



Ref. No. 17/64

Rome, 23 June 2017



Take my yoke upon you
and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble of heart

Dear Sisters and Associates and Partners in mission,

This week we celebrate our feast, the feast of the Sacred Heart, in the village of Kipako in Congo, amidst the turmoil of Venezuela, in the basement chapel here in Rome, in the home of Sophie in Joigny, in communities of our elders on every continent, in a virtual gathering with the Sacred Heart family throughout the United States and Canada, in a new small community in the center of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and in hundreds of places where we live our mission.

We come together this day as Religious of the Sacred Heart, often with friends and co-workers. We gather in Eucharistic thanksgiving, to publicly commit ourselves again to follow Jesus Christ forever, trusting in the fidelity of God, the love of our sisters, and the support of so many people who share our commitment to making the love of God real in our world of today.

At the same time that we live the certainty of our commitment to discover and make known the love of God's heart, we are living "an historic time of change and uncertainty". We experience the pierced Heart of Jesus in the lives of our people, our neighbors, and our countries. We hear the cry of the poor, the marginalized and the voiceless in so many places that live with internal and external threats of violence, economic exploitation, and destruction of our common home, the earth. The call and challenge of incarnating God's love in the midst of this complex world shouts out the questions of our Chapter "What is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do?"

In the last months, we who serve the Society at the generalate level, along with RSCJ around the world and in many places associates, partners in mission, students and friends, have met to contemplate the calls of our General Chapter 2016, in light of these questions. We have prayed, talked, reflected and talked again about where to begin, how to go forward, how to launch into the deep, what type of risks are we willing to take, what kind of risks we must take. The answer is actually quite simple. We need to begin where we are right now in the present moment, with who we are, what we care about and have passion for and with all the people with whom we will go forward on this journey. As we search for the answer to the questions posed by General Chapter 2016, we need to take a significant risk to follow Sophie's advice, listen attentively to the Spirit and take action.

The gospel of this feast gives each one of us an invitation and a compass. It is the same invitation we find in our Constitutions (paragraph 8):

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart



The chapter calls give us a guide, or perhaps more aptly a GPS (global positioning system) on how to live this gospel today. We are not just invited, we are called:

- **to go out, to set sail and go with others to new geographic and existential frontiers,**
- **to live more humanly in the radical style of Jesus,**
- **to create silence and deepen our interior life so we can hear the heartbeat of God in ourselves and our world**
- **to revitalize our unity in diversity and to act as one Body**

Recently I had the opportunity to spend a little time with two different groups of young people in the Philippines, one in a small rural town in Northern Samar and the other in a campus ministry center in the basement room in the state university for education in Cebu. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, my heart burned within me as I witnessed the commitment of these young men and women to the gospel and to the mission of the Society which we share with them. Their enthusiasm and energy to live this “Rebecca moment” with us for the sake of God’s people, to live more humanly, to listen to the heartbeat of the world, and to be a part of the One Body are a personal call to me and I hope to each one of us to strengthen our commitment to the young who bear the future on their shoulders.

The gospel for our feast invites us to yoke ourselves to Jesus and teaches us a sure way to move forward. Jesus reminds us that we have many yokes that we wear or carry, some of which are not of God. We need to recognize the ones that don’t help us set sail, that hinder us from being more human with ourselves and each other in the radical style of Jesus. And we need to face honestly the things and ways that burden us individually and as a community and work to let them go. This gospel is a call to conversion. I invite all of us to look at the “yokes” we have in our lives and ask ourselves as a community, what do we need to let go of in order to yoke ourselves to Jesus Christ and with each other to set out beyond our historic and existential boundaries.

The gospel calls us to learn from Jesus, to become gentle and humble of heart. Our Chapter reminds us that it is in the depth of silence that we will hear the heartbeat of God. It is only at this depth that we hear what we need and what we don’t need, to show forth the compassionate face of God. Let all of us, Religious of the Sacred Heart and those who have chosen our mission and spirituality as the ballast of their lives, renew our commitment to this journey forward and deeper to re-create a dynamic, agile RSCJ global community, called by God to learn and to live our charism and mission in the 21st century as One Body.

As Religious of the Sacred Heart we are committed through our vows to the mission of education. Is the General Chapter 2016 calling us to live our vocation as educators in a new way? RSCJ around the world would agree that our vow of education is, at its heart, about discovering and manifesting God's love, not about being a teacher. We need to humbly acknowledge our need to learn, to commit ourselves to learn and, to commit ourselves to do this together as a global learning community. On this feast of the Sacred Heart, I invite the Religious of the Sacred Heart to renew our vows within the context of this global learning community, a community rooted in the heart of Jesus. I invite each of you who share our mission and spirituality to renew your commitment to our mission and to live the charism in the context of your daily life.

All of us became part of this Sacred Heart community because we were deeply attracted in some way to Sophie's vision and purpose, to make known, to incarnate the love of the heart of Jesus, pierced on Calvary. This month we begin our celebration of Sophie's friend, Philippine, a woman who was eager to live Sophie's vision in a new land, who launched out in the Rebecca with her four companions for the sake of mission. Let us listen to God's spirit speaking within and among us as we deepen our own "Rebecca moment" and venture into new territory, whether existential or geographic. May we learn, like Philippine, to bind ourselves to Jesus, to let go of all that gets in the way of incarnating God's love and learn to be women and men of courage, faithfulness, generosity, audacity and prayer.

With much love from your sister,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Dawson".

Barbara Dawson RSCJ