

Basic Elements of our Religious Life

The Sisters of Divine Providence, who are incorporated in the present context of religious life with its various forms, search in communion with the whole people of God, to deepen their way. The XXVIII. General Chapter, which took place in January 2015, has enlightened us with the following reflection on how we can understand and cultivate our identity: it encourages each Sister, in whatever phase of life, to live the Option of being "*signs of God's Providence*".

1. Our Spirituality as Sisters of Divine Providence

Spirituality and Lifestyle

The Spirituality of the Sisters of Divine Providence is a way of life that runs through all stages of life. We want to strengthen anew the foundations of our consecrated life by letting mature a spirituality that supports new expressions of consecrated life in movement, in the mission, and that gives proposals.

This requires a deepening of the basic spirituality (spirituality of the founding generation) that is realized in fostering a simple lifestyle, in accordance with the Gospel. It drives us to return to the first love in a constant personal and community conversion, as well as representing consistent attitudes, those that are loyal to one's own being, which often stand in contrast to trends of the world; directing our life towards a radical following Jesus Christ and his project as the centre, rooted in the word of God, which converts us to the prophetic witness of the Charisma, which constitutes our identity, and by living in communities of missionary disciples that radiate the joy of being a sign of the love of God and Christian hope on the side of the poor. We want to strengthen our spirituality by entering every day in the "inner tent" and open it for the "tent of humanity", by sharing, solidarity spirit and as a result, we give concrete answers to the current needs of the time; to maintain a prudent (simple) lifestyle, for us and for the entire planet, and enthuse people with the belief in the God of Providence.

2. Interpersonal and community Relations

Community life is the distinguishing factor in the prophetic dimension of Religious life. We find the inspirational source of our community life in the Faith in the Triune God, who is the relationship. The community strengthens our vocation to the radical following of Jesus and challenges us to relationships in movement, in the joy of the Gospel. Appropriate relationships according to the Gospel help us to build community in a sisterly way, in the diversity of the people and also to deal with human conflicts. They transform us to the prophetic witness of our consecrated life. Creative mutual relations encourage us to cross borders and to discover the face of Divine Providence in fellow-sisters and in the cry of the poor, as well as caring for life.

There were always two words that emerged in our chapter process: “relation” and “movement”. They are inter-related (they belong together), for life is relation and movement. Without movement the relations transform themselves in custom/structure, that run the risk of not being enough reflected. Our daily attitudes (behaviors) no longer change, everything remains the same.

Relations in movement impel us (stimulate) to be more open in our experiences with lay people, in the Church, in the Congregation, with people’s cry→ “I want to be seen”, as God saw Hagar in the desert. She could rise up, establish a new relation with her son and live, she herself, in a new way.

I hear this cry “I want to be seen” not only from outside, but also from inside of the Congregation, in our mutual relations and in our reciprocal expectations. At the same time I am able to feel that we meet each other in a more open dynamics, creative way starting from the mutual joy, in our diversity (heterogeneity), and starting from our enthusiasm for the work without fear of taking a new step, and of entering in movement in our relations, in such a way to God.

Probably it may be a way for the Reading of our proposals/our themes starting from this aspect. What, in our Congregation, dealing with relations, needs to be brought more in movement, in order that we can unite our forces and put them to the service of the Kingdom of God? And how can this happen?

3. Apostolic Service

The apostolic service demands courage and discernment to perceive the *signs of the times and of the places*, to animate and to be animated by the prophecy of the Kingdom.

The encounter with the Lord puts us in motion, impels us to leave our auto-reference, because the following of Jesus is missionary and the intimacy with Jesus is itinerant.¹ «Whoever puts Christ in the center of her/his life, decentralizes her/himself! The more you unite yourself with Jesus and the more He becomes the center of your life, the more He makes you go out of yourself, decentralizes you and opens you to others»² «We are not in the center; we are de-centered”, we are at the service of Christ and of the Church»³ (Rejoice,5; Cf. Constitutions n.3).

To centralize our being apostolic in Jesus, in the search of being Providence of God today, puts us in motion, especially in the direction to situations, in which life is maltreated and where signs that negate the provident love of God are present. The missionary-prophetic dimension takes its deepest roots in the mystery of the Trinity.

¹ Francis, Apostolic Letter “The Joy of the Gospel”, No. 265.

² ebd. «The vocation to be a catechist » – The Pope encourages the catechists to be not afraid to reach out to and leave one’s self in order to encounter one’s neighbour (Rome, 27. September 2013), in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Portuguese Edition, No. 40, Sunday, 6. October 2013, page. 4.

³ ebd. «Creative ways that are rooted within the Church» – Pope Francis to his Jesuits brothers at the anniversary day of St. Ignatius Loyola (Rome, 31. July 2013) –, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Portuguese edition, No. 31, Sunday, 4. August 2013, Page. 28.

We live in a world that is crisscrossed by many concrete expressions of contempt of life as a whole: cruelty and violence, people are treated as things, utilitarian and consumerist mentality, depredation and a wasteful approach to the environment... all of that distances us from God's project for Creation.

At the same time, we know the endeavor of many people, groups and organizations engaged in initiatives that give concrete expression to an ethic of virtues, attitudes and practices of the care for life as a fundamental value.

Questioned by the Living God through the cry that emerges from the maltreated life, we want:

- to deepen our Options for the poor, while we assume new relations with refugees people, migrants, drug addicted people, victims of slave work and of human trafficking, especially children, young people, women and elderly people;
- to promote diverse possibilities of net working in existent projects and to assume new interprovincial/regional projects, as well as interconnect with other networks;
- to assume a simple lifestyle that concretizes more and more an ethic of solidarity, of the enough and of caring.

We do not walk alone, but rather walk together in the certainty that God's Providence walks with us. "Alone I go faster, together we go farther".

The keyword of prophecy as "being in the name of God" symbolizes the presence of God there, where he would like to be today, where he impels us to be:

- go in direction of new existential frontiers;
- swim against the current of the actual society
- awaken the world for the values of the Gospel

If we are present on the side of the poor and are acting together *with* them, we are a credible sign of the Providence of God, more than if we would act much *for* them. In prophetic presence, we commit ourselves to be close to the people, whose cries today come strongly to God's ears from: refugees, those who are affected by human trafficking, driven by existential emptiness to the margins of society. We are called to denounce injustices in the world and to proclaim and to live Christian hope.

The PROPHETIC dimension of RELIGIOUS LIFE goes beyond this missionary or apostolic sense of our identity, because our daily attitudes, our communitarian relations and our relation of power and of service must be PROPHETIC.