

General Chapter 2024



Society of the
Sacred Heart of Jesus

Opening Conference

Before beginning this opening conference, I want to personally thank each one of you for your prayer and support for the Society, for our colleagues and friends around the globe, for our team and for me, during these last eight years, especially during these last four years as we lived through the pandemic, a chaotic world situation and my diagnosis with cancer. I want to express special gratitude to my team and to the Motherhouse community for the innumerable ways they have supported our mission and me. I have experienced all of us being in the hands of God, like the disciples in the boat with Jesus in the middle of a storm, like God's people walking through the desert, rediscovering the tender mercy of our God along the way and the POWER OF THE SPIRIT among us.

SO WE BEGIN IN HUMBLE GRATITUDE. Welcome to the Opening of the XXXVII General Chapter of the Society of the Sacred Heart 2024. We are here 72 women representing 41 countries, with multiple nationalities and cultures, gathered in Nemi in this ecclesial act. We are happy to be joined by our sisters from around the globe as we enter this sacred moment in the life of the Society, with our faithful facilitators, Piluca Benavente and Begoña Martínez, and our brother and friend, Father General Arturo Sosa of the Society of Jesus.

It is a special joy to have our dedicated staff with us here or supporting us remotely from Rome and across the globe. Special thanks to all who work with our sisters in our ministries, communities and care homes for making it possible for us to be together in this way.

We are gathered as One Body to open a new chapter in our life. Those of us in this room and those of us who are part of this opening from around the world come together as women consecrated by our charism TO GLORIFYING THE HEART OF JESUS, letting ourselves be transformed by His Spirit, to live united and conformed to Jesus Christ, and through our love and service to radiate the love of His Heart in our world today (Constitutions §4).

Today is a celebration of the Society's life and mission and so let us pause for a moment in silent prayer.

- Let us remember and thank God for all the women who have answered this same call over the last 224 years, beginning with Sophie and her companions who knelt before this image of Mary and consecrated themselves to a life and mission, centered in the Heart of Jesus.
- Let us, like them, place ourselves under the care of Mary, Mother of the Church, asking her to teach us how to journey with Jesus, holding on to the essentials as she did and knowing when to let go.
- Let us thank God for what we have received and learned from those who have pilgrimed through the deserts of their times, upon whose shoulders we stand.
- Let us pray for ourselves and for those who will come after us, that we will deepen and strengthen our call to this same mission, in the Spirit of Sophie, always responding to the needs of the times in which we live.

Today as we mark a new moment in our salvation history, it is important to recall the questions we grappled with during the General Chapter of 2016, the questions we have continued to explore and discern over the last eight years.

Who is God calling us to be?

What is God calling us to do?

These questions called us to follow in the steps of Philippine, to venture forward in what we named “the Rebecca moment”. We committed ourselves to launch into unknown territory for the sake of our mission. We have tried to cross frontiers, to live more humanly in the humble and radical style of Jesus, to deepen our contemplation and cultivate silence in our lives and to become more truly One Body. This experience, lived in the midst of an extraordinary world crisis and the painful situations of our people, led us into the desert, a place where we recognized our vulnerability and insecurity, a place of painful but also deep learning.

All of us have actively explored these two key questions and each of us has spent hours, I am sure, studying the responses to the many processes, gatherings, tents of encounters, that shape the content and matter for this general chapter. Our commitment and that of our friends and colleagues to the Society’s vitality and mission, has been an amazing experience of the power of the fire of love – a Pentecost moment! It is not by chance that our own synodal discernment coincides with Pope Francis’ call of God’s people into a new way of being church. This way of living a chapter is our synodal act.

With what attitude are we called to come to this gathering

The desert experience gave us the theme for this chapter - COURAGE, CONFIDENCE, and TRANSFORMATION, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT. Are we going to allow ourselves as a body to be transformed? How is the fire of the Spirit giving us new energy and, at the same time, the courage to let burn things that we need to let go of? Will we give direction for a future that is truly “of the Spirit”, not for our own sake or for survival, but to live our mission for the sake of God’s people in a continual process of transformation, to live our vocation as religious women in the church?

I am beginning to understand more deeply that the greatest gift we received from Sophie is the dynamic of contemplation. Gazing on the pierced Heart of Jesus in LIFE, we, like Sophie, are called in our moment in the history of salvation, to root all that we are, all of our decisions and actions and our commitment to serve God’s people through our service of education in this dynamic of active and creative love. As we enter into this chapter, I invite us to practice this attitude of contemplation. As we discern our future together and the choices we need to make, we must hold in our hearts before God, the faces of our people – joyful and suffering; the beauty of our earth and each of our homelands as well as so much destruction caused by greed and thoughtless choices; our own strengths of generosity and love and our weaknesses which have caused wounds; the richness of our many cultures and our inability to live in a truly intercultural way; the energy of the gospel and the chaos of our world; a longing for stability and security and a recognition that we are called to be an itinerant people.

Our responsibility as a Chapter

I invite each RSCJ throughout the world to participate in this 37th General Chapter through prayer and attention to what will happen during these days. It is a sacred moment, a privilege and a responsibility.

I invite each of us here, chosen by our provinces as a delegate or because we hold a position of leadership in the Society, to be truly present. Our task as chapter members is clearly articulated in the section of the Constitutions on governance. If you have not read this recently, please take some time today to reread it to remind yourself why and how we are here.

Like Sophie and her companions and the women who have come before us, we are called to assess the state of our congregation both within the provinces and at the general level, to thoughtfully set the agenda of the Society for the next eight years and to elect a new leader for the congregation and recommend those women who will work together with her as a team for the sake of our mission and life. We are here to choose and nurture LIFE in a contemplative and discerning way, with a focus on the world in which we live, the needs of the present moment and, as best as we possibly can, how we foresee living out our mission into the future.

As we entered this room, we removed our shoes as Moses did when he encountered God in the burning bush on the mountain-top. Today we enter into a sacred space, a place of encounter with God and with each other. Like Sophie and her companions and the women who came before us, we are called to an awesome, potentially transforming responsibility. We must set aside our individual and province preferences and become part of the One Body, listening to the Spirit, in order to choose and nurture LIFE, in response to the cries of the poor and the needs our times.

The agenda of this General Chapter

Over the last eight years, RSCJ and thousands of our companions in mission have participated in our discernment about walking into the future together. Through a communal journey of spiritual conversations and discerning communities, cross-cultural exchange through technology, group presentations, tents of encounter and discussions on various themes core to our life, and, most importantly, the spiritual journey we have all been invited to participate in, the Society has strengthened its international bonds in a synodal way. These global conversations were enriched by the work of commissions and committees, many of which were initiated during the last General Chapter. Work on vocations, young adults, international volunteers, our educational mission, JPIC, On-Going Formation, Finance, Investments generously provided new insights and resources and have contributed to creating the foundations of this Chapter.

The suffering we experienced together as a community through the pandemic, helped us recognize our vulnerability and also strengthened our commitment to the One Body that is the Society. Despite COVID, we engaged in a variety of processes culminating in the Special Chapter of 2021. The Society's discernment continued in an Assembly of Provincials and

through the International Planning process. We owe a debt of gratitude to the International Planning Commission and the various planning groups that preceded them, for their thoughtful and hard work, for their creativity, transparency and diligence in leading us to the place we are today.

Now we are taking the next step in our communal discernment process.

- To evaluate the progress of the Society since the last General Chapter and to give direction to the Society for the next eight years.
- To confirm the reorganization of the congregation and identify the steps we need to take to make this plan a reality.
- To explore how our Apostolic Priorities will guide us in responding to the needs of our time and become a guiding force for our choices as a congregation
- To determine new ways to share the congregation's resources (human and financial) among and across provinces in a spirit of justice and equity for all and in support of our Apostolic Priorities
- To elect a new superior general and recommend her leadership team.

Finally, I would like to share a few thoughts about the "mountains we need to climb" as a congregation to go forward as one body. They relate to the theme of this chapter which has shaped our agenda - courage, confidence and transformation, through the power of the Spirit. I put them in the form of 'how' questions because we already know the answers to the 'why' questions.

- How do we find the courage to recognize the real issues we need to address to live as a truly intercultural community within our New Provinces and among the One Body that is the Society?
- How do we help each other to have the courage and confidence to continue to identify and cross the "frontiers" that unconsciously separate us from each other (culture, class, race, old wounds...) and prevent us from being the One Body that Sophie treasured as essential.
- How do we learn to live prayerfully, peacefully, creatively and dynamically as an itinerant and ever-changing community called to contemplate the reality of our times in the pierced Heart of Jesus and respond through the power of the Spirit?

So let us begin this Chapter by placing ourselves as Sophie and her companions did more than 200 years ago, before Mary, woman of faith among the people of God, first woman of the church, first formator of Jesus.

Let us ask her to teach us the way to be united more deeply to her Son, to discover anew the way to radiate the love of Jesus in our world today.

Let us see ourselves as we are, apostles of the 21st century gathered in a Pentecost experience with Mary and Jesus.

Let us be open to the power of the Spirit, listening carefully to the Word of God present among us through the diverse voices of our sisters and those who join us in the mission we proclaim to discover and reveal the love of the Heart of Jesus in this blessed and broken world.

Barbara Dawson, RSCJ

Superior General

August 1, 2024

THE LIVED PROCESS



Symbols offered by each province to travel the journey during Chapter 2024.

*If you could see the journey whole,
you may never undertake it,
might never dare the first step
that propels you from the place you
have known
towards the place you know not.*

*Call it one of the mercies of the road:
that we see it only by stages
as it opens before us,
as it comes into our keeping,
steap by single step.*

*Each choice creates the road
that will take you to the place
where at least you will kneel
to offer the gift more needed
before turning to go back home
by another way.*

(Adapted from Jan Richardson, "For those who still have a way to go" from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*)

The Journey from General Chapter of 2016 to the General Chapter of 2024

Since the General Chapter of 2016, the entire Society has been aboard the *Rebecca*¹ on a journey into the unknown, seeking to answer two fundamental questions: **Who is God calling us to be? And what is God calling us to do in this world?** We undertook this journey using a model of communal discernment (U - process), through which we were invited, as a body, to enter into communal discernment, with an open mind, heart and will. This discernment strengthened our "Cor unum et anima una in corde Jesu", and breathed vitality and agility into our mission and our lives.

¹ The Rebecca was the ship which carried Philippine Duchesne and her companions to the "New World".



*The path travelled with its lights and shadows.
Created by Lee, Su Ki.*

During these last eight years, we have been living the four calls of the 2016 General Chapter: to reach new frontiers, to live more humanly, to create silence and to be and act as one Body. Together, we have dreamed of a Society capable of meeting the challenges of an ever-changing world. At the 2018 JPIC conference in the Philippines, we felt the call to become “artisans of hope” in a world both blessed and broken. This journey led us to the Special Chapter in 2021 where, together, we began to discern new ways of organizing ourselves.

By the end of this Chapter, we made the following decisions and recommendations.

- That the new organization of the Society will be made up of new entities that are smaller than regions but larger than the provinces.
- The apostolic axes (education, formation, spirituality and JPIC) will be incorporated into this organization.
- To progress the plans for the re-organization of the Society, we asked the General Council to appoint an international planning commission.
- We identified the need to develop a plan for putting our resources in common.

The Assembly of Provincials in Malaga in December 2022 confirmed the need for a revitalization of mission through what now became known as the Apostolic Priorities and affirmed youth as an explicit and visible option within each Apostolic Priority. We developed the next step in the reconfiguration of provinces.

In Malaga, the provincials also expressed the hope that all members of the Society could prepare together for General Chapter 2024 by following a spiritual journey, inspired by our Constitutions and our charism.

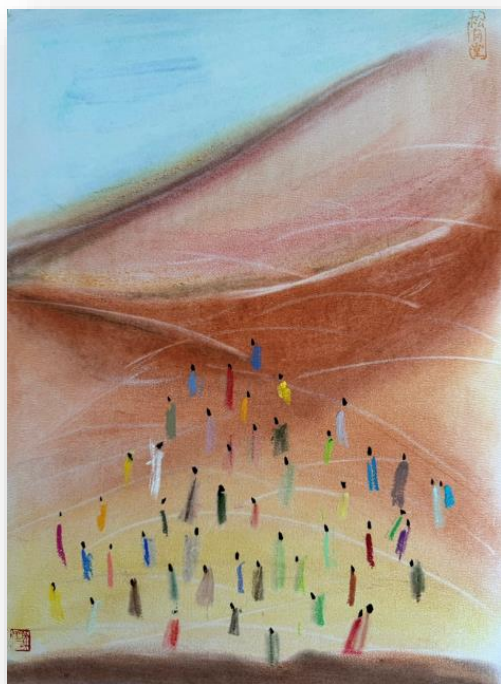
We recognized that reorganization requires a new approach to governance and leadership on the part of all members of the Society. It involves greater co-responsibility, flexibility and the practice of synodality. We have been invited through these years to change our thinking, our mental models and our ways of doing things.

Although we have been moving in the same direction, we have not always moved at the same pace. Throughout this process, we have also encountered resistance, pain and moments of desolation. At the same time, we have opened up spaces of reconciliation and hope. We have been called to make sacrifices, to let go and embrace a new life, convinced that the world needs our charism and our mission now, more than ever.

General Chapter 2024

Each one of us arrived at General Chapter 2024 filled with immense gratitude for what the Lord has accomplished in and through us and our mission partners on a journey characterized by dialogue and discernment. As the Chapter progressed, we felt with deep certainty that we were living a moment of renewal.

God goes before us (Ex 13:21-22)



*The Society's journey through the desert.
Created by Lee, Su Ki*

During our pilgrimage together, we realized like the people of the Exodus, that we are not walking alone: God is walking with us, and Sophie and Philippine are also accompanying us along with the entire Sacred Heart family.

The opening of the Chapter was marked by a ritual of the washing of hands and the symbolic gesture of entering a sacred space barefooted and putting on new sandals. These gestures took on a profound meaning. Leaving behind our status as provincial delegates, we transitioned into becoming capitulants, committed to the interests of the entire Society, embracing a collective vision, and guided by a spirit of service and shared responsibility.

The theme of this General Chapter 2024, **"Courage, Confidence and Transformation through the Power of the Spirit"**, guided us

through a journey of three important moments: **confidence / trust and risk; courage and vulnerability; transformation and evolution.**

As we entered the Chapter process, we focused on **trust and risk**. Trust is essential to our capacity to take risks and to move forward together. Building trust requires a willingness to relinquish a certain amount of control, to accept a certain amount of vulnerability in our relationships. These actions help to cultivate a culture of trust where each voice, even the quietest, is heard within our community.

We camp and open our tents (Num 2:1)

There was a time when pilgrims walked without maps, following the stars. On our pilgrimage we identify with the people who look to signs in the sky as a reference to where we are going. The Society is evolving, and we need to discover how the Spirit of God is leading us into the future. With this intention, we listened to the reports of the General Council and the Treasurer General, we considered the Congregational Study and the synthesis of the reports from the provinces. In these days, we also listened to presentations from the International Planning Commission and the International Commissions on JPIC, Education, Volunteers and Vocations. All these presentations and reports helped us to be aware of how much the Society has evolved over the last eight years and how much is still to be done!



Enlarging the space in our tents to have synodal conversations.

The International Education Commission presented the document, "Sophie's Gift – Our call to the future", which articulated our current understanding of the philosophy of Sacred Heart Education for all our ministries. It was presented to the Chapter for ratification and in a spirit of great joy, the Chapter unanimously approved it, because the unifying and encouraging spirit of this document roots us in our charism.

Like the people in the desert, we unfolded the tarpaulins of our tents and set up camp as New Provinces. Each tent of encounter became a welcoming space where people came to know more about one another's cultures, shared history, our treasure and our dreams for the future.

The SWOT² prepared by each New Province helped us to have a picture of the body that we are today and how we feel called to continue moving forward. We admired the creativity in the journey of each New Province and although the pace of our progress is different, the will to move forward was clearly visible.

We make room for grace

On our way to being One Body we need to dialogue about points that are sensitive to us. Our conversations at the Chapter focused on loss and grief, identity and belonging, power and equity.

² SWOT analysis is a tool used to help organisations and projects identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to facilitate strategic planning and decision-making.

During these days, we talked about our losses and the grief that this causes us. We will need to mourn what we let go of to create space for new life.



*Making room for grace by embracing our vulnerabilities
and diving deep into our being.*

The conversations about identity and belonging allowed us to experience a space of grace to explore our differences, without fear of being judged or excluded. Each of us is responsible for creating this space where every person and every culture feels "at home". It is an opportunity to heal the wounds we have caused one other and to nurture new relationships.

Our conversations about power and equity helped us to honestly express our experience of inequity and to unite our intention to take the necessary steps to live more justly, especially as we put our resources in common.

We discovered that **courage goes hand in hand with vulnerability**. We are not perfect; we are wounded, and it is our condition as wounded women that makes us capable of embracing our vulnerability and the vulnerability of our world. The image of kintsugi³ art invited us to discover the beauty of imperfection, to live resilient, authentic lives.

Some capitulants expressed the hope that we can go through this same process in the New Provinces, welcoming our fragility, recognizing our prejudices and stereotypes and healing past wounds. Discovering the blessings of mutual acceptance enabled us to experience transformation and helped us to go on building the future of the Society together.

God calls us to be human and humble, to be women of communion, to leave our "perfect offerings"⁴, to live in reciprocity, to care for one another, and to allow ourselves to be helped. In the Gospel we contemplate the Jesus who was capable of living interdependence, and, like him we desire to walk with others and believe in others.

³ The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer and powdered gold.

⁴ From the song Anthem by Leonard Cohen

Sometimes we forget that our small Society was born in a time of great vulnerability and with many imperfections. In those beginnings, marked by a wounded context, Sophie gave us the gift of our “Cor Unum”. There is an invitation to rediscover in our history the wisdom of those who preceded us and to recognize that today this same wisdom sustains us through all the changes that we are experiencing as a Society.

We are united as one people (Ex 19:8)



A flock of starlings. Starlings are birds that move in the same direction as a whole, contracting and expanding, rising, descending and changing direction while maintaining a compact shape.

The journey we followed prepared our hearts as a community of believers and women of hope so that we could confirm the decision made by the Assembly of Provincials in Malaga in December 2022, to create eight New Provinces

Together we deepened our trust in God even further and prayed for the grace to choose and “let go”. We also acknowledged that in making this decision we are stepping out in faith into the unknown as our new way of organizing develops.

The decision to confirm the structure of eight New Provinces was passed unanimously by the General Chapter. An atmosphere of joy filled the Chapter room as in a spirit of great gratitude, we recognized the journey since General Chapter 2016 which has brought us to this point. This confirmation of our new governance structure marked the fulfilment of an important stage on our journey towards building the One Body.

Our celebrations continued the following morning as we joined three other religious congregations for an audience with Pope Francis. The Pope focused his discourse on three points: discernment, formation and charity. He reminded us to “keep the faces of the poor ever before you, and, mindful of them to seek to fan into flame the spirit of gratuitousness and selfless love that marked the beginnings of your presence in the Church”. (Pope Francis 12.08.24)

Now the people get ready (Ex 23:20)

To help the New Provinces to implement and transition to this new structure, the Chapter began to identify a common vision, values and guidelines. We also gave serious consideration to the recommendation from the Committee on Governance⁵ for an Advisory Council to work with the General Council. We studied additional ways to support the development of the Apostolic Priorities across our new structures. Mindful of the need to support and sustain the mission of the One Body through our *Cor Unum*, the Chapter also began to explore together in greater depth a way of putting in common our resources that is equitable and just.



Looking to live in a more just and equitable way.

God, you tell me: lead this people (Ex 33:12)

We cannot do this alone (Ex 18:18)

As we prepared for the election of a new Superior General, we reflected on the themes of **transformation and evolution**. Transformation and evolution are two intertwined forces that shape the cosmos, life, and human consciousness. They represent a dynamic of gradual change, slow and adaptative processes and growth. The image of the river travelling different landscapes from the source to the sea, spoke powerfully of the connection between the “what” and the “why”. of our relationship with God and our call as women of faith.

⁵ Committee on Governance: Barbara Dawson, RSCJ, Imma de Stefanis, RSCJ (IPC link), Mary Wright (IBVM-canon lawyer)



We recognized that in each of us there is a deep well, a source where God dwells. Sometimes the well is blocked with stones and gravel and God is hidden. In the same way, with our disordered attachments and resistances we prevent ourselves experiencing and responding to God's love. This experience reminds us of the words of Madeleine Sophie: "In each one of us there is a spring, sometimes it's hidden under the bad weeds; all we have to do is remove them and the clear, limpid spring will spring up again".⁶

We prayed for the grace of inner freedom, recognizing that God is our source and final destination.

We also prayed with the words of Jesus in Mk 11:2-3: Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them: "*Go to the village in front of you, and as soon as you enter, you'll find a colt tied up that no one in the world has ever ridden. **Untie it**, and if anyone says to you: What are you doing there? Say: **The Lord needs it**, and he'll send it back here right away*". (Jerusalem Bible)

This gospel passage invited us to be open to the call to serve. It was in this context and atmosphere of personal and communal discernment that the process for the election of the Superior General began.



"Untie it. The Lord needs it."

The Chapter called the new Superior General to this service and following the election, the capitulants contributed to her discernment in the selection of her Council by submitting nominations and motivations.

⁶ Madeleine Sophie Barat. Conference LXIX "Need of the Holy Spirit. Its effects on the soul". Pentecost 1847, General Archives of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

See how our God carries us the whole way (Dt 1,31)

Prior to the election, we had made an important decision regarding the model for the residence of the General Council. While the Society is engaged in a period of significant change and transition, the Chapter agreed that a certain stability at the general level is essential. Therefore, after careful discernment we affirmed that the General Council should continue to live together in Rome.

After the election, we engaged in conversations on the **Apostolic Priorities, Governance, Formation and to put our resources in common**. Following a synodal pathway, which aims to foster a lived experience of deep listening, discernment, participation and co-responsibility, we imagined the Society in the future and what could help us to realize our dreams in each of these important areas.

Courage! Our God is with us every step we take (Joshua 1:9)

In responding to the calls of General Chapter 2016, we **were** engaged in a communal discernment as we searched to answer the questions: **Who is God calling us to be? And what is God calling us to do in this world?** During this General Chapter 2024, in the space we made for grace, we realized that God is calling us to renew our *Cor Unum*. We are called as RSCJ and partners in mission to a stronger identity rooted in charism and expressed through the prophetic, holistic vision of mission in and through the Apostolic Priorities.

Our deepened understanding of charism and identity inspires us to live our shared mission through revitalized governance structures and putting our resources in common.



"Transmission". Thinking about the transmission of the Chapter, as well as our charism. A call for each of us to become this flame that is transmitted from the flame of Sophie's candle.

Created by Sophie Maille, RSCJ. August 27, 2024

At this Chapter, through our international and intercultural encounters, we created spaces for dialogue which helped us to recognize in a more profound way, our shared humanity. We showed each other that the dreams we have for peace, reconciliation and communion can be realized. As we move forward in our journey towards our New Provinces, we call each other to embrace the values of dialogue, co-responsibility, collaboration, transformation and equity.

Responding from the depths of our relationship with Jesus and attentive to the urging of the Spirit, we flow like a river from this Chapter into the sea of the Society's mission, firmly committed to working for the transformation of our world by revealing the Love of the Heart of Jesus to all creation.

As women apostles of the 21st century, God is calling us to move with people who are on the move. People carrying enormous grief, who are looking for peace, for bread, who must learn other languages and immerse themselves in other cultures. In solidarity, we can create spaces for them and with them, together sharing in a journey towards equity and justice for all.

We act with hope, courage, and confidence because we know that transformation is ultimately the work of the Spirit of God.



Flowing with purpose, by Kelsey Fagan

**DECISIONS
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Governance at the Service of Mission

INTENTION

We have a deep desire to strengthen our *Cor Unum* and our sense of a common mission that springs from our charism.

We seek to expand models of leadership at all levels so that they reflect greater participation and create spaces for each religious to “contribute to the progress of the whole as an expression of our communion.” (Constitutions §140).

We seek to ensure governance and other structures encourage all levels of community (local, provincial, and international) to relate to one another; to assume co-responsibility for the whole; and transcend our own particular situations in order to build the communion that Christ has entrusted to the Church and to the Society (Constitutions §144). This requires broad-based commitment to live the values and principles we have consistently embraced: discernment, co-responsibility, mutual trust, accountability, interdependence, and subsidiarity. It also requires a commitment to explore the integration of shared leadership and participatory leadership models.

DECISIONS FOR GOVERNANCE AT THE GENERAL LEVEL

SUPERIOR GENERAL

The new Superior General and her Council will assume office on December 12, 2024 (Supplement to the Constitutions §167).

LOCATION OF RESIDENCE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The Chapter confirms that the General Council will continue to reside in Rome.

ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND GENERAL COUNCIL

The Superior General with her Council will create an Advisory Council comprised of eight provincials representing each of the eight New Provinces. During the period of transition between December 2024 and the initiation of all eight provinces, the current provincials of each future New Province will discern and decide upon their representative.

This Advisory Council will be integrated into the governance structure at the general level.

The Superior General and her Council may invite others, both RSCJ and lay, to participate according to the topic and the needs.

During the period of transition (September 1, 2024 to November 21, 2027) the Superior General and the General Council will study the role, function and the possible future need for the Assembly of Provincials. This study will require experience and additional information before any recommended changes can occur.

COMPOSITION OF THE 2032 GENERAL CHAPTER

The General Chapter delegates to the Assembly of Provincials the decision concerning the composition of the 2032 General Chapter.

The Superior General and her Council will:

Mandate a working group to study key issues in the Society regarding reconfiguration into eight Provinces and their demographics, and engage in a consultation of the members. The Superior General and her Council will present a recommendation to the Assembly of Provincials for a decision on the composition of the 2032 General Chapter at least one year before it (Constitutions §162).

DECISIONS FOR GOVERNANCE AT THE PROVINCE LEVEL

CONFIGURATION OF THE NEW PROVINCES

The General Chapter of 2024 confirms the reconfiguration of the Society of the Sacred Heart into eight New Provinces. At its initiation, the eight New Provinces will include the following provinces and the countries in which we currently serve:

- Democratic Republic of Congo-Chad, Uganda-Kenya
- India, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam
- Australia-New Zealand, Japan, Korea-Chinese
- Cuba-Haiti-Puerto Rico, Mexico, Canada-United States
- Argentina-Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela-Paraguay
- Austria-Germany-Hungary, England-Wales, Ireland-Scotland, Malta
- Belgium-France-Netherlands, Egypt, Italy
- Poland, Spain

BEGINNING OF THE NEW PROVINCE

Each New Province commences when the new provincial takes office and the provisional plan of government is approved by the Superior General. All New Provinces will begin and new provincials will take office no later than November 21, 2027.

The Superior General and the General Council will name the new provincial and approve her team according to the criteria outlined in the Constitutions (§149)

PROVISIONAL PLAN OF GOVERNMENT FOR NEW PROVINCES

In consultation with the members, each New Province will develop a provisional government plan. At a minimum, the plan must include: a consultation process with the members for a provincial and leadership team, and a way of engaging the membership in the life of the New Province. The Superior General and the General Council will review and approve this provisional government plan *ad experimentum*. This plan will be in effect until the New Province convenes a Provincial Chapter.

PERMANENT PLAN OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE NEW PROVINCE

Within three years of the beginning of the New Province, the provincial, with the consent of her Council, will convene a Provincial Chapter to draw up the plan of government and submit it to the Superior General and the General Council. (Constitutions §153, 154, 155 and Supplement 153)

COMPONENTS OF A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE⁷:

- Provincial (a professed of perpetual vows)**
- Provincial Council of at least two people (professed of perpetual vows)**
- Canonical Treasurer who is not a member of the Council
- Director of novices if a novitiate is located in the province
- Provision for Provincial Chapter and Provincial Assembly
- Provision for engagement of lay people in the administration of the province in a way that conforms with Canon Law.
- Guidelines for delegation of responsibilities.
- The role of the members as active participants in the life and mission (Constitutions §141).**
- Built-in regular communications and accountability.
- Built-in ways of participation and discernment.

⁷ The provisional Provincial Plan of Government must include the ** components at a minimum. The permanent plan of government includes all of the components listed.

Apostolic Priorities

The challenge of our time is to live and act as One Body, articulating and creating new ways of living out our priorities for mission across existential and geographic boundaries for the sake of our blessed and broken world. The General Chapter confirms that the Apostolic Priorities unite us in living the mission of the Society today. These priorities are rooted in our Constitutions, particularly in the section on Our Service in the Church and in the call of our charism to discover and manifest the love of the Heart of Jesus. The four Apostolic Priorities call us - both RSCJ and partners in mission - to live out all our apostolic commitments in a world deeply in need of love, hope and compassion.

INTENTION

- Mission is the central motive (the why) of our reorganization.
- We choose to express our mission today around a set of four global Apostolic Priorities: Education, Spirituality, JPIC and Formation.
- We desire to respond to the needs of young people through the Apostolic Priorities and our apostolic activities.
- We make this choice to strengthen the impact of our engagement with the world for purposeful transformation.
- We seek ways to revitalize our mission in response to urgent needs to foster collaboration, coordination and communication for greater impact both locally and globally.
- The Apostolic Priorities touch a deep dimension of our roots and mission. They are linked to our identity as RSCJ. The path of developing and integrating them will lead us to live this identity with clarity and share it with others.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL

- Evaluate and consult the current International Commissions to review their mandates, contributions, etc. in light of this Chapter and our needs.
- Deepen our understanding of the holistic vision of mission articulated in the Apostolic Priorities.
- Urge the New Provinces to define the way Apostolic Priorities can play a central role in the creation of the New Provinces.
- Encourage members and mission partners to explore how the documents Apostolic Priorities Document, Sophie's Gift and, Being Artisans of Hope in Our Blessed and Broken World, complement one another and inspire the revitalization of our mission through our apostolic works.

- The Superior General and General Council nominate a working committee on Apostolic Priorities to continue to explore and dialogue about the potential of a Mission Council.

They will consider:

- a) Working in collaboration with the General Council.
- b) Integrate a clear focus and priority for youth and mission partners.
- c) Consider the mandates and activities of existing groups such as international commissions and networks; and
- d) Take into account the experience of the provinces as we develop and live the Apostolic Priorities on the way to becoming New Provinces.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEW PROVINCES

- Map the apostolic commitments in the current provinces so that members and mission partners can create opportunities for networking and sharing with others engaged in the same area of mission.
- Evaluate our presence and ministries (involving groups, communities, mission partners) and discern possible ways New Provinces can develop a common apostolic orientation that will give energy and dynamism for our life and mission.
- Share the apostolic projects among New Provinces, building the One Body.
- Study and continue the dialogue about the possible integration of the Apostolic Priorities into the governance structure.

Put our Resources in Common (Acts 2, 44-46)

INTENTION

This world in which so many of our sisters and brothers are suffering and are unable to lead a truly human life calls into question our own way of living, and makes a lasting mark upon the way we use financial resources.

We want to make a genuine effort to bring about a more just distribution of the world's resources in solidarity with all who suffer. We build communion with them by setting aside our own interests, by giving, without seeking reward or gain, by sharing at every level in the Society and by depriving ourselves for the benefit of those who are in need of everything. We can do this if we are prepared to take the permanent risk of choosing a way of life consistent with our option of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. (Const. 170-171)

We want to act as One Body, to be accountable in order to grow in transparency and trust, and to live in equity.

We want to put our resources in common and this requires a commitment from all provinces to carry forward the decisions and recommendations of the Chapter. Therefore, this General Chapter suggests that:

1. Each current province and each New Province, carry out a study of demographics, financial projections and property ownership.
2. The formation of RSCJ and lay people in:
 - the spirit in which we manage finances;
 - the management of financial resources at the service of the mission;
 - planning;
 - accountability;
 - knowledge of civil and legal implications in each country.
3. The database on the human resources available in the Society (training, accompaniment, professional skills, etc.) is regularly updated.

DECISIONS

1. That the Superior General and her Council, together with the General Treasurer and the Advisory Council, develop a plan, as soon as possible, for a more equitable distribution of our resources to ensure that all provinces have what they need for life and mission and can plan for the future.
2. That until this plan is created, the Superior General and her Council ensure that each province has what it needs for the transition to the New Provinces.
3. That the Superior General and her Council approve the incorporation of new priorities in the Sustainability Fund to cover the needs of life and mission.
4. In a spirit of transparency, the Advisory Council should have a clear understanding of the financial reality of the Provinces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Superior General and her Council ensure the development of clear policies, procedures and criteria for sustainability and formation funds.
2. That the sharing of our human and financial resources be a theme of meetings between the Superior General, her Council and the Advisory Council to discern our mission in view of the Apostolic Priorities in an intercultural and international community.
3. That the Superior General and her Council explore the possibility of the creation of an International Development Office.

Formation

Adapted to the capabilities of each one and directed towards responding to the challenges of the world, formation envisages the development of our spiritual, human and apostolic life. The harmonious growth of the person presupposes an understanding of the affective life, which influences our whole way of knowing, loving and acting. Aware that it is always the Spirit who transforms us, we take seriously the responsibility of collaborating with the work of God throughout our lives. (Constitutions §72-73)

INTENTION

Our purpose for prioritizing formation at this time of transition is motivated by the need to revitalize our ways of relating, to encourage personal and local responsibility, and to support New Provinces to connect, network and collaborate in the work of formation at all levels. We want to prioritize leadership formation and integral human development, spirituality, community and apostolic life throughout all of life. We also desire to deepen our sense of charism and identity as RSCJ and to ensure viable communities focused on our commitment to mission.

For RSCJ

- Reread, reflect and concretely work on the recommendations of the formation document, "Life Unfolding" in the context of the 21st century.
- Research, evaluate and integrate existing leadership, administration, finance, and legal formation programs and resources within and outside of the Society
- Language study and intercultural formation
- Participatory leadership formation that prepares RSCJ to assume responsibilities

For RSCJ Formators

- Prioritize formation of RSCJ formators for initial formation, along with support, networking, and sharing among them
- Review the existing work already done on key elements and themes for initial formation, including the 2020 novice formation program, evaluate and build on them in light of the situation and needs of young people today
- Develop unified (not uniform) criteria and timeframe for initial formation programs, including those for candidates and PTVs

For RSCJ and Partners in Mission

- Provide opportunities for formation to charism and mission that includes:
 - Integrating the essential elements outlined in Sophie's Gift in all formation to mission programs in any context within the Society of the Sacred Heart
 - Creating a digital library on the internal RSCJ website for sharing resources among partners in mission and ourselves
- Prioritize pastoral training and safeguarding for all who care for children, youth, adults, and seniors, that includes key topics such as power, gender and sexuality
- Create spaces for reciprocal learning in the light of the 21st century among RSCJ and partners in mission

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The New Provinces find ways for networking, collaboration and sharing in leadership formation and human integral formation, keeping in mind initial formation for RSCJ, and ongoing formation for RSCJ, RSCJ formators, and the involvement of partners in mission.
- The Superior General and her Council explore possibilities for a Formation Commission or working group to find ways to work with the New Provinces.

Closing Conference

Thanks

Before I begin this talk, I'd like to express my personal gratitude and thanks.

Thanks to Barbara, Marie-Jeanne, Daphne, Bodo, Anne, Isabelle, for their commitment to the life and mission of the Society over the past 8 years.

Thank you to the members of the IPC, Imma, Ananda, Jacquelin, Elizabeth and Paqui, for the courage, confidence, and attention with which they accompanied the implementation of the decisions and recommendations made by Chapter 2021

Thank you to each of the sisters, collaborators, mission companions and, more broadly, to the members of the Sacred Heart Family, for the path you have travelled, for your prayers, your support and your commitment to living the charism of Saint Madeleine Sophie wherever you are.

Thanks to each of the capitulants for their essential contribution, and for all the other contributions and work they did during the Chapter process right up to the end.

Thanks to all those who contributed to the quality of this Chapter by creating the right conditions for shared discernment: the facilitators Piluca Benavente and Begoña Martínez, the secretaries Bozena and Yerka, the liturgy team members Maria, Myoung Ki, Cecilia, all the interpreters Mary, Marilu, Mariluz, Martine, Ilaria, Lucrezia, Saideh, Giuseppe, the technicians, Vincenzo and Marco, all the staff members Mary, Cuca, Dina, Palmira, Yolanda, Susana, Francesca, Sabina, Loredana, Alessia, the members of the communication commission Margaret, Rita, Paola, Amélie, and our "pronto soccorso", Roselyne!

I hope I haven't forgotten anyone, but without all of you, we wouldn't be here!

Courage and risk-taking: incarnation

"If you could see the whole journey, you might never undertake it".⁸

As you know, the image of the donkey, which made itself known during the election process, is still with me. That donkey spoke to me of incarnation. It led me to the creche and to the long journey of the Magi, guided by the star to discover, adore, contemplate, celebrate and manifest the Lord. They followed a star. We follow more than one star: Jesus, the light of the world, whom we wish to "follow more closely, in a life conformed to his, and to dedicate ourselves to the education of youth".⁹

⁸ Jan Richardson, "For those who still have a way to go" from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*.

⁹ Constitutions §119

The calls of the 2016 General Chapter took us out of familiar territory, inviting us to return to the source of our vocation, to question our identity and mission: Who is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do?

With our eyes fixed on Christ, we set out on the road, leaving behind our routines, our places, our securities, our certainties... Each of us, our international and intercultural caravan throughout these 8 years and the Chapter, as a body, were willing to open a space to grace and to listen to the light breeze of the Spirit, to discern together, in the cloud, the continuation of the path, "trusting in the fidelity of God and in the love of our sisters".¹⁰

"We would not have been complete"¹¹ without taking this "blessed and broken" world with us: children and young people in search of meaning, all our sisters, especially our older sisters, our collaborators and companions in mission, all the people with whom we are in relationship, the beauty of Creation, the peacemakers... But also this polarized world where violence seems to dominate over words and dialogue, where walls are built rather than bridges, conflicts and wars (in Ukraine, in DRC, in Sudan, in the Middle East ...), populism, climate change and its effects (floods, typhoons, the earthquake in Japan...), Afghan women and all those excluded from society, economic inequality and extreme poverty, migrants...

Courage and vulnerability: abandonment and death

In our desert crossing, we have experienced that discerning together God's call to new life and transforming our lives, does not just lead to a few surface level renovations or external changes (the number of provinces, finances, structures, the concrete aspects of our lives...). Rather, it's all about opening up our lives to an inner journey, to an inner work of transformation.

We have embraced our differences, our personal, community, provincial and Societal wounds and vulnerabilities, experienced our losses and grief, agreed to let go, to make room for resilience and reconciliation, to receive healing and be more alive.

We have also consented to the uncertainty and tensions provoked by divergences and convergences, to allow new life to emerge in its freshness.

This has led us together to grow in trust, to recognize each other as interdependent, and to promote practices that seek to further support the sharing of responsibility, power and resources, in the service of the common good and care.

Sometimes it's good to remember that *"a bend in the road isn't the end of the road... unless you fail to make the turn!"*.¹²

Transformation invites us to take risks, to not let fear have the last word, and to realign the life of the soul with its outward expression. So it was with our entry into religious life. It was more than a change: it was a transformation. Our commitments, our relationships, our

¹⁰ Constitutions §119

¹¹ 1st session of Chapter, August 2024

¹² Helen Keller

rhythms, our practices and habits, our relationship with God, were all transformed, and this experience opened up a new story of life through death.

It's an experience of this nature that we've lived personally and as an international, intercultural community of sisters here in Nemi. And this grace is enough for us.

Transformation and evolution: resurrection

We cannot move into the future without remembering and honoring the past, Madeleine Sophie, Philippine, and their first companions, all those who have gone before us and all our sisters who live by Sophie's gift, seeking through their lives and activities to discover and manifest the love of the Heart of Jesus.

We cannot journey into the future without honoring our history and traditions that have shaped our identity as Religious of the Sacred Heart, our particular call to translate the Gospel into a certain way of life, through who we are (for better or for worse) and what we do, to read in faith the signs of the times, and to respond together today with creativity to the needs of "our blessed and broken world".

It is with immense gratitude that we can look back and give thanks to the Lord for his faithfulness and give thanks for the love of our sisters.

But what would Sophie be doing today?

To live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, I believe she would invite us to return unceasingly to the source, to the Heart of Jesus, to draw living water for each day's journey...

To live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, I believe she would invite us to consent to reality and welcome this moment as a "crossroads of grace" where we are called together to choose Life...

To live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, I believe she would invite us to embrace our vulnerability, to live the fullness of our humanity with hearts wide open, to make more room for empathy and compassion in our relationships...

To live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, I believe she would invite us to sit down in community, to rediscover its soul and prophetic power...

To live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, I believe she would invite us to let go, to loosen our grip on certain "ways" of the past, to discover new roads, new ways of doing and seeing, personally, in community, in the New Province, in the Society.

We are called to do for the next generation what our sisters have done for us: make room for the new. "If each of our lives is to have meaning", said Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, sj, *"we must succeed in confirming the creative work of evolution"*.

The world needs our hope, our active participation as agents of transformation, our wisdom, our caring presence, models of lively communities of people who embody the values of the Gospel and manifest for everyone the love of the Heart of Jesus.

Our Mission is our *raison d'être*. Our Mission is the horizon that keeps us moving forward. "Sophie's gift" and our Apostolic Priorities: Education, Formation, Spirituality, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, braided together, offer us the grace to deepen our charism and give us a map to invent our future together, in response to the expectations and needs of the young people of our time.

No doubt you're wondering where the Magi have gone?

After this month in Nemi, like them, in joy, we *"return by another road"*.

God gave us the grace to embark on this chapter with COURAGE and CONFIDENCE, and we experienced letting ourselves be TRANSFORMED, personally and as a Body, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.

Together, like Mary, we can sing the MAGNIFICAT and give thanks to God for the wonders He has done for us!

We're going to join our sisters, collaborators and companions in mission, in enlarging our tents to the dimensions of the New Provinces. Together, as Church, we will seek and discern the transformation that will make room for New Life to renew and strengthen our Mission.

It is my wish that each of you to keeps moving forward to follow the star you recognize, to keep going beyond fatigue and anything else that might distract you from the path, and to be "pilgrims of hope"¹³ for the world.

Claire Castaing, RSCJ
Elected Superior General
August 31, 2024

¹³Letter of the Holy Father Francis for the Jubilee 2025 – 11 February 2022

General Chapter 2024

