the tree' that grew symbolically as a result. The chapter members expressed hope for a harmonious meeting where each other would be listened to so that the common future could take shape.

Many individual sisters and communities from the congregation sent expressions of commitment which were put up.

There were flowers with wishes of success and everything showed that this chapter was truly celebrated. The Brazilian sisters brought a congregational cross carved out of wood that will have a place in the new generalate.



As usual during the General Chapter, the 2017-2023 period was discussed. This report had been circulated in advance so that it was discussed with sisters, Friends and associates. There were some critical questions on topics that were already on the agenda for substantive discussion. Furthermore, the chapter members were satisfied with the report.

Finance

The substantive accountability was followed by the financial accountability. After all, the General Council has final responsibility for this according to the Constitutions. The Solidarity Fund, asset management, the investment portfolio, asset accumulation and result development were discussed. The conclusion was, because the congregation is getting smaller, that this affects all assets. For the next 10 years, the congregation don't need to worry. The new General Council will start looking at longer-term implications.

After approval of the financial report and substantive report by the chapter, Sr Mel Ryley thanked the General Council for their attention to all the countries and their commitment to the entire congregation, after which the discharge of board took place. As thanks, the General Council members received a beautiful, luminous natural stone on which a tree of life was displayed.



Charisma, spirituality and mission



We watched together the film 'Pope Francis, a man of his word' in which the core values of the congregation are effortlessly reflected: mercy, simplicity and God's providence. We saw Pope Francis travelling the world to assist those in need and spread the word of hope. With a focus on human dignity and care for the earth, he depicted the bond of God's love that brings everyone together.

Using this film as a basis, all countries looked at their mission and told about it using a self-chosen symbol.

Society needs activities that are also done by our sisters. This requires an open ear and an open mind off the beaten track. Traditionally, the congregation has focused on education, care of the sick and social works. We still see that. The new board is expected to look at improving the existing structures. Working together more, listening better and paying more attention to people who need our help thereby strengthening the mission.

There is also a need for a specific focus that the whole congregation is working on: sisters, Friends and associates. Several themes related to human rights such as human trafficking, immigration, refugees and social inequality were mentioned. The times require us to seek renewal.



Connectedness

In our congregation, we distinguish between professed members: the sisters, and non-professed members such as the associates in Brazil. We also know the Friends in the US, Beziold Verband and Barach in the Netherlands, and there are also women in Indonesia who feel committed to the congregation. With these women and men, we share spirituality and charism. This partnership is important and is also what we want as a congregation. They strengthen our mission, are our connection to the world outside the congregation and they live our spirituality. There is mutual inspiration. All groups do this differently. Associates are members of the congregation and participate in the provincial chapter.

However, they do not have voting rights, nor do they discuss finances. Sometimes, associates and companions are invited to an ICC, like last year in Nemi. They think along with developments going on. In what way can they too have a structural input into chapters and international meetings? A question that will be examined in the coming period.

Merging project

In recent years, the US, Brazil and the Philippines have been exploring the possibilities of forming an international province in which the three parts work closely together. Interculturalism has been discussed, with respect, dialogue and diversity as key concerns. In addition, leadership was a recurring theme. In particular servant leadership in which the four principles of collegiality, subsidiarity, solidarity and pluralism play a major role. The seat will be in Brazil. That country is already a province and has a provincialate.

In order to function as one province, English has been chosen as the common language. Much has been invested in this over the past period. Learning a language together forges a bond. Sr Janice Buszta (USA) teaches English online to the sisters in Brazil and Sr Jessica Magno (Philippines) is currently in Brazil to support English with conversation. In addition, Sr Jessica is getting to know the Brazilian province, learning the language and helping in the mission. As Sr Jessica was not a chapter member, she had made a short but impressive video expressing her experiences.

In the international province, as in all other provinces, formation at all levels is very important.

The distances between the three parts are great making communication crucial. For instance, there is a WhatsApp group for everyone in this project where information and photos of activities are shared and a newsletter distributed by e-mail.

The big question was whether the formation of the international province will continue. This will change the structure of the congregation.



Structure

Structure has been discussed at the ICB meetings over the past few years. Not only in the context of forming the international province, but also about simplifying the naming of all parts that are not (or are no longer) provinces. A province has certain responsibilities that end when that part is no longer a province. Young parts that are not yet provinces also lack those responsibilities which makes the position of all non-provinces the same. Therefore, the chapter has concluded to opt for the term 'region'.

Everyone remains Sister of Charity with the same charism and spirituality. The work for the General Council will not change much either. Needs will be mapped in all regions, making the tasks of the General Council clearer for each region.

If nothing changes, in a few years there will be only one province: Indonesia.

In the preparations, several suggestions for merging have been discussed:

- Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland and Britain can form one province together;
- Philippines and Timor Leste can also form one province together.

These proposals will not be developed further.

The chapter was positive about the formation of the international province and expressed appreciation for the carefully conducted process. This has given the international province a definite future.



Leadership



The ideal model for leadership is servant leadership. This has been discussed many times. It is a model that works for growth of all and not just the sisters in leadership position. How can the General Council shape leadership development? The chapter believes it is important to recognise potential leaders, take time to form a team, share responsibilities and be an example to others.

It may be possible to organise on-site courses for new leaders, create a concrete plan for personal leadership and include leadership development in the formation.

Communication

Communication is often about the means available. This time, it was also about language. It is repeatedly stated that English is the working language in the congregation. There are many sisters who are not skilled in English. Even sisters in leadership positions do not all speak English and surely that is what they are supposed to do.



This chapter focused on the question of how we, as an international congregation, can implement English as a common language. Various ideas were suggested, ranging from watching English-language films together, to holding an English day in every community, to giving all sisters the opportunity to learn the English language. Certainly, budget and time will have to be allocated to make the implementation a success.

Working visits



One of the main means of communication is the working visits of the General Council.

During the working visits, connections are made between the different countries.

Therefore, the General Council could also stay a bit longer in a country to have the opportunity to talk to all communities and sisters, as well as

associate members, Friends and companions.

Briefing

After one or more working visits, there would be a Briefing with photos and reports of the working visit and with news items from the General Council. The proposal came to make the individual provinces and regions responsible for the content so that everyone knows what is



going on in the other countries. Equipped with photos, of course.

The website could also use an update with more information from the different countries. Again, the individual provinces and regions are responsible for this themselves.

New in the media mix is the use of the livestream for parties and other activities that can be shared with the other countries.

Heritage

The Netherlands is the country where the congregation originated. From here, sisters were sent out all over the world where new provinces and regions were created. The Netherlands is a province on its way to completion. Several properties have been sold. The very first buildings (the house with the 13 cells, the Oude Dijk, cell of Mother Michael, chapel) and the cemetery are still there. In the preparation of this chapter, it became clear that many countries want the core of the congregation to remain in the Netherlands as a place where sisters can always return to. Sr Irène Rooth explained that the Dutch province is currently developing a vision regarding material and spiritual heritage.

The chapter offers some suggestions:

- * Transfer the oldest part to a management foundation;
- * Work together with local authorities;
- * Consider an international community in Tilburg that can support the General Council.



Constitutions and recommendations

On all the decisions and practices of the past board period, the statutes are being updated. As soon as these are processed, each sister will receive a copy.

The General Chapter has made some recommendations for the new board period and the new board. These will be incorporated in the report of the chapter, which every member of the congregation will also receive.

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Elections

After most issues were discussed, the elections for a new general board took place.

Sr Sofiani Warasi (Indonesia) is the new superior general. She is assisted in her work by Sr Elisângela Ferreira Belo (Brazil) as vicar and two board members, Sr Amy Gitana (Philippines) and Sr Miranda Situmorang (Indonesia).



After the elections, a BBQ was held in which some guests also participated.



Closing



On the last day of the General Chapter, the evaluation took place, followed by a solemn Eucharist in the Congregation Chapel in Tilburg and a well-attended reception. A memorable period ended and the new period began.

