

**Address to the 15. General Chapter
Of the Servants of the Holy Spirit
Ariccia, January 16, 2022**

Chapter theme:

“Immersed in the life of the Trinity, transforming the world with compassion.”

Scripture: **“She keeps crying out after us”** (Matthew 15:23) and
“I have heard my people’s cry” (Exodus 3:7)

Dear Sister Maria Theresia,
Dear councilors,
Dear capitulars!

First of all, I would like to thank you for your renewed invitation to come to your chapter, now almost two years later than originally planned. I bring you the greetings of my councilors and all our Sisters worldwide. I am sure that all are very united with you in prayer during these days and that all rejoice with you that finally your 15th General Chapter can take place.

Already several times I have changed and adjusted my message for you, but now I am happy to share with you about the situation of our Congregation, our blessings and challenges, our 12th general chapter thrust and our ideas regarding our further cooperation.

1. Situation of our Congregation, our blessings and challenges

As you all know, we are a small Congregation with a little over 300 Sisters in 22 convents throughout the world. Everyone is doing her best, as the superiors’ reports at the recent general chapter stated, to live our life faithfully. The Sisters are zealous for our perpetual adoration and doing all they are able with the numbers each convent has, to keep the adoration perpetually. Actually only a few of the convents have enough Sisters to keep round the clock adoration. Most of the convents have to repose the Blessed Sacrament some nights a week because of lack of Sisters and due to the age and health of the members. In some places, the Sisters have lay people to help them with some of the hours of night adoration and they find the lay people very responsive and glad to help, feeling privileged to take part in it. In some convents lay people also help with hours of adoration during the day, since the small number of Sisters makes it impossible for them to keep the full daytime hours. A number of Sisters is troubled by this situation, since we are Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and are not able to keep it.

The Sisters all value the Liturgy of the Hours and the praying of all the Hours in choir. There are few exemptions asked, since the Sisters find it a joy to be praying for the Church and the world and joining with all throughout the world, who are offering this official act of prayer. I have been

able to visit only a few houses so far, but wherever I have been, I have experienced how intensely the Sisters bring the Steyl Family before God in their intercessions.

In many of our convents we have some lay employees who help with the work in various ways. This help allows the Sisters to be free for their personal prayer, adoration time and for the Liturgy of the Hours.

We do realize the manifold blessings of the Lord, which he showers on each convent. There is not one place that does not have many friends, who seem to vie with each other in supplying for the Sisters' needs and also giving treats, especially for feast days and the special seasons and liturgical celebrations. We can never thank God enough for the countless blessings he bestows upon our communities. We often consider ourselves to be God's "spoiled children!"

During this period of Covid-19, we were almost spared the first year. Only one Sister was infected and recovered. In March 2021 this happy situation changed when our community in Poland was infected with Covid-19. All but two Sisters became very ill with the usual symptoms of the disease, and the Superior had to be hospitalized. During the weeks that the Sisters were ill, our Arnoldus Family of SVD and SSps, located near the convent, came to our aid by providing cooked meals and shopping for all our needs. In November / December 2021 it also hit our community in Berlin and us in Bad Driburg. We spent our 125th founding anniversary in quarantine.

Our convent benefactors all over the world seemed to feel it a duty to see that our Sisters were supplied with all they needed regarding nourishment and every necessity. In fact, some convents were so blessed that they could readily share with those who were in need.

As mentioned briefly above, we do have our challenges, with diminishment in numbers and, in all our communities, there are the aged and infirm. The number of these Sisters continues to increase, while the number of those entering does not keep pace with the numbers who must step in for active participation in adoration and work. We now face the heart-rending challenge of closing our convent in Berlin. But there is also the other experience. We are still dreaming of new foundations. At present, especially in Indonesia. The community there is very lively and new Sisters enter every year. We receive many invitations for new foundations.

Dear Sister Maria Theresia, a great challenge was and remains your message at our General Chapter 2019. When I prepared this message I was reading it again. The message is not forgotten among us.

2. Our 12th general chapter thrust

The theme of our general chapter was chosen from Pope Francis, "Vultum Dei Quaerere, Seeking the face of God." We were able to follow this theme throughout the chapter, basing our chapter document: "Seeking the Face of God Today," on it and bringing this thought into our common discussions, in our Bible Sharing, and as we face the future together. We brought along some copies of our document to share with you.

This fact of aging and the lack of new members was reflected in a decision of the general chapter. The newly elected general council was given the task of raising awareness in the local communities of the current situation within the Congregation in terms of staff and the need to close or combine houses to maintain our perpetual adoration, a worthy Liturgy of the Hours, and all that is involved for a real contemplative way of life. We have invited all our communities to make suggestions.

As you all know, our general chapter decided to increase the number of councilors to 4. Another innovation was, the general treasurer is no longer elected by the chapter, but is appointed by the general council.

The general chapter has entrusted our new council with many different tasks, which are expected to be accomplished within a certain period of years.

Over the next years, we will set up a commission to review and update our formation program, which has become a little antiquated.

Before the Covid-19 crisis, which closed borders and forbade travel to and from other countries, we also had planned a commission to begin working on the changes in our Constitutions, which were voted on during the general chapter. Since travel bans have been lifted in some places, we will look into this once again.

The renewal of our Vademecum is also on our to-do list.

We talked seriously about the linguistic and cultural preparation of Sisters being sent to another country. We are still looking for the best way to do this, since such an appointment in our Congregation often comes very suddenly, because a Sister is needed somewhere. We have realized that the appointment for another country includes much more than just getting a visa and passport.

Many communities have expressed their desire to have a tertiary and renewal courses in the Motherhouse. We did not yet delve into how this can be done, considering our shortage of personnel, but we know we have to address that desire.

The modern means of communication were also the subject of some of our discussions. In "Vultum Dei Quaerere" Nr. 34 we read: "In our society, the digital culture has a decisive influence in shaping our thoughts and the way we relate to the world and, in particular, to other people. Contemplative communities are not immune from this cultural climate. Clearly, these media can prove helpful for formation and communication. At the same time, I urge a prudent discernment aimed at ensuring that they remain truly at the service of formation to contemplative life and necessary communication, and do not become occasions for wasting time or escaping from the demands of fraternal life in community. Nor should they prove harmful for your vocation or become an obstacle to your life wholly dedicated to contemplation."

We have approved the use of skype so that Sisters, especially those overseas, who do not receive a visit from their relatives, can contact them in this way. In some houses Sisters already use the Internet to do online study of languages and other studies.

For our Sisters in Africa - Lomé we decided, ad experimentum until the next general chapter, to allow African Sisters to visit a parent who is gravely ill or has died. Since this is considered an extremely important part of family life in Africa. We have been told repeatedly that this is the reason for the lack of candidates and or perseverance for those who have entered.

The question of whether we should accept widows was also discussed. All communities have been asked to discuss this question within three years and submit the result of their discussions to the Generalate.

At the end of the general chapter, the capitulars agreed that this chapter was different from previous chapters. There were many Sisters who were taking part in a general chapter for the first time.

At the end of the chapter we made an evaluation, and the result was very positive. Before writing this sharing, I looked again at the answers given anonymously by the capitulars. As the high point of the chapter, many Sisters gave highest points to the election process, because it was done very differently this time. There was an open discussion regarding the Sisters proposed for office and the qualifications expected. This was a new experience for everyone that helped us grow in mutual trust. Further highlights for many were the intercontinental discussions, which we held on several of the final days and the weekly Bible sharing. All the capitulars seemed to grow together into a real community during the chapter. That is why many said that saying goodbye was a low point of the chapter.

Another low point also, that many Sisters stated, were the discussions about the closing of houses and possible home visits. These were not "high" points for them. The majority of the Sisters find both possibilities difficult to accept.

3. Our ideas regarding our further cooperation

In her invitation Sr.M.Theresia also asked us to present our ideas about our further collaboration. Dear Sisters, please forgive me for not being able to present a finished idea to you about this. Certainly, our prayer for you will always come first in our cooperation.

I know that there are many joint activities in some countries, e.g. joint retreat leader, joint seminars and lectures. I experienced this in Poland, where it worked very well. We accepted each other in our vocation and way of life and also found possibilities and occasions to do things together.

The Corona pandemic has shown us that a much is possible online. This would certainly also be a possibility of increased collaboration for us.

Our way of life, as reaffirmed by our General Chapter, sets limits to active collaboration, but not to spiritual collaboration and union. For this I would like to thank you today in the name of all the Sisters.

I was very touched when I read your chapter theme: "Immersed in the Life of the Trinity, transforming the world with compassion." It fits very well to the world today. When I heard the theme, I thought of Pope Francis. He would like it very much. And your blessed mother Maria immediately came to mind. She would have liked it too. It was before her eyes when she longed to go to China. Congratulations, dear Sisters, on this truly spirit-filled theme. We sincerely hope and pray that it will become alive and fruitful for you through this General Chapter.

Mother Maria Magdalena Kruse SSpSAP
Superior General