

## DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

*FATE TUTTO CIÒ CHE VI DICE*

Alda Isa Paes<sup>1</sup>

The Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate witnessed yet another milestone in the history of the Congregation through the XXI General Chapter held in Rome from 12<sup>th</sup> November to 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2021. This historical event took place facing all odds and challenges of the Covid -19 pandemic that stifled many movements around the world. But by the grace of God and the courage of the sisters all the delegates of the General Chapter were present in Rome representing 21 countries to be part of this august event.

The Chapter preceeded with a lot of preparations namely spiritual and the year 2021 being dedicated to St. Joseph, on Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, during the solemn Mass. celebrated in the Church of San Salvatore in Onda for the upcoming XXI General Chapter, Sr. Izabela Świerad, the Superior General, presented in front of the altar of St. Vincent Pallotti, a burning candle - a sign of prayer and cry for the light of the Spirit for the whole Congregation, which burnt continuously throughout the Chapter. Holy Mass was preceded by the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a conference by Fr. Jacob Nampudakam, SAC, Rector General. Fr. Jacob drew attention to the fact that the end of the service in the general leadership is an invitation to be grateful and to deep reflection: to what each sister has learnt, and what vision of the future she sees on the near horizon. The adoration and the Holy Mass were attended by the Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate led by Sr Ivete Garlet, CSAC, Superior General, the Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate and lay members of the Union.

Fr. Martin Manus SAC, General Counselor, of the Pallottine Fathers and Brothers served as a facilitator during the Chapter. A letter of

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1 General Councilor of the Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate.

Pope Francis, was presented at the offstart of the Chapter in which the Holy Father sent his greetings to the participants of the Chapter and conveyed his blessing to all the Sisters of the entire Congregation.

The Chapter commenced by a day of recollection on 13<sup>th</sup> November guided by Fr. Dr. Roque Gonsalves SAC, General Secretary of UAC, who addressed on the theme of the Chapter: “*Do whatever He tells you*”. (Jn 2:5). On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the official inauguration of the XXI General Chapter took place with a solemn Holy Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, at the altar of St. Joseph. The Mass was celebrated by His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The concelebrants were Fr. Jacob Nampudakam, SAC, and Fr. Martin Manus, SAC. In his homily the Cardinal underlined the importance of listening to the Word of God which reaches us through the Church, especially in the person of the Pope. He also stressed the importance of collaboration as one of the main elements of our Pallottine charism, and the service to the poor by listening to the words of Jesus and following the example of Mary, which in turn transforms contemplation into concrete practice. The Eucharist was also attended by a group of Roman Pallottine Sisters, namely Sr. Ivete Garlet, CSAC, Superior General, and the entire leadership team, as well as by Sr. Vittorina D’Imperio, CSAC Provincial Superior of the Italian Province, and Pallottine lay members, among them Ms. Donatella Acerbi, President of the UAC. This day also marked the official opening of the Chapter by the Superior General.

The sessions of the initial days included presentiaion of the reports of the Superior General, the General Treasurer and all the Provinces, Region and Delegature by the respective Provincial/Regional/Delegature Superiors, higlighting their work and challenges.

During one of the sessions, all the deseased sisters who expired during the term of the previous General team (2016-2021) were remembered and prayed for. Each day of the Chapter began with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and time for adoration was dedicated during the day. Reports of various undertakings by the General Administration with their commissions also presented their reports, namely on mission, formation, reunification, General Archives, Our Way of Life and UAC.

On the day of the discussion on the topic of UAC, the following eminent speakers presented their talks: Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, I.Sch, from the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, presented what the Church expects from the UAC today. According to the teaching of Pope Francis, the Church presents two challenges to the Association: to rediscover and deepen the missionary identity, and to live synodality. Rediscovering our own identity as baptized people goes hand in hand with collaboration. We are invited to listen to God and to each other, walking together to continue the mission of Christ. Fr. Jacob Nampudakam SAC, Rector General and Ecclesiastical Assistant of the UAC; spoke about the UAC in the light of his task as the guarantor of the charism and as the ecclesiastical assistant of the association, which - according to the statutes - is the task of every Rector General of the Pallottine Fathers and Brothers. He described what it means to faithfully watch over and preserve the heritage of the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti while listening to the signs of the times. Fr. Denilson addressed the topic of the UAC in the context of its Statutes. These Statutes are a gift of the Church to us, showing that the Church has trust in us, and at the same time they are a mandate for action. He pointed out that the Church by its very nature is synodal, and this synodal nature finds its expression in the apostolates of the Church. The UAC is following the same path, undertaking apostolic activities in response to the needs of our times. Everyone - according to the "Pallottine anthropology" - has been created in the image and likeness of God, and by virtue of this likeness and of baptism, everyone is invited to proclaim the Gospel. Sr. Ivete Garlet CSAC, General Superior spoke about the UAC in the context of the process of discerning the reunification of our two Congregations. She presented a brief history of our Congregations and spoke about their role in the Union. The process of discerning the possibility of a reunification is a prophetic sign of communion and unity for the UAC, an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Ms. Donatella Acerbi, President of the UAC spoke from the perspective of her role as president of the Union. She underlined that the Union, which unites priests, consecrated men and women, and laity in the Pallottine spirituality, is one charismatic family. All members, Pallottines and others are called to build

unity among them in order to respond to the needs of the Church and the world according to the charism of the Union. The central question is how we must live and act together so that we can fruitfully follow Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father, and proclaim the Gospel. Sr. Liberata Niyongira SAC, General Councillor and member of the General Secretariat of the UAC, also presented a report on involvement of the Congregation in the life of the Union in 2016-2021. She highlighted the sisters active participation in the spiritual field by their partaking in the meetings of the General Council of UAC and in the commissions for formation, finance and mission at the international level, meetings with local communities of the UAC in different countries and participation in symposiums and national congresses of the Union.

During the Chapter many key topics were also touched by the following speakers: Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM, Executive Secretary of the UISG, presented a conference on “The Challenges of Consecrated Life Today”, Fr. Xavier Jeraj, SJ on the political and social consequences of Covid-19, Ms. Patricia Morgante (UISG) dealt with the positive aspects of using new technologies during the pandemic, Ms. Jeniffer Trotter gave us a presentation on the impact of the pandemic on the financial sector, Sr. Carmen Sammut, Superior General of the “White Sisters” (MSOLA) shared her rich experience of the structural reorganization of her own Congregation, Fr. Tim Norton, SVD, bishop-elect for Brisbane, Australia and Sr. Veronika Openibo, SHCJ, spoke on the topics of Interculturality and Internationality in the Religious Communities. His Eminence Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Papal Almoner, shared his experience through many examples, the true mercy to which the Church is called, which is, helping the poor, homeless and needy which is our evangelical responsibility. Recalling the words of Pope Francis, he emphasized the need to help every human being. Sr. Hanna Kiedrowska, SAC and Fr. Leszek Pyś, CSsR shared their experience as collaborators with Cardinal Krajewski. The testimony of Mr. Adam Piekarski who has changed from his life of misery to a dignified artist with the help of the Cardinal, Fr. Lezek and Sr. Hanna was a witness to the compassionate face of God. A conference by Sr. Gabriela Bottani, S.M.C., from the Talitha Kum network highlighted on anti-trafficking

advocates of our times, Sr. Simone Hachen, SAC, from Germany shared her work as a social worker and in helping migrants and refugees and Sr. Alda Isa Paes, SAC, from India presented different activities aimed at empowering women and children with inspiring examples.

The Chapter was also filled with the colors of a cultural evening, sparkled with the blessing of a special audience with the Holy Father and finally with the elections of the new General Team. The elections gave rise to a new beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate by prayerful discernment guided by Fr. Timothy K. Healy, SJ, who introduced who guided the sisters.

The XXI General Chapter saw a wind of change through the election of Sr. Josephina D' Souza (India), the first non-European as Superior General and the General Councillors as Sr. M. Małgorzata Wyrodek SAC - Vicar General (Poland), Sr. Adelheid Scheloske SAC (Germany), Sr. Marie Claire Mukeshimana SAC (Rwanda) and Sr. Alda Isa Paes SAC (India)

The following was the final message to all the members of the Congregation - Encouraged by our precious and rich history we, Pallottine Missionary Sisters, set the course for our future with a watchful eye on the present time. Let us “remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm and look forward to the future with confidence” (NMI, I).

Mary, Queen of the Apostles is our role model and so we are aware that it is our calling to follow her advice to do whatever JESUS tells us. Mary responded as we should do today - she recognized the actual need. As members of an international Congregation, living our founder's charism in contemplation and action, we strive:

- always to be united in the Cenacle together with Mary and the Apostles, as we listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- to be gifted with newness of life by living the Gospel more profoundly;
- to create greater collaboration and cooperation within our communities based on interculturality, dialogue, forgiveness, mutual understanding and appreciation;

- to encounter Christ in all we meet, especially in every poor, needy and suffering person by recognizing their dignity and treating all with respect;
- to deepen our understanding of OWL through prayer and study, becoming rooted in our Pallottine charism, embracing the co-responsibility as if we were founders, dedicating ourselves wholeheartedly to God's work of salvation;
- to respond to the needs of our time being committed to our apostolic mission regardless of health or age;
- to actively participate in the synodal process initiated by the Holy Father Pope Francis by being open: to encounter, to listen and to discern.

“As the Capitulars reflect on the words of the Mother of Jesus: ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (Jn 2:5), I pray that they will discern new and creative paths to guide the Congregation in responding in joyful obedience to the Lord’s call to serve him through their lives of religious consecration and apostolic zeal, in fidelity to the Pallottine charism.” (Pope Francis in his letter to the members of the XXI General Chapter)

At the end of the Chapter, a pilgrimage was made to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and an act of consecration was done to Mary. The newly elected Superior General, Sr. Josephina D’Souza addressed the capitulars with a encouraging final message and closed the XXI General Chapter. A final thanksgiving mass was held at the tomb of St. Vincent Pallotti, at San Salvatore in Onda with a solemn blessing and a solemn moment of being sent.