

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann
XXXIV General Chapter
LINEAMENTA

Sisters of St. Ann, a Family for Families

*Journeying with the Church, bringing Hope and
Joy to the world today*

Rome, 16th June 2019

Introduction

This text, which accompanies the Letter of Announcement of the XXXIV General Chapter of our Congregation, is the so-called text of the *Lineamenta*. Just as for the Synods of the Catholic Church, this is a **preparatory document** in which the themes to be dealt with in the Capitular Assembly are outlined, as the first draft.

Lineamenta is a Latin word that means “*guidelines*”, “*traits*”. They are, therefore, inputs for reflection, the first outline on which to begin the study of the theme of the Chapter. The Lineamenta, by nature, have a wide scope and are intended to provoke reflections, observations and suggestions, first on a personal level, then at the Community and Provincial / Delegation level.

The general Theme is subdivided into **3 thematic areas**, which are, in turn, made up of different paragraphs containing **questions** meant, first of all, to lead to the deepening and personal assimilation of the theme and then, to sharing at various levels.

In spite of the vastness of the theme and its innumerable facets, we hope that these Lineamenta awaken and strengthen in each Sister and in all the Communities, the sense of our charismatic identity and of our mission today and open us to the elaboration of new paths of communion among us, in the Church and for the big Family which is the world. Let us entrust this journey to the Most Holy Trinity, placing ourselves under the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth and of St. Ann, through the intercession of all our Saints.

1. FROM A FAMILY

1.1. It is not good that man should be alone

We can speak on the theme of “family” in our world today from many different angles, with multiple perspectives for reflection which could open up different paths for the journey of our Religious Family. *What feelings, memories... does the word “family” evoke in me?*

Unfortunately our world today encourages the absolute growth of the individual. In this hyper-individual world, the concept of “we” seems to be subjected to the power of the absolute “I”. In general, words like “other”, “family”, “society” and “world”, are used for the sake of convenience, that is, to respond to the needs of the self. Even our families of origin are not left untouched by this tendency and it is a mentality that is creeping into our Religious Communities, which are our families by “vocation”.

In what way do we perceive that we too are subject to the temptations of this individualistic mentality?

Such a mentality is widespread and pervasive, but it does not satisfy the human heart, because in the beginning it was not so in **the plan of God**. As we read in Genesis, after having created everything, God created man and made him king of creation¹, but the creative act of God went further, He considered that ***it was not good for man to be alone!*** He created him in His image and likeness, that is, in the image of Himself who is Trinity of Persons, therefore He made him for **communion**. In fact, He offered him *Eve as his companion, a treasure of grace and purity*: precisely the encounter with another face, with a “thou”, **reflects God’s own love**². Right from birth, the human person is invited to communion and dialogue with God and with others. The vocation to love and to communion is inscribed in the humanity of man and woman³. In

¹ Cf. *Gen* 1:26-31; Carlo T., *The First Man and the Man-God*, in *Called to Happiness*, p. 21.

² Cf. *AL* 12 (*Amoris Laetitia*); Carlo T., *The First Man and the Man-God*, in *Called to Happiness*, p. 21.

³ Cf. *FC* 11 (*Familiaris Consortio*).

this consists the dignity of each one of us. In following this call, lies our responsibility and happiness.

1.2. The Holy Trinity reveals itself as a family

The whole of Scripture, starting from the Old Testament, highlights the figure of a **God of Love** who is Father, because He loves His children and stoops over them to free them, to help them, to save them. He is a God of Love who is also “Mother” because He is always beside His children, and He never abandons them.

The Gospels and all the writings of the New Testament too show us how Jesus continually revealed the Trinitarian Love. We cannot understand God if we separate Him from the relationship of communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: “The Triune God is **a communion of love**, and **the family is its living reflection**. Saint John Paul II shed light on this when he said, «**Our God** in His deepest mystery **is not solitude, but a family**, for He has within Himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. That love, in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit»⁴”.

How do we, as persons and as communities, allow ourselves to be challenged by the Trinitarian Family which is communion of Persons?

By observing and listening to what Jesus said and did, the disciples were led to understand the relationship of the Son with the Father and the mystery of the three Divine Persons. In the same way we too, on the path of following Christ, enter more and more into the mystery of the Trinitarian Life. Mother Enrichetta experienced this in a particularly vivid way. There was in her an untiring search for the Divine Trinity indwelling in her soul, a perception we would say, sensitive to Its presence, because she writes: “...I had within me the Most Holy Trinity...; I never lost sight

⁴ AL 11.

*of the Most Blessed Trinity...; Oh! how vibrant is the devotion that I feel to the Holy Trinity!”⁵. The whole of Mother Enrichetta’s Spiritual Diary is filled with references to the Holy Trinity with **filial and confidential tones**. From her we learn to live in constant dialogue with the three Divine Persons: *total abandonment to the Father, imitation of the Son who gives His life and constant docility to the action of the Spirit*⁶.*

In what way am I growing in the experience of the Trinity indwelling in me?

Is my life of prayer something simply mechanical and devotional, or is it a personal conversation with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

1.3. God sent His Son born of a woman

God wanted to reveal Himself to humankind by being born in a family, and therefore the human family has become an icon of God, an icon of the Trinity, in living interpersonal love and the fruitfulness of love! In the fullness of time, Christ wanted to be born and grow in the bosom of the Holy Family of Joseph and Mary. It is touching to think of this novelty which accompanies the mystery of the birth of the Son of God, through the ‘yes’ of Mary and Joseph, **who recognized in Jesus the work of God**. Their home became a place of unconditional acceptance.

Joseph and Mary, it is said in the Gospel, “brought the child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord”.⁷ With the presentation of Jesus, they acknowledged that their child was a gift of God and belonged to Him. Jesus, for 30 years, knowing He had to be concerned about the things of His Father, remained obedient also

⁵ M. Enrichetta, *I*, p. 234. 251; *IIB*, p. 350.

⁶ Cf. *C* 96.

⁷ *Lk* 2:22.

to Mary and Joseph, and from them He learned to pray, to work, to adhere to the mysterious plan of the Father. In this environment, helped by the testimony and words of His parents, He learnt the religious traditions and those of worship of His people, He lived in obedience to the Holy Scriptures, He came to know the truth about God. “The nuclear family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is for each believer and especially for families an authentic school of the Gospel”⁸.

Which elements of spirituality can we draw from this “school” for our life of relationships?

Like the Holy Family, every Christian family is born and grows on the basis of free and gratuitous relationships, it is a place of love, of self-giving and of transmission of life. The family thus enriches the social and ecclesial community, and the community in turn supports the family in its difficult journey. The family is a domestic Church, the usual place in which to encounter God and build the community of believers.

What values of the Holy Family of Nazareth still hold good today for the families and also for our Communities?

1.4. Born of a family

Faithful to their matrimonial vocation, the Marquises of Barolo were able to interpret the events of life in faith, in the light of God’s Plan. They pursued a “dream”, certainly not easy to be realized, which kept them rooted in hope in any situation, favourable or adverse. Sterility was not a source of disillusionment, but a *pilgrimage of faith* in God, who provides and does not

⁸ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 27 December 2015.

abandon; an *opportunity for growth* in the awareness that God was guiding them; an *experience of Love* made up of presence and reciprocal willingness to “empty oneself”; *willingness to accept* the Cross of Christ, in which every dimension of life becomes a possibility for fruitfulness. This openness of heart brought new life into them in unexpected ways.

Having known how to interpret their journey as a couple, within the Providential Plan of God, the beginning of our Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Ann was made possible on 10th December 1834, within the walls of their own Palace. There we were born, we, who were already in the heart of God and we can well say it, in the heart of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia!

At that moment, something new was born in the Church: a religious Community blossomed within the domestic walls. A couple, Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, became a family, in a harmony of relationships that enriched and enriches many. Our Congregation bears imprinted in its DNA, *being a family and living as a family*: this is the indelible sign of the matrimonial fruitfulness of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia. Focused on God and responding to the then reality, they lived a mission that made them *father* and *mother* of a larger family, that of the little ones and the poor whom they loved and continue to love through the heart of each one of us.

Have I ever thought that the hearts of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia continue to throb through my heart? How can we deepen and enhance this experience?

1.5. Under the protection of a Family

Our Religious Family, which was born in the Church willed by God, is called to live under the loving care of His Providence⁹, the

⁹ Cf. *Const. 1980*, art. 6.

core of its identity. It has been entrusted, not by chance, to St. Ann, *Patroness of the Institute*¹⁰, *model of a mother and educator*¹¹, who teaches us to “to grow daily in humility, prudence, chastity, patience, love of God and in all the virtues of great religious perfection”¹².

Our Founders thus wanted that we have the Family of Saint Ann to look up to as a model to generate and educate other “Marys”. The family of Saints Joachim and Ann was an exceptional one: “In their home, Mary came into the world, accompanied by the extraordinary mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Mary grew up in the home of Joachim and Ann; she was surrounded by their love and faith: in their home she learned to listen to the Lord and to follow His will. Saints Joachim and Ann were part of a long chain of people who had transmitted their faith and love for God, expressed in the warmth and love of family life, down to Mary, who received the Son of God in her womb and who gave Him to the world, to us”¹³.

How do we cultivate our love and filial relationship with the family of Saints Joachim and Ann?

In what way do we carry out our apostolate, in generating and educating others to recognize and accept the presence of God?

1.6. In the Church, our big Family

Pope Francis reminds us that *the Consecrated life blossoms and flourishes in the Church*¹⁴. In fact, “**In the Church** each one of us finds what is needed to believe, to live as Christians, to become holy... we can say that it **is like family life**. In the family, everything

¹⁰ Cf. *Const. 1846*, 217.

¹¹ Cf. *C 11*.

¹² *Const. 1846*, art. 213.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 26 July 2013.

¹⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, *Homily*, 2 February 2019.

that enables us to grow, to mature and to live is given to each of us. We cannot grow up by ourselves, we cannot journey on our own, in isolation; rather, we journey and grow in a Community, in a family. And so it is in the Church!... The Church is Catholic because she is **everyone's home**. Everyone is a child of the Church and in her all find their home..."¹⁵.

Our presence as consecrated persons, which is a living expression and privileged realization of the great Trinitarian communion, is grafted into this communion of the Church, born and gathered as a Family by the Holy Spirit.

For every Religious Institute, being in the Church and for the Church is testified by its ecclesial approval. Our Congregation received it from Pope Gregory XVI in 1846, thanks to the tenacity and tireless work of our Foundress. That was a period in which the Church, with great difficulty would approve new Religious Institutes. Our Institute, instead, was fully approved in a very short time! It is a privilege and a great responsibility, because the Church, in recognizing that *our Institute is an instrument of Divine Providence for the little ones and the poor*, accepts it as one Family, and exhorts it to be faithful to its mission, in the certainty that it will produce abundant fruit¹⁶. This leads us to treasure the gift received in order to give it, in our turn, to those to whom we are sent.

How do we express our gratitude to the Spirit who permitted that our lives come into contact with this Religious Family?

The **sense of the Church** was then, very much alive in our Blessed Mother Enrichetta: *it had strongly penetrated her soul*. Her love for it, her "feeling part" of it, making its sufferings her own, was the fundamental motive of her prayer and self-sacrifice. And she inspired and guided the Sisters along this path, to feel that they

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 9 October 2013.

¹⁶ Cf. C 13.

were a living part of the Church, of that Church which, today, Pope Francis calls ***a field hospital, an outgoing Church, a Church that goes towards the peripheries*** to encounter and welcome new children or to find again those who had been lost along the way... From this same vision, though many decades earlier, a great dream had been born in the heart of Mother Enrichetta: the mission to lands where Christ was still little known, where the Church was daring to take steps in reaching out to the poorest, the marginalized and those rejected by society.

We too, today as before, “in communion with the Church”, are invited by the Spirit to proclaim the Love of Christ to the ends of the world.

Is our passion for the Church such that we bear within us her sufferings, those of the Holy Father and of the Local Church in which we are incorporated?

Living in communion with the other components of the big Ecclesial Family, are we ready, as a Community and as Province/Delegation, to live our life as an ‘outgoing Church’?

2. IN A FAMILY

2.1. Community as *Family*

When we think of our call to be a ***family***, we discover that the experience of our Founders as a couple, is very significant for us, starting from their meeting in Paris, which was casual or perhaps even arranged, but interpreted by Carlo Tancredi and Giulia within the Providential Plan of God and was the beginning of a faithful and happy union. We too find ourselves together in Community, not because we have chosen and wanted it, but because we have been sent there by obedience, “called by the initiative of God”¹⁷.

¹⁷ C 75.

Perhaps we are sometimes tempted to think that certain “arrangements” of communities are not really proper, yet deep down we also know that there is a Providential Plan of God that guides our personal and community history, and we believe that every Sister is a providential gift of God to us.

What is my attitude towards my Community? Do I consider it as my family and relate to the Sisters as “my” sisters?

We are all aware of our weaknesses, and in everyday life there are encounters and conflicts with our Sisters. Yet precisely in Community we find our strength: *we draw from the **Word of God** and the **Eucharist** the capacity to love, forgive and serve*¹⁸.

The **Word of God**, which enlightens and nourishes us daily, is in fact the **principle which unifies the Community in oneness of thought**, beyond our differences of taste and points of view. The **Eucharist**, celebrated and adored every day, is the **Sacrament of Church unity** and community unity for the consecrated person, and the occasion to **renew the commitment of giving one’s life for others** in acceptance and in service¹⁹.

How do we listen to and share the Word of God in the Community? What is our disposition when we enter into the Eucharistic celebrations and when we come out from them?

2.2. Family Spirit

Carlo Tancredi and Giulia were very different from one another: he Piedmontese, she French; he reflective, mild, simple, modest in words; she volcanic, impulsive, attractive, brilliant in conversations. They were very different but **not distant**.

¹⁸ Cf. C 77.

¹⁹ Cf. SAFC 24. 26 (Starting Afresh From Christ).

Dialogue was the secret of their **closeness** and **unity**: every day Carlo Tancredi and Giulia used to meet before lunch and communicate to each other *in a spontaneous manner* what they had experienced. Their life as a couple was nourished and supported by **continuous dialogue** which, despite having as its content normal facts, the usual faces of everyday life, was a **growth in self-communication**, a revealing of one's soul to oneself and to the other. This continuous communication was not a waste of time, it meant putting in common the most beautiful part of oneself. Mother Enrichetta used to say: "*Jesus would like His spouses to love one another with true love, and to have but **one heart and one soul***"²⁰.

Family spirit is made up of simple things like trust, goodness, acceptance, sharing, humour etc. and at the same time it is sustained by a strong **foundation**: the **centrality of Jesus** who is always present in our life and among us. Only "with Jesus at the centre" it is beautiful and possible to nourish our **family spirit** every day, that is, to commit ourselves to cultivate simple, sincere and cordial relationships, to create occasions for joyful fraternity, sustain ourselves in times of trial and feel responsible for one another²¹.

How do we, in Community, make use of the occasions for communication among us?

In what way are the modern means of communication useful for cutting down distances and fostering sharing, instead of being instruments which cause isolation?

To return to a true family spirit means returning to being **happy** and **fruitful communities** also on the vocational level. A community that lives the values of our family spirit becomes a community that **witnesses** and **educates** the new generations.

²⁰ ME, *IIA*, p. 37.

²¹ Cf. *C* 79.

Such a community is a concrete response to the expectations of many young people who, in a fragmented and individualistic world, look for a presence that welcomes, loves, values; a presence that is also demanding while it instills trust and hope, a presence that sheds light on the great choices of life.

Let us try to look at ourselves through the eyes of others:
How do people who approach us, especially the young, perceive our Community?

2.3. Unity in diversity

As spiritual daughters of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, who *with their different personalities and cultural formation, knew how to live in profound conjugal understanding*²², we, Sisters of Saint Ann, are called to live, at the level of the Community, of the Provinces and Delegations and of the Congregation, the great challenge of **interculturality**, which is **unity in diversity**. It must have happened to each one of us, to live alongside Sisters coming from different geographical and cultural contexts, or simply to share daily life with those who have an origin, a temperament and a mentality different from ours.

How has this experience enriched me and enriches me in my human, spiritual and apostolic growth?

Not only our charismatic origins but also the signs of the times, in a world totally globalized, compels us to live **unity in diversity**, which commits us to *accept and integrate in the Community the diversities of character, culture, generation and formation*²³.

This acceptance of diversity is not an end in itself, but is at the **service of the divine plan** of making the whole of humanity the

²² Cf. C 83.

²³ Cf. C 83.

*great family of the children of God*²⁴. “All of you are one in Christ Jesus”²⁵ writes St. Paul to the Galatians, therefore communion in diversity is above all a **baptismal gift** proper to the new life in Christ. It is not a question of our efforts, made with clenched teeth, but it is the gratuitous acceptance of a gift that opens the heart of each one and of our communities to the surprises of God, to the continuous creative innovation of the Holy Spirit.

Good relationships, communication and pleasant living together, although necessary and very important, are not enough. Living unity in diversity drives us, with the power of the Spirit, to go beyond mere tolerance of differences and to live a process of **transformation** and **conversion**. This process leads us to put our different “cultures” in interrelation, in order to give life to a “**new culture**”, **founded on the Gospel and animated by charismatic values**: in it all feel at home, the differences are not cancelled but we try to know them, appreciate them and integrate them. Each one can give the best of herself, share her gifts and be challenged and purified by the encounter with what is “different”. In this “new culture”, every aspect of our “culture of origin” is evangelized.

To journey towards interculturality is a **process**, a **spiritual journey** that becomes a sign of **prophetic hope for humanity**, since to live unity in diversity within our Communities, sets us in motion, not only within, but also outside, to encounter diversity that populates the world around us.

What positive steps has the Province/Delegation taken to foster, within our communities, the growth of unity in diversity?

How do we live openness and interrelatedness with people from other cultures, religions, etc.?

²⁴ Cf. VC 35 (Vita Consecrata).

²⁵ Gal 3:28.

2.4. From the Religious Family to the Spiritual Family

The charismatic experience of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia went beyond the foundation of our Religious Family, it extended to the foundation of the Magdalenes and to the flourishing of numerous works which, in the course of time, also involved priests and many lay persons.

The apostolic strength of the family of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia is, still today, more alive than ever, and their commitment to make the gifts of Baptism fruitful in a journey of sanctity, has brought much fruit in the Church.

There are many ways and means through which the Spirit continues to manifest the fidelity of God who fulfils His work, keeping alive the Charism transmitted through our Founders, giving meaning to the lives of so many children, young people and families, persons of every class, profession and culture.

Here we want to consider in particular the reality of the LASA group²⁶, fruit of the work of the Spirit, who acted through the openness of mind and heart of Sisters who carried out a process of sharing gifts in keeping with the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

In the desire to be faithful to our Rule of Life²⁷, practically in all the Provinces and Delegations, some from many years, others since recent times, there have been some initiatives to approach the laity in order to share our mission with them. What is experienced is a mutual and enriching collaboration. Their presence is a sign of the fruitfulness of our Charism and an incentive to live our consecration and mission faithfully and authentically.

The Church highlights the richness of this “collaboration”, in which it wants that there be an appropriate contact between the

²⁶ LASA (LAY ASSOCIATES OF ST. ANN).

²⁷ Cf. C 30; D 10.

values characteristic of the lay vocation" (e.g. a more concrete perception of the life of the world, of culture, politics, economy, etc.) and the *values characteristic of religious life* (e.g. the radicality of the following of Christ, the contemplative and eschatological dimension of Christian existence, etc.). Through this, a real and enriching **exchange of gifts** takes place²⁸.

The LASA groups are a **gift** for us, but also a **commitment** and a **responsibility**, towards those persons who trust in our Religious Family and depend on it for their spiritual journey, and also towards the Charism itself. In fact, it has been placed in our hands, to be passed on, to find ever new ways and means of being actualized in different times and in different geographical areas.

Let us share the experiences in which we have seen that our Charism, through us, has reached and involved other persons.

What richness are we receiving and values are we learning, from our contact with the laity?

At this moment we do not know where the Spirit wants to lead us, and the experience of collaboration and sharing with the laity has different characteristics and connotations in the various Provinces and Delegations. However, we are certain that openness to a **Spiritual Family**, which shares the Charism of Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, through different ways along the paths of this world of ours, is the **call that the Spirit is making to us today**. We do not want to turn a deaf ear to this call, but to respond to it with the attitude that distinguished Mother Enrichetta in facing new situations: simplicity of **abandonment to God** and **courage** deriving from fidelity to the Charism received.

If we are open to these new ways of God's Plan, our Communities and our Congregation can become a **Family for families**, *a centre radiating outwardly, a spiritual force, a centre of*

²⁸ Cf. *FLC 70* (Fraternal Life in Community).

*animation, of fraternity creating fraternity, and of communion and ecclesial collaboration, where the different contributions of each one help to build up the Body of Christ, which is the Church*²⁹.

3. A Family for Families

3.1. The Human Family in the world today

We, the Sisters of Saint Ann, are a family in Mission, **to the World Family**. Yes, to the Human Family! We are all **globally connected, interconnected** and **interdependent**: economically, socially, culturally, and politically. Let us pause for a while and think of the basic things we need in life: the food on our table, the clothes we wear, the house we live in, the transport we take etc. Begin by considering how we would obtain the essentials—food, water, and power—if supply chains were cut off. This interdependence is not only at the material level but also at the level of relationships! We belong to each other, we need one another. Humankind is a beautiful masterpiece of God’s creation. *“You have made them for a little while lower than the angels”*.³⁰ This macro Human Family is made up of micro Families. Family is the basic unit of the society, the first essential cell of human society. Every family is a family because of relationship that exists among its members and this relationship is based on love, and every member explicitly and implicitly wants to love and to be loved. However, more than ever before, this unit is faced with problems that seem to undermine its very foundations.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should

²⁹ Cf. *FLC* 70.

³⁰ *Heb* 2:7.

*act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood*³¹ states the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. But even after more than seventy years of its issue, this Declaration is still more a dream than reality. Countless human beings continue to the present day to be victims of racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination, marginalization, exploitation, human trafficking and various types of intolerance. These are the serious consequences of the “**throw away culture**”, a disease that is at the root of the injustices that are being perpetuated all over the world and have their devastating effect on the families.

At the same time it is also heartening to see that there have been and are **many right-thinking persons who have done much good** in all parts of the world. Our Founders too were among them. They, in fact, guided by the Spirit and sensitive to the suffering of every person created in the image of God, “*promoted the dignity of the person so that human rights might be upheld. They stooped over human misery in order to eradicate the root of all misfortune*”.³²

What sentiments do these situations provoke in us?

Let us listen to the world news, read journals etc. to enter into and understand better the present world scenario of suffering humanity.

How many families around us are also wounded, vulnerable, due to oppressive family traditions, the scourge of the **sexual abuse** of minors which has been a widespread phenomenon in all cultures and societies, especially within families and in various institutions! We are certainly aware of Pope Francis’ Motu Proprio, “**Vos estis lux mundi**”, (published on 9th May 2019), which establishes new procedures for reporting sexual abuse and violence.

³¹ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 20 July 1998, Art. 1.

³² Cf. C 6.

We are invited to commit ourselves to read this document attentively in order to understand how to intervene when we come to know of such cases and to inform ourselves about the norms of the Local Church on this matter.

The Church's concern is focused especially on the victims of sexual abuse, those fleeing from war, violence, political or religious persecution, from natural disasters including those caused by climate change, and from extreme poverty. These persons need particular help requiring closeness, compassion and support towards healing.

Today there are families that **have migrated** or displaced, from their villages, States and Countries to other places for various reasons. The Bible itself is a story of migration; an exodus of generations. *“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt”*,³³ and Jesus too, while still a baby, went through this experience because of Herod. In fact, the Gospel describes the concern of Joseph who, warned by the Angel took the child and his mother, and fled to Egypt.³⁴ The experience of leaving one's country or village is at the very root of the history of our own Congregation. *All Piedmont smiled at Giulietta and although naturally fond of her native land, she had an equal affection for the land of her husband and more to that, gave to Piedmont her predilection.*³⁵ So also Mother Enrichetta's family, when their father left them, went to live in another locality.³⁶ Many of our families too may have experienced this phenomenon in various ways with its positive and negatives consequences. And in our mission, we find ourselves dealing with people and families who come from places different from ours.

³³ *Ex* 22:21

³⁴ Cf. *Mt* 2:13

³⁵ Silvio Pellico, *La Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*, 1864, p. 4.

³⁶ Cf. M. Enrichetta, *I*, p. 78-79.

How do our attitude and the expressions “we” and “they” affect our apostolate?

3.2. The challenges faced by families

Innumerable are the **challenges** to which the families are subjected today, in a world that is in continuous and rapid transformation.

These challenges can be **from within**: like personality types, expectations, behaviour, seeking one’s own pleasure and realization, various forms of addictions and so on... which can affect relationships to the point that the commitment of exclusivity and stability proper to matrimony, ends up by being destroyed³⁷: *“We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop”*.³⁸ Therefore, complex situations are increasing in the world: broken families, extended families, de facto couples or same-sex unions³⁹. The weakest persons pay the consequences: the young uprooted and the elderly abandoned, children who are orphans of living parents, adolescents and young adults confused and unsupported⁴⁰.

Then there are challenges **from without**: like social demands, political ideologies, social media, economic issues (poverty, unemployment etc.), conflicts of faith and beliefs and so on... which pose challenges to a serene living of family life. Unfortunately, the Family does not seem to be valued in a world governed by economics and technology, power and efficiency. Materialism,

³⁷ Cf. AL 33-34.

³⁸ AL 39.

³⁹ Cf. AL 52.

⁴⁰ Cf. AL 51.

consumerism, commercialism are affecting the very fibre of family life.

In the present day world there is no stereotype of a family, but rather “**a challenging mosaic**” made up of many different realities, with all their joys, tragedies and dreams. Even the problems about which we are concerned are challenges which are a test for our educational service and stimulate us to missionary creativity⁴¹.

Which are the specific challenges faced by the families in the places where we live and work?

What initiatives have we or other Institutes taken to meet these challenges?

3.3. Our Mission urges us to be at the service of Families

Our Founders, who being themselves a pious couple and having lived in good Christian families, with the joys and sorrows of daily life, were not only able to understand, but **actively involved themselves in the sufferings and struggles of the poor families**.⁴² Parents left their children alone to go in search of work, where they were exploited and paid unjustly. Carlo Tancredi and Giulia, before such a pathetic situation, welcomed the little ones abandoned to themselves and opened their hearts and their home! Yes, they offered their lives for the families, for the future of the families, to build happy families!

Carlo Tancredi writes: *“To have a true picture of this impossibility (the inability of the poor parents to attend to the education of their infants), let us enter, at dawn, into the miserable dwelling of a poor family, on one of those laborious days during the*

⁴¹ Cf. AL 57.

⁴² Cf. Col 1:24.

*long winter season, when their life is very difficult because of poverty”.*⁴³

*Let us continue reading the above text about the dwelling of a poor family. With this vision, **we visit three poor families** in our vicinity and share this and other experiences of service rendered to the families in various ways like visits, assistance, counselling, accompaniment etc.*

Carlo Tancredi, as Mayor and Decurion of the city of Turin, made an accurate analysis of the situation of misery in which the poor class found itself. He indicated pauperism and illiteracy as the two main sores of the society of his time and began to think that it was not enough to have recourse to “welfarism” in order to banish poverty, a more profound intervention was needed which gave to the most needy social class the means to rise from such a state.

The **socio-educational work of our Founders** in favour of the families, the little ones and the youth were carried out on two fronts: to relieve from misery with immediate interventions, like distribution of food, wood, clothes, alms, medicine and to facilitate self-promotion through instruction and professional qualification.

We are wonderstruck by the lives of our beloved Founders; the Spirit called them, led them and sent them, making them “a particular sign of His love for humanity”.

In fidelity to the Charism, we too receive from the Spirit the strength *to carry out our service and the light necessary for discerning the ways of the Lord, in the signs of the times, to become prophetic witnesses in a world that is in continuous change.*⁴⁴

With the power that comes from the Spirit we are enabled to address the challenges faced by families, inspired also by the

⁴³ Carlo Tancredi, *On Education of Early Childhood among the Poor Class*, in *Called to Happiness*, p. 86.

⁴⁴ Cf. C 39.

“Saints” of our Institute. In doing so, we participate in the plan God has for His people, and **collaborate with the Church in serving the domestic Church**, the families for their happiness and salvation, because a healthy family means a healthy Church and a healthy society. We, as Sisters of St. Ann, approach families as a mystery, therefore, we approach them and serve them with reverence, respect, a positive attitude and with a disposition that we have much to learn from them. We accompany them with humility, love and acceptance.

How does our Community make a study of the needs of the territory where we are placed? How does the Community discern ways and means to assist the families in the challenges they face today?

3.4. With a Missionary heart to the peripheries of the world

Jesus calls us to continue to journey to where He is most needed. *“We don’t walk alone or comfortably, but we walk with a heart that does not rest, that does not close in on itself but beats to the rhythm of a journey undertaken together with all the people faithful to God”*.⁴⁵

Moreover, Pope Francis repeatedly urges us to **go to the existential peripheries** of our modern world. *“The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery”*.⁴⁶

This longing to go out to the peripheries of prison walls, dirty narrow streets and homes to console and help the poor, we see it

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 24 Oct. 2016.

⁴⁶ Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, *To the pre-conclave General Congregation of the Cardinals*, 9 March 2013.

clearly present in the lives and writings of our Founders: *“May true charity never tire of delving with loving concern into every smallest or most disgusting misfortune of the human condition”*.⁴⁷ *“Good God! In your name I will go to change the tears of desperation into those of sweet hope”*.⁴⁸ We know how Mother Enrichetta, even as a young girl, was aflame with the love of Christ which she desired to spread in the whole world with missionary zeal. *“Goodness! Infinite goodness of my God! I would like to reach all the most remote parts of the world in order to make known to all human creatures how great, immense and infinite is Your paternal goodness!”*.⁴⁹

As Sisters of St. Ann, we too are called to go to the peripheries and spread the Gospel with a missionary heart, bearing witness with our life and works that Christ loves and saves every person.⁵⁰ **“To keep our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts”**.⁵¹

At this point, let me reflect and introspect and ask myself: am I, like our Founders and Mother Enrichetta, a spirit filled, witnessing evangelizer ready to go out to the growing existential peripheries with a heart aflame with God’s love?

For our Community, what are the peripheries that call us to prophetic action, today?

⁴⁷ Carlo Tancredi, *On Education of Early Childhood among the Poor Class*, in *Called to Happiness*, p. 90-91.

⁴⁸ Giulia Di Barolo, *La sera*, in *Con gli occhi del cuore*, p. 239.

⁴⁹ M. Enrichetta, *I*, p. 353.

⁵⁰ Cf. C 38.

⁵¹ EG 262, 280 (Evangelii Gaudium).

The Church is “*missionary by nature. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity; she exists in order to evangelize*”.⁵² The proclamation of the Good News, to the ends of the world “by attraction”, calls for hearts that are open and expanded by love.

In fact, our Religious Family right from the early decades has lived this healthy tension towards universality when in the year 1850, our Foundress Giulia sent the Sisters out of the State of Piedmont, founding the Community of Castelfidardo which was in the Pontifical State, and Mother Enrichetta in 1871 sent the first missionary Sisters to India. So for them, State, national and continental frontiers were not barriers to the expansion of the Institute and our Sisters courageously accepted the challenge of entering into other cultures with different languages and religions. This missionary dimension of our Congregation was given further impetus by our Superiors General from the 1970s onwards, through the opening of new missions in different countries and Sisters opting for missions. This missionary thrust continues and will continue in fidelity to the Charism of our Institute.

As a Community we reflect and write down concrete ways to keep alive the zeal for the missions, opt for work of evangelization in our missions ad intra and extra.

The Church has always promoted many initiatives and above all prayer, the soul of all missionary activity, to announce Christ to the ends of the world. This year (2019) Pope Francis has designated an **Extraordinary Missionary Month** for October on the theme “*Baptized and Sent: The Church of Christ on Mission in the World*”.⁵³

Let us use the means that the Church and the Congregation put at our disposal to keep the flame of missionary spirit alive in our hearts and in our everyday life and apostolate. Reading of the lives

⁵² EN 14 (Evangelii Nuntiandi).

⁵³ Cf. <http://www.october2019.va/en.html>.

of Saints, Martyrs and Missionaries, in particular of our own Missionary Sisters, will revive our ardour for the missions. [Lives worth noting, Rome, 26 July 2002; Memories to Cherish, (India, 2016)].

3.5. The World Family in the Common Home

The **World Family** has a **common home**, which “is like **a sister** with whom we share our life and **a beautiful mother** who opens her arms to embrace us”.⁵⁴ Mother Enrichetta had a great respect for nature. She loved birds to the extent of suffering when they died. Most of all she loved flowers and spent every bit of her time attending them.⁵⁵ As a child, she already developed what we call today an environment-friendly and eco-friendly life. Our Founders too loved nature, they were concerned about creating a healthy environment for the integral growth of the children in the Kindergarten and also strived hard to offer a dignified ambience to the prisoners and the poor. Carlo Tancredi, through his political commitments, also did his best to ensure that Turin be a healthy and beautiful city, liveable for all.

This “sister” earth now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our **irresponsible use and abuse of the goods** with which God has endowed her. The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: *“Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest”*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *LS* 1 (Laudato Si’).

⁵⁵ Cf. M. Enrichetta, *I*, p. 84.

⁵⁶ *LS* 48.

What concrete steps are taken at the level of the Community and in the places where we carry out the apostolate to protect our common home?

Pope Francis urges the world's 1.2 billion Catholics and all people of good will to take urgent action on climate change to lift the planet's most vulnerable populations. His encyclical letter "***Laudato Si'***" is a compelling call **to care for our common home**, and to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.⁵⁷ We are called to an ecological conversion, to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, to be protectors of God's handiwork. Not to ignore the wounds of nature but be responsible in the mission that God has entrusted to us, to work and protect the garden in which He has placed us.

*It would be useful to read again the encyclical **Laudato Si'** individually or in common to create more awareness in us and in others for an urgent need to live the Eco spirituality and ecological conversion to protect our mother Earth.*

An individual Sister's dedication to this cause is contagious to the community and the ripple effect spreads to the society at large. My **ecological conversion** can be achieved also by living the **vow of poverty** responsibly through moderate usage of all things, including the modern gadgets, saving water and energy, reducing wastage etc.

What is my personal commitment to safeguard the common home so that it can be a peaceful and healthy dwelling place for all the families?

⁵⁷ Cf. LS 19.

Conclusion

The theme **family** was developed here, starting from its “theological” origins in the very bosom of the Trinity, which is a “Family” of persons; it then went on to illustrate how our Congregation, which was born in the Church from a family, lives like a family and is destined for families; and it finally came to the consideration of what the World Family and especially the families of the world present to us today, as a challenge and an incentive for carrying out our mission.

We are certain that this text will have generated interesting reflections, other questions and motives for sharing. All this makes our journey as a Congregation alive, strengthening our union with God, communion among us and our effective involvement in the contemporary world.

From the collection of the reactions, responses, suggestions and further provocations and from all the material that will come from the Provincial Chapters and Delegation Chapter Assemblies, we will arrive - through the Pre-capitular Commission - at the drawing up of the *Instrumentum laboris* that will be the text which the General Chapter will work upon.

