

ECHOES

Interculturality ↔ **Mission**

Interculturalité ↔ **Mission**

Interculturalidad ↔ **Misión**



International Interculturality Session

10–20 November 2023

Generalate - Rome

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The International Interculturality Session took place at the Generalate, in Rome, from 10th to 20th November 2023. Though the 25 participants had already met via Zoom, it was a joy to get together in person and sharing the richness of their different cultures with one another after a brief presentation of each one.

Ana Maria Alcalde's Opening address

*"Welcome to all of you and thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this special Session. I say it is special because almost all the Provinces, Delegations, Networks, and Vicariate are present, and it is also special because of the theme that brings us together: **interculturality**."*



In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about interculturality, and at our General Chapter 2021, it also emerged as a dream, a challenge, and an opportunity because we realised that "in a world that separates and divides, intercultural life is an imperative of our mission of communion." The intercultural dimension must be present in various dimensions of our lives: mission, community life, formation, leadership, etc. (20th General Chapter)

Interculturality is today a challenge and an urgent necessity for the mission of the Church in the synodal process, as it wishes to go out to meet everyone, and it is equally so for consecrated life and for the life-mission of the Holy Family.

*At this moment in human history, we have to feel this urgent need if we are aware that humanity, of which we are part, is divided and wounded by innumerable conflicts where we are pitted against each other, forgetting that we are all human, brothers and sisters, interdependent. No one is born "**intercultural**". Hence the need for a journey of inner transformation, analogous to what Jesus did when he became incarnate (Phil 2:6-8). **We need a new birth (John 3:7).***

Are we formed to live with interculturality? Are we forming the new generations for interculturality? If we give interculturality all the depth it holds, I believe we still have a long way to go.

We want our current and future communities to be intercultural. All communities are or will be

situated in a specific geographical location and in a specific cultural context. This requires knowing the culture, learning one or more languages in order to be able to communicate effectively within the community and with the people around us, and adopting a lifestyle, food, housing, transport, clothing, etc., similar to that of the people living in that cultural context.

Advancing in interculturality also means increasing the capacity for listening and dialogue; mutual respect; personal and community discernment; having a critical vision of one's own culture; knowing the culture that welcomes us; living egalitarian relationships, etc. (Const.art.121). The resistances and obstacles we encounter in this process are experienced by all of us. However, they are important steps to be taken as a necessary condition for an intercultural life that is worth facing with open-mindedness and true determination.

One of the temptations we may have is to be content with living multiculturalism as an expression of our openness to the universal. That is, to be content with living well with each other and with people from different cultures - which is no small thing - but we would miss the opportunity to experience the enriching exchange between cultures, in a constant and never-ending participatory and interactive process. This process is liberating and enriching for those who risk entering into it.

In interculturality, we find an invitation, a call to deepen the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus

in a family, in a people, in a culture, in a particular historical time. He "lived as one of many."

The Founder's invitation resounds today: **"Go to Nazareth and contemplate"**. Our charism of communion in diversity has an internal dynamism that pushes us in this direction. For this not to be just a slogan, we must integrate it into our daily lives, and before wanting to do things for others, we must listen to the people, to the culture that surrounds us- always

evolving - and to God, who reveals Himself through these mediations. Remaining open to allowing ourselves to be transformed is a gift that we can accept with the help of His grace.

At the beginning of this Session, I encourage you to have the attitude of "disciples", open to the action of the Spirit, so that the inspiration, formation received and the experience of these days may have the transforming and multiplying effect that we all desire."

Opening Prayer: thanking God for the beauty of every culture

The participants entered the atmosphere of silence in order to welcome the different cultures, backgrounds, and contexts of one another.

The symbols that each one brought of their culture were placed in the prayer corner. Then, the group was invited to look at



each symbol and thank the Lord for the beauty of each culture.

Link between the first meeting (By Zoom) and this session

After the prayer, Catherine Lavery invited the participants to remember the meeting they had in June 3, 2023. In that occasion, each one had presented the same symbol which is now in front of them.

- ☞ From June until now, what resonates with me?
- ☞ Where do I note inner resistance?

Resonates:

- ☞ Feelings of joy, hope, and happiness
- ☞ Desire to know the other culture
- ☞ Diversity
- ☞ The beauty of different cultures
- ☞ Inclusion
- ☞ Communion is possible.
- ☞ Openness to accept the other

Resistances:

- ☞ Lack of generative listening
- ☞ Need for transformation
- ☞ Lack of willingness to accept the other culture
- ☞ Language barrier
- ☞ Fear of coming out of the comfort zone
- ☞ Close mind-set
- ☞ Lack of getting to know the other culture

In a second moment, the participants were asked to reflect on their desires for the Session. These were written on individual A5 sheets, and posted on the whiteboard.

Culture Shock

In the afternoon, Rasika led a sharing and reflection about 'Culture Shock'. In language groups, the participants shared their experiences in culture shock, the reason for the shock, and why it affected them personally in either a negative or positive way.

The participants freely shared their feelings in the common assembly. Some of the responses from the group:

- ☉ Culture shock helped us to open and welcome the other.
- ☉ Intercultural living must begin with the community.
- ☉ Willingness to adopt the new culture.
- ☉ Enjoy the richness of other cultures.
- ☉ There is lots of learning by facing cultural difference if the person is open.
- ☉ Culture shock in relationships is very hard. This sometimes closes up the person for her entire life.

Some degree of Culture Shock is inevitable. Contributory factors are:

- ☉ Lack of preparation.
- ☉ Thinking all the cultures are like mine.
- ☉ "My culture is the best" denying the positive aspects of other cultures.
- ☉ The mentality of "Them and Us"; Our ways are good their ways are not.
- ☉ Adapting to the culture of the new country is easier than accepting and respecting the cultural diversity of the members of the community.
- ☉ Receiving cultures are not prepared to welcome the new culture, causing pain and misunderstanding.

At the end of the day, time was given to the participants to look back at the whole day: reflecting in silence on what had struck them and what insights they received. With that, the first day was over.

11.11.2023

What is Culture?

The day began with the prayer, which helped the participants to connect themselves with the Divine Master and the God of the Universe.

Geni led a reflection on the theme: **What is culture?**

Common understandings of culture:

- ☞ Culture is human-specific.
- ☞ It is a way of life.
- ☞ Culture is learned.
- ☞ Every culture is built on a worldview.
- ☞ Culture is symbolic.
- ☞ The culture is stable yet dynamic.
- ☞ Culture is what we do and the reason why we do it.
- ☞ It is the world we have created and are still creating.

Culture, therefore, is like an ocean, surrounding us like water and a fish. **"As fish cannot live without water, the humans are immersed in culture"**. Like an iceberg, culture has a visible part, and a much bigger invisible part. We all wear our **"cultural glasses"**.

Can I identify three limits of my culture?

Some aspects shared:

- ◆ Machismo - Discrimination against women.
- ◆ Priority of obedience to established law over the value of human life.
- ◆ Superiority complex.
- ◆ Jealousy.
- ◆ Prejudices.
- ◆ Judgmental attitudes.

Definitions of the Terms

Catherine Lavery continued the session on the definitions of:



Monocultural: born and raised in a single, homogeneous cultural and linguistic world

Multicultural: Living among people of different cultures

Cross-cultural: a commitment to living outside one's natural cultural environment

Intercultural living is authentic discipleship lived by culturally different people together.

Intercultural Living: This should be the aim of people living in intentional, international religious or faith communities. It is not easy, normal, or even possible for everyone. It is a faith-based project.

Intercultural living requires:

- ☞ Tolerance of ambiguity, immaturity, and mistakes
- ☞ A forum for venting frustrations
- ☞ Appropriate correction, genuine listening, flexibility
- ☞ Commitment to ongoing dialogue and development
- ☞ Attention to overload, stress, differences, and misunderstanding
- ☞ Encouragement, compassion, and concern
- ☞ Clarification of vision, goals, strategies, and commitments

No culture is dominant, and no culture is -oppressed

- ▮ Intercultural living is radically different from living in an international community.
- ▮ It describes specifically the way we live out our faith and discipleship.
- ▮ Intercultural living is not a problem but a challenge (opportunity); not 'theirs' but 'ours'.
- ▮ Impossible in an US/THEM world (opposed), but only in a WE world (integrated).
- ▮ Intentional intercultural living is something new for most people.
- ▮ The overwhelming majority of humans are monocultural.
- ▮ Intercultural living is the future of international religious life.
- ▮ Unless international communities become intercultural, they will not survive.
- ▮ Intercultural living is not only for international communities.

She concluded the session by posting the question, **what three points do I take from this presentation?**



Since the contents of the morning sessions were quite theoretical, to change the rhythm, Geni asked the participants to make a circle with four or five members. She gave some ribbons to the groups, asking them to do something creative with them which would symbolise the essence of intercultural living.

Energy...enjoyment...cooperation were evident during this activity.

Catherine started the afternoon session by stressing the need of intercultural living for Holy Family Sisters. She quoted the words of our Founder.



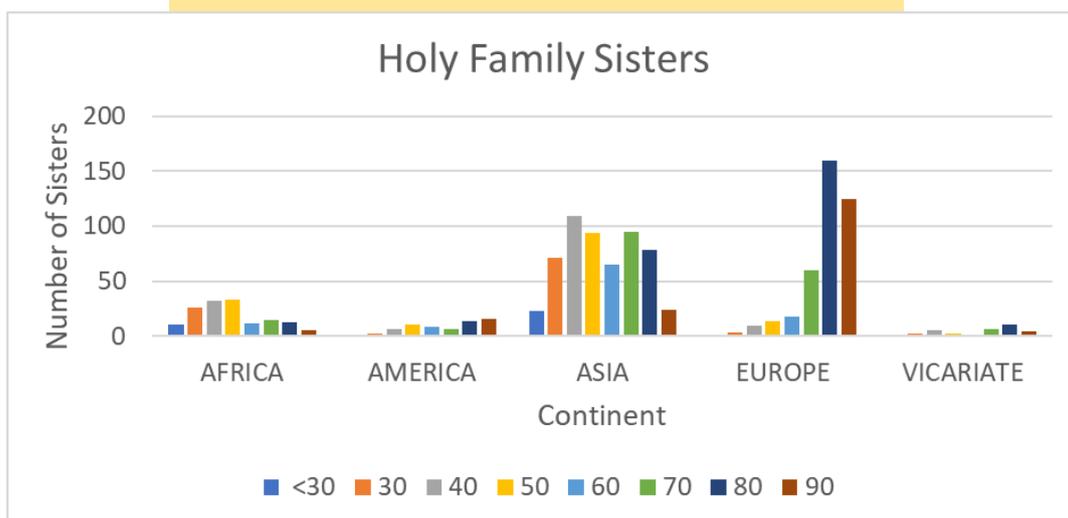
"In my dream, the Holy Family appeared to me like a great tree, a kind of oak with verdant branches:

there were birds of every colour, from every country: each species had its own song, but every now and then they formed one single voice and in perfect harmony they seemed to say:

"Glory to God, glory to God alone, and all through Mary!"

As Holy Family Sisters throughout the world, we have a responsibility to promote intercultural communities, witnessing to the fact that **"communion is possible."** (Mission Inter-Gentes EGC 2011)

De-westernisation of Consecrated Life



Our identity as Christians is intercultural. Intercultural living is a challenge, but it is the way of the future. **"We must learn to identify the way we think and then rethink for the sake of the**

mission". (Anthony Gittins).

The call to interculturality is God's gift to us at this time, says Maria Cimpermann, RSCJ.

Jesmin continued the session on “Why Interculturality...?” The 20th General Chapter invites the whole Institute to look more closely at our understanding of intercultural living.

The call to let go

The mentality of “my” ministry (Province/Delegation/Network/Vicariate), place, culture - the individualistic attitude (Mission Passion and Response: Letting Go, General Chapter Document, Pg. 11)

Audacious steps, proposed by the 20th General Chapter...

The General Council will create 2 or 3 communities of “re-founding” of the Holy Family in the diminishing Units for an intercultural presence in the peripheries (General Chapter Document Pg. 12).

Continental Decisions

- ☞ **Intercultural living:** start new insertions or intercultural presence to respond to needs.
- ☞ Continental Novitiate, which includes intercultural living.
- ☞ Give witness to intercultural life.
- ☞ Have a common formation programme, including intercultural living. Start with the formees pre-novices and novices).
- ☞ Orientation and intercultural living for the Sisters, who are active in the communities in each Unit
- ☞ Formation and training for the Sisters who express their desire to live in an intercultural community
- ☞ To provide opportunities for the young Sisters (1–10 years) to have intercultural living in other countries. (To provide orientation or training on interculturality to Sisters within Units where there are already multicultural communities.)

Decisions of the Council of the Family

Collaboration and Cooperation as a Family, Internationally and Locally

Time was given for personal reflection and group sharing on: **What is your deepest desire?** Finally, the participants shared in the common assembly their own feelings about their desires.

Sunday

12.11.2023

On this Sunday morning, the participants had time for themselves, and after the Eucharistic celebration were able to watch the Pope Francis’ Angelus message on the television.

The afternoon session began with a prayer. The reading from Romans 4:8 stressed that **‘we are many but one body’...**

Eithne began the session with a clarification:

Yesterday, the content of the

sessions included not only clear definitions of various terms around culture and interculturality but also an outline of the demographics of the institute, showing our ageing and diminishment in numbers. This is true of all consecrated life in Europe and the West, but not exclusively so. In the Holy Family, there is ageing and diminishment in many of our units on other continents, especially those that are long-established.

This is our reality, and I think we became more painfully aware of that yesterday evening, perhaps causing a certain confusion as to our role as members of the Interculturality Team. What really is our responsibility?

A time of struggle and confusion in the face of reality is a healthy part of any process towards transformation. Are we promoting interculturality in order to find a solution to

diminishment and fill the gaps?

No. In our team, we have said that this is a formation session for named link-persons, with a view to providing them with the tools and materials

necessary for the coordination of ongoing formation in interculturality in their respective units.

So, what we are asked to do during this session and beyond is to listen to the calls of the Spirit coming to us from our

troubled, divided, and multi-cultural world reality and to try to form ourselves and our Sisters to live interculturality as a prophetic response. Not interculturality as a means of survival. Interculturality and mission...

Intercultural Conflict Styles

Geni continued the session by sharing **Four Intercultural Conflict Styles**.

When we cross the borders of our culture, we can find ourselves in a situation of conflict when

we are confronted with the differences of the other culture.

How do we act and react to the conflicts? We can identify four types of conflict resolution styles. Those are:

Discussion style: Direct strategies in communication, emotionally restrained or controlled approaches in emotional situations.

Engagement style: Direct strategies when communicating, but in an emotionally expressive way.

Accommodation style: Indirect strategies for solving problems, using an emotionally restrained approach.

Dynamic style: Indirect messages in disagreement; using emotionally intense and expressive verbal and nonverbal communication.

Geni asked the group to think about which type of conflict predominates. They shared their response with the person who sat next to them. Then a self-survey activity was given to each participant to identify themselves and where they

stand in the intercultural conflict styles. The participants were very serious about doing the exercise and finding themselves where they stood.



Today we had another beautiful day with sunshine. The opening prayer helped the participants enter the day in a deeper way. As Jesus

said *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"*. A road to travel, a truth to proclaim, a life to give...

The day's session shifted the emphasis to the spirituality of interculturality. Eithne focused on three aspects of the life of Jesus:

- ☞ **Jesus and His Culture**
- ☞ **Jesus - a Stranger**
- ☞ **Jesus and Strangers**



Let us see some texts from her sharing...

☞ **Jesus and His culture:**

As members of the Holy Family, part of our own Family "culture" is a strong relationship with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Like our Founder, we are inspired by the Mystery of the Incarnation and the life at Nazareth: the simplicity of it, the humanity of it, "everything that is extraordinary in ordinary everyday life..." It is part of our heritage.

Our documents constantly refer to the Holy Family and to the early life of Jesus. *"Jesus, as Son, received everything from the Father and, in the Holy Spirit, gave everything back to him. He was born in a stable, was exiled to Egypt, and for thirty years lived a simple, ordinary life with Mary and Joseph"*. (Constitutions Art.99)

Reflecting on the Incarnation from this perspective is to see these truths from a Christian, post-Resurrection point of view. Jesus himself probably did not think of himself in these terms. I am sure that each one of us

has cherished images and ideas about the various events of Jesus' life-images influenced perhaps by our own cultural worldview.

Time was given to participants to visit their own images of Jesus' home life...

Let us take some time to look a little more objectively at the world and the culture into which Jesus was born, where he grew in his relationship with the Father, and came to understand his mission – to establish the Kingdom of God.

Jesus of Nazareth, like every other person, was born into a culture. Jesus was a Jew. He was raised by a Jewish mother and a Jewish stepfather in a small Jewish town, Nazareth. The presentation invited the participants to reflect on the Jewish culture of Jesus and its significant influence in his life.

☞ **Jesus – a Stranger**

"The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world

knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not".

In John's Gospel, and in the Scripture Texts which our Founder chose for us, we contemplate Jesus, the Light of the world, but *"the world knew him not... and his own people received him not."*

Earlier, we have seen Jesus, the Jew, embedded in his own culture... and yet in many ways, he remained an outsider, a stranger.

Let us just consider the major events of his life - events we are really familiar with, but perhaps have never thought of them from this point of view. Jesus was born outside of the house and village, immediately becomes refugee in Egypt, he went beyond borders, waives his privilege and dies outside of his village, outside of the city but humiliated and exiled.

Jesus as Stranger represents the radical transcendence of God, the otherness, the difference of God beyond imagining.

Personal reflection: The participants took quality time for personal reflection on the topic.

👉 **Jesus and strangers**

In the Old Testament, we find a strong religious challenge to always welcome the stranger, the foreigner. This was emphasized for two reasons:

First, because the Jewish people themselves had once been foreigners and immigrants. *“You must not molest the stranger or oppress him, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.”* (Ex. 22). These Scriptures kept reminding them not to forget that.

Second, they believed that God’s revelation, most often, comes to us through the stranger, in what’s foreign to

us. That belief was integral to their faith.

Jesus had two very important encounters with “Strangers” ... Both of them non-Jews, both women, both unafraid to enter into dialogue with him – dialogue that challenged the status quo, and the assumptions enshrined in the Jewish culture: the Canaanite woman and the Samaritan woman.

“The Spirit of Jesus deepens our ability to love. He helps us daily to recognize what is unique in each person. He calls us to forge authentic relationships based on sincerity, respect and forgiveness; he enables us to transcend frontiers of mentality, culture, race and creed. He gives us a constant concern for justice and communion.” (Const. 94)

“We, too, if we let ourselves be challenged and enriched by the “foreign” and culturally “different” gaze, we will allow the re-foundation of our charisms, broadening the vision of our Founders in a way that we cannot even perceive today. This is not an easy path nor will it be free of challenges, but if we respond to the signs of the times, confident that the Spirit is at work, then we can announce the good news of interculturality and denounce everything that denies it, with the strength and the richness of the radically inclusive Project of the Kingdom that Jesus inaugurated.” (Adriana Carla Milmanda)

The group was called to reflect about their experience of life: identify in their contexts the strangers, the minority groups, the prejudices, the acts in a way of inclusiveness...



She continued by explaining how Jesus was the host and Jesus - as a stranger.

Jesus as the host: He takes initiative, brings people together, serves them and restores the dignity and identity in those who are rejected, marginalized, the others, the stranger. But as host, he is at a slightly higher level.

Jesus as a stranger: He reveals himself in the *kenosis*, "at a lower level", allows the other, the host, to take initiatives, make choices or get served. But when he is a stranger, the other is above him.

To show hospitality to the stranger is **to identify the other as stranger and oneself as host** – a position of superiority and control.

Our challenge today is first to respect and then appropriately to cross or erase the boundaries or margins that mark our world and separate or segregate people who need each other. It is a huge challenge and it is vitally necessary that we meet it, as an expression of our faith,

compassion and solidarity.

Our document, **Vowed for Mission** calls us to meet that challenge: *“Our Holy Family Charism opens us to the entire earth community with its multiplicity of relationships constantly generating life. It urges us to recognise and proclaim the primacy of our God, and manifest God’s love for all beings by going beyond boundaries that maintain systems that threaten*

communion. These boundaries are often within us and among us. They also separate and divide communities, families, peoples, races, religions and humanity from other members of the earth community.”

Time was given for the personal reflection, for reading and praying with the quotations provided. The participants shared their experiences and feelings in the larger group.

14.11.2023

“Interculturality and the Holy Family Charism”

In the opening prayer the participants were invited to do a breathing exercise in order to relax and centre themselves to enter this day in a peaceful way.



Aldégonde led the day of reflection.

Our Charism impels us:

To re-awaken our awareness of the richness of the diversity.

Move mentally from our theoretical knowledge to the experience of our Charism, which will lead us to move from the invitation to radically welcome others who are different from us to adopt the attitude of a

disciple of Jesus.

To feel responsible for living interculturally in order to embody more fully the common culture of the Holy Family, which is our Charism of Communion and above all our purpose.

God created us different from one another, but complementary. We need to begin from what our Constitutions tell us in relation to our Charism, and

then by going more deeply into our Christian and evangelical heritage, we will find the strength to move from invitation to radical welcome.

She quoted the text from Matthew 28: 18 – 20 *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And so, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age”.*

Just as communion is essential for the community of disciples, so it is for us, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. Therefore, each of us is called

to make disciples, who in turn will make disciples!

The mission statement in Matthew 28 is valid for all times. The programme that Jesus proposes to his disciples includes four activities indicated by verbal forms: to go, to make disciples, to baptise and to learn to obey.

As Christians, we are called to fulfil Christ's mission of communicating the Father's love for every person. We are part of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. And it is here that our Holy Family Charism is born.

Time and some questions were given for personal reflection.

She continued to share **'looking at our Charism'**

We have looked at the mission that Jesus entrusted to us and above all the source of inspiration of our Charism of communion. The Holy Family of Nazareth, which is a source of inspiration for us, is, according to the Good Father, a gentle image of the Trinity. The Good Father uses these two models to help us enter the school of discipleship.

We have been given the mission of being and living communion. The socio-political crises around the world, as well as the environmental crises, are calling us to a new way of being together.

Created in the image of God, we are Sisters in our humanity and, moreover, sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux,

daughters of PBN, and we are therefore called to understand, love and support each other, for the advent of a more just world.

The Charism of the Holy Family of Bordeaux is a recognition of diversity. Our source of inspiration is Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This family of Nazareth is the gentle image of the Trinity. Its members are different, but complementary. Their common culture is to love, desire and seek God alone.

Time was given for personal reflection, with some guide questions.

Charism of the Holy Family and interculturality

Cultural diversity, or the presence of different cultures interacting with each other, often forms us and constitutes the whole. Interculturality is the set of relationships and interactions between different cultures, generated by encounters or confrontations, described as intercultural.

Involving reciprocal exchanges, it is founded on dialogue, mutual respect and a concern to preserve each person's cultural identity.

Together, as a community, means starting from me, from you, from her, or from them to arrive at us. Diversity... is the positive way of expressing difference.

Diversity is a gift from God to his creation. Our God is not the God of cloning, but the Father of Difference. In the creation story we know, we read that everything God created was different and beautiful.

A transition from the school of knowledge to the school of life is necessary

We know our Holy Family Charism by heart, with all its richness and all the values that surround it. At the same time, we find it very difficult to live it in depth.

As members of the Holy Family, intercultural life is an opportunity, a chance for us. It must become more of a practical expression of our Charism of communion.

We are called to take these steps together, each at our own pace, but with the constant concern to focus on the common culture of the Holy Family, which is our reason for being and our purpose.

Intercultural life requires faith. Faith does not exist in theory; all faith is existential: it must be lived. Faith can only be expressed in a culture.

What interculturality brings to the Charism of the Holy Family

Interculturality is a response to our faith, to our diversity and above all to our Charism of communion.

Interculturality brings to our identity the need for a sense of stability, so that people feel

respected in their dignity, they feel valued and this leads them to make very human gestures other people then feel attracted by the Charism of communion and try to live as brothers and sisters in humanity.

Conclusion

We are called to make this transition with serenity in order to build a common home, which is our society. Intercultural living is a very demanding process, but it is possible to achieve a world of justice and

peace. No culture is superior or inferior to others. Let us learn to know our cultural differences so that we can invest them in interculturality and, above all, so that our Charism of communion is welcomed in our contexts.

May our communities be places of unconditional welcome and mercy.

May Holy Family communities become places where there is room for every child of God with his or her difficult life.

May we be able to make everyone feel that we are brothers and sisters through our way of being, saying "You are my brother, you are my sister" through concrete gestures to those who do not share our cultural codes.

May our attention to the little ones be constant, to allow them to express themselves in their culture, by listening to their most essential needs.

Teach us, Lord, to keep our door always open to welcome the other who is different.

15.11.2023

General Audience



The participants had the joy of participating the **General audience in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican**. All were happy to see the great crowd of people from different nationalities and different cultures to partaking in this audience, and also happy to hear the announcement of the presence of **Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux** resounding in the Square.

In his message, Pope Francis stresses that *"Jesus is our constant source of joy, our friend who accompanies each of us on our way"*. *"But how to proclaim Him, and this 'how' is*

joy. Either we proclaim Jesus with joy, or we do not proclaim Him, because any other way of proclaiming Him is not capable of bringing the true reality of Jesus."

The Pope recalled a passage from the Gospel according to St. Luke which tells the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were filled with joy after encountering the Lord. "One returns to daily life with the impetus of one who has found a treasure," the Holy Father noted, adding, "They were joyful, these two,

because they had found Jesus, and He changed their lives."

He concluded by offering comforting words for the faithful to take to heart, and some homework.

"Each of us today take a little time and think: 'Jesus, You are within me: I want to meet You every day. You are a Person, not an idea; You are a companion, not a programme. You are Love that solves so many problems. You are the beginning of evangelisation. You, Jesus, are the source of joy.' Amen"

The day started with an opening prayer. The presence of God is experienced not only through sound and movement but in the stillness and silence that pervades the atmosphere. The group was led to become aware of God's abiding

presence in and around them, by their breathing.

John 17: 21 -24: *"That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us. That they become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me".*

—

Eithne helped the participants to understand this statement in clearly by explaining what is mission spirituality.

Follow me, leave your home, leaving home, family and country to proclaim the good news of Christ has always been part of the Christian experience, never more so than since the nineteenth century. – the century which saw the birth and the rapid growth of the Holy Family.

While clearly going out for Christ and in His name, the missionaries of this epoch went out primarily to evangelize – here we can think of the importance given to Quasimodo in our own history and spirituality.

The great early missionaries left their country primarily for Christ's sake. The love of Christ and the seeking of Christ was the impulse behind their movement. They left all and went into voluntary exile or on pilgrimage for Christ, out of a desire to abandon all things and themselves, for God.

"Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house, for a country which I will show you...you are to be a blessing!" (Gen 12)

In the midst of certain discussions around how mission should be lived in our times,

and in view of what we are learning about interculturality, the earlier model of abandonment of self into the hands of Christ can be of help to us today – and the spirituality and the spirit of God Alone, so central to our charism and tradition, can nourish and inspire us. To leave home and country on pilgrimage for Christ, gives a profound understanding to mission.

St. Columba, a Celtic missionary in the 9th. Century, taught that there are 3 ways of responding to the call and going on pilgrimage.

Physically leaving home – but continuing to hold on to what has gone before.

It is as if the pilgrim were still living in the motherland, he said, if he / she copies in the pilgrimage the custom of the motherland...in our times, the temptation to never leave home at heart, retaining all the customs of the home country... living from home-leave to home-leave... Despite doing a good job, the heart of the missionary call is missing.

The missionary may leave home by desire – in the heart, not bodily.

The person stays to minister to those at home.... We can think of St. Therese of Lisieux...and we know Sisters among us

whose hearts are constantly open to the universal, with love, concern and compassion. Columba sees this as true pilgrimage for the Lord.

The full meaning of being a pilgrim for Christ is to completely leave home and country...The missionary vocation is to abandonment: this is its asceticism and its demand... Living for God Alone...

And family.... To live apart, outside one's own culture and people for the sake of Christ and the Gospel is a specific call to live in faith – a call to live more deeply our belief in Christ. The calling and the sending... to be with Christ, and to proclaim the Good News to those we meet.

Time and questions for reflection was given.

'Leave your fishing nets and boats upon the shore'

Leave your fishing nets...Leave your livelihood, your profession, your achievements... your "net" "work of relationships ... Leave what keep you busy on a day-to-day basis.

- ⇒ Leave the seeds that you have sown
- ⇒ Leave the crops that you've grown
- ⇒ Leave the people you have known ...

But the Risen Christ is always there, waiting to welcome us... wherever "there" might be. There are also many kinds of multicultural Holy Family communities in different places.

Everyone comes with baggage

Missionaries are brought face-to-face with their own frailty and vulnerability because of their situation.

A priest reflects: It would seem that for us missionaries as for everyone else, the deepest pain is that of my own poverty, which has to be accepted. I've got to let go, to surrender completely, and it takes too long to admit that and let it happen. I need to be freed, but only the Lord can do it.

Feelings of loneliness and insecurity are a call to live more deeply in faith, to go beyond the feeling level and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of my life in all its

dimensions. This is at the heart of mission.

The path of the apostle is that of being with Jesus, immersed in the reality of life.

Missionary-Guest

Today we do not go on mission "ad extra" to deserted, unknown places, to people who do not know Christ, but to countries where there are highly developed social and political patterns of living ... it is more usual to go to a Church that is well-established, with its own characteristics and patterns of community. We are GUESTS of both the local Church and of the host country.

To be a guest means

- ⊙ To have no power in a given situation, but to go along with the arrangements that are found.
- ⊙ The visitor does not serve in the house... She may be asked, but this cannot be presumed...this can be an area of pain... things that

are enjoyed and appreciated may have to be surrendered to what the host chooses.

- ⊙ As GUEST, it is essential to be open-minded, and ready to accept and learn from the receiving culture. This demands respect, and the conviction that we can be enriched by our hosts.
- ⊙ We do our utmost to learn the language, in order that mutual sharing can be at a deeper level.
- ⊙ Jesus gathered the community of disciples around himself. They did not come together because they were friends, or because they knew one another.
- ⊙ When we move outside our Unit of origin, we may not know the sisters with whom we will live and work; we may be called to belong to a GUEST-COMMUNITY, called to witness that Interculturality, Family, is possible.

Skills for Intercultural Living

The afternoon session was led by Jesmin, which enlightened the participants to develop necessary skills in view of intercultural living:

- ⇒ Self-awareness
- ⇒ Self-confident-trust
- ⇒ Effectiveness
- ⇒ Open mindedness
- ⇒ Willingness to change
- ⇒ Appropriateness of actions
- ⇒ Cultivate a learning
- ⇒ Motivation
- ⇒ Tolerance and forbearance
- ⇒ Ability to live on the margins
- ⇒ Cultivating an ecumenical, collaborative openness



Time was given for personal and group work. Finally, lively interactions and discussions took place in the big hall.

Cultural Evening



17.11.2023

Interculturality and Religious Life

The song of the opening prayer invited the participants to experience the intercultural way of living in a deeper way.

*"We are connected like branches to the tree.
We all walk the planet, let's walk with dignity.
No matter our colour, no matter our creed.
All of us are gifted and all of us we need..."*

Rasika started the session presenting some questions:

Why interculturality in Religious Life? What is the correlation between interculturality and Religious Life? Can we think of Religious Life without interculturality? Is it a totally new concept in Religious Life?

Religious Life began in a specific context, in order to respond to the signs of the time, therefore it is contextually and culturally conditioned. As changes in the signs of the time come about in different

contexts, Religious also change, in accordance with the demands of responding to those changes. Interculturality is not new. It does not succeed automatically, but it can be learned and cultivated.

We are familiar with international and multicultural community living within the Institute but now we have realized that interculturality is deeper than multiculturality.

Intercultural living is a major challenge in the current context among Religious Congregations, even though it is the norm of the future if we are to be effective in living the faith and our vocation for mission. **Intercultural living is our mission as the Spirit invites us to be witnesses to the unity in diversity of the Reign of God.**

Intercultural life demands constant renewal and transformation, both within and outside as it poses many challenges in day-to-day living.

☞ **Why do we speak about interculturality within Religious Life today?**

Statistics suggest that many of our members hail from distinctive parts of the world. Hence, we experience the changing face of religious life and its multicultural nature. Today, when local communities within international congregations comprise people of several linguistic and ethnic groups, **learning to live together from an intercultural perspective** rather than homogenized living together – where differences are “smoothed over” rather than valued – becomes a



gospel challenge. Therefore, being members of an international institute and living in a globalized and multicultural world, we are invited to be transformed to live Religious Life anew.

Based on recent observations, some experts predict that international religious orders would progress either by **Fission or Fusion**.

Fission: Certain linguistic or ethnic groups live independently. The outcome is ‘separate development’, they do not commit themselves to intercultural living.

Fusion: Requires a mentality of dedication to ‘integral development’ which is different from separate development.

The purpose of intercultural living should never be for institutional survival, but to enable members to be more

focused and committed to the mission aspect of their charism. If not, we will die out and fail in our responsibility to commit ourselves to mission.

☞ **Is difference a threat or a source of enrichment?**

Intercultural living means learning to appreciate diversity in a community. The members can differ in terms of spirituality, generation, skin colour, education, ethnicity, culture and many other features. In order to develop the potential to diversity, it is important to simultaneously pay attention to the similarities and differences in cultures.

The Religious Life or a local community or a family is a microcosm of a wider society – and whatever is happening in the wider society affects, but also reflects within the smaller unit in society. We may need to honestly ask ourselves the questions that are unpalatable: *where is racism happening within us, and outside of ourselves?*



Group Activity: A glass of mixture fruits juice was given to each participant to drink and find out the fruits that were added in it.... This activity given in order to understand effective way of living the intercultural living: the taste of each fruit is still there, but when combined, a new reality is born.

How to integrate interculturality in community life?

- ☑ Community living entails awareness of the cultural baggage that both hinders and enhances one's community relationships. This baggage includes our personal biases — not only about cultures different from ours, but also our judgment and fixed ideas.
- ☑ Intercultural living is an intentional and explicitly faith-based undertaking. It requires a deliberate decision and a genuine commitment.
- ☑ A deeper understanding of self
- ☑ It is important to move away from ideas of assimilation and hoping that new members will conform to already established cultural norms and structures, as this would force individuals to give up significant traits of their identity.
- ☑ Time is needed in order to share differences of cultures, rituals, the terms that are used widely in different cultures and how we understand them in order to know each other.
- ☑ Intercultural dialogue should be encouraged. It is a mutual learning process.
- ☑ "Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God." (Evangelii Gaudium, 272-Pope Francis)

What is the role of formation towards intercultural living?

Intercultural living invites and demands of us that our formation programs should include content that prepares people for human formation, from the point of view of psycho-spiritual formation, theological formation and socio-cultural formation in order to make intercultural living meaningful.

Individuals from different backgrounds can share their personal narratives and voices and significant aspects of their identity. This is a long process of studying, reflecting, experiencing and evaluating our

journey. On one side, it is essential to help the new members from the very beginning to become intercultural persons. On the other, it is also essential to have a formation for the leaders and formators.

What is our prophetic call in the understanding of interculturality?

Vatican II created a new awareness that the Church and by extension Religious Life must be in, with, and for the world, participating in its struggle for the transformation of humankind. There is a renewed call for reflection on what is required today, if Religious are to be a prophetic presence and a counter-

cultural witness inspired by Evangelical values.

Our prophetic living is called to be intentionally intercultural. We are living in a multicultural world. Hence the intention should be building bridges, creating harmony and healing past historical hurts. This is the prophetic witness the world needs today.

After all, the very purpose of intercultural living is to enable us to move from the relative security of our community or comfort zone in order to reach out and encounter people. Our ultimate desire is not survival but greater commitment to God's mission – the Missio Dei.

From invitation to radical welcome

How can communities better welcome outsiders or 'others' with their differences and thus expand the cultural mix of their communities? There are three stages:

Community of Invitation:

Come and join us and share riches of our cultural and religious traditions

Community of inclusion:

Come and join our community and help us diversity internally and internationally

Community of radical welcome:

Bring your cultural and religious values, your voice and your self: help us to become and intercultural community

Synodality and Interculturality

In the afternoon session, Geni focused on **“Synodality and Interculturality”**

The Synod of Bishops is an institution of the universal Church, convened on certain occasions and which manifests the collegial collaboration of the bishops with the Pope and of the bishops with each other, in order to reflect on certain themes that affect the Church in the whole world or in some country or continent.

The oldest "Synod" is the so-called "Council of Jerusalem" (Acts 15, 2-35) in which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostolic College discussed the integration of Jewish and Gentile believers into the Christian community.

The Synod of Bishops, as we have it today, came into being in 1965 on the initiative of Pope Paul VI, who defined it as "a permanent council of Bishops for the universal Church".

As a result of these assemblies, the Popes have promulgated their "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations". These didactic documents are the authoritative decrees which conclude the work of each Synod. Let us recall some of them:

☞ **Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paulo VI, 1975)**

☞ **Familiaris Consortio, Christifideles Laici, Pastores Dabo Vobis, Vita**

Consecrata (John Paul II)

☞ **Verbum Domini (Benedict XVI)**

☞ **Amores Laetitiae, Dear Amazonia, Synod on Synodality (Francis)**

In 2018, the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* moves in the direction of transforming the Synod from a one-off event into a process divided into different phases, in which the whole Church participates and everyone in the Church is invited to take part. It is on this renewed basis that the process of the Synod 2021-2024, entitled *For a Synodal Church - communion, participation, mission*.

This process foresaw a long phase of consultation and listening to the people of God in all the Churches of the world, which took place in several stages: it began at the local level (parish and then diocesan), then progressed to the level of the national bishops' conferences and ended at the continental level.

In this process, listening has become an opportunity for encounter and dialogue, within each local Church and between them, thanks also to the stimuli of the Preparatory Document and the Working Document drawn up by the General Secretariat of the Synod.

Participation is an expression

of belonging and co-responsibility.

The co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God, through Baptism, in the service of the brothers and sisters. All are necessary for the mission.

Co-responsibility invites us to develop an attitude of gratitude. Our participation is service, not privilege or power. In this dynamic, the service of authority calls for great humility.

This calls for an attitude of constant discernment – discernment implies attentive listening, acceptance, respect, dialogue.

It is a matter of arriving at a decision built together, in process, rather than a decision taken, without the previous process of listening and dialogue. In other words, decision making is done in a process of discernment with broad participation, which makes all participants jointly responsible.

And for that, we need formation, in all aspects and at all levels, including discernment and interculturality living.

Religious can participate in this process of unfolding the synodal spirit, as people with a practice of community life, of assemblies, of discernment processes.

GROUP ACTIVITY

In the last session of the day, the participants carried out a group activity. In multilingual groups, they were asked to draw in silence what interculturality means to them. It was a surprise that each group drew a tree (a connection with

the Founder's dream).

Finally, they shared their feelings about drawing the picture together without talking. Some of the responses are as follows:

- ☞ Giving space to the other
- ☞ Respecting
- ☞ Unity in diversity
- ☞ Co-operation
- ☞ Team work
- ☞ Appreciating
- ☞ Moving together
- ☞ Silence
- ☞ Availability
- ☞ Sharing the giftedness



This activity helped them to understand more deeply the essence of living interculturally in community.

18.11.2023

Recalling the meeting and finding the focus for the future plan

The morning prayer helped the participants to enter the day in an atmosphere of silence.

Geni and Catherine facilitated the day's work.

In the first session, Geni invited to recall the journey so far and share any concerns or areas needing clarification. After a few minutes of silence each one shared her reflection and feelings. Some of points shared:

- Welcome and accept the other culture.
- Listen to the Spirit in silence.
- Deep listening to myself: God in in me and in others.
- Interculturality is to live our Charism deeply.
- Living interculturally in the communities.
- Awareness to live the mission deeply: look at the fears which comes from facing the reality (limited active members and the work load).
- Need for personal transformation
- Learn from our own mistakes.
- Accept in faith and give space to the other.
- Feel the need to have more clarity and the way towards the culture "E".

In the second session, the whole journey was recapped in a nutshell, from the 1st till the 8th day. The following questions were given to reflect on personally and to share with the group.

- ☞ What will I take from this session?
- ☞ Which topics have I found most relevant to my current situation?

In the third session, the participants were asked to work on the following questions and do the three-year plan in the group and see how they implemented it in their own countries.

- ☞ How will I take up my responsibility to coordinate interculturality with the Sisters in my unit?
- ☞ What are the essential areas to work on in my Unit/Vicariate over the next three years?

At 3.00 pm they shared the essential areas they might take in their contexts. After a listening session, they were invited to work with the member of the International Interculturality team to plan for the future, following a template.

The rest of the afternoon and the following day were devoted to drawing up the action plan.

20.11.2023

Closing Session

The day started with an opening prayer. God created this beautiful world to experience our relationship with all of creation. Each one of us is unique, but we have to share our uniqueness for the good of all. We have the responsibility

to embrace the whole world and transform it into unity. The intercultural spirits are: **Uniqueness, Search, Co-operation, Self-commitment, Diversity, Responsibility, Pooling the energy.**

The participants were asked to share the main focus of their **three-year plan.**

After listening to each Unit and Vicariate, there was time for discussions and clarifications.

Closing talk by Eithne

"We have come to the final Session of this particular part of our journey. During our time together, we have frequently mentioned that fact that we are on a journey towards living interculturally – and that we need others to be part of that journey... On our first day, Ana María said, "Interculturality is today a challenge and an urgent necessity for the mission of the Church... At this moment in human history, we have to feel this urgent need..."

Ana Maria encouraged us on the first day "to have the attitude of "disciples", open to the action of the Spirit so that the inspiration/formation received and the experience of these days may have the transforming and multiplying effect that we all desire..."

We heard Jesus' invitation to follow him, to listen to him, to accept the consequences of living as he did...on Wednesday, at the Audience, Pope Francis said, what Jesus does with the disciples tells us that the first to need to be evangelized are the disciples. The first who to need to be evangelized are us ...

We have the responsibility... we believe that this has come now as a result of the Chapter listening to the Spirit... so let us be encouraged by that fact that we really have made a meaningful start to our journey – I think we are coming to believe «...in the positive character of other cultures» and then actively nurturing «the desire to be enriched by them...." We know we "must welcome those of

other cultures and give them (our) unreserved trust" (cf. Aylward Shorter, Missiologist).

*We are on the way... We have said several times that **Intercultural living** should be the aim of people living in Intentional, international religious/faith communities. It is not easy, normal, or even possible for everyone. But we in the Holy Family have always found ways to overcome difficulties... And we are not alone. Jesus is our travelling companion. We are not alone... the Spirit is guiding us. We are not alone – we have each other. I quote John O'Donohue, an Irish Poet «... Our friends (our sisters at this Session) were once strangers. Somehow at a particular time they came from the distance into our lives. Their arrival*

seemed so accidental and contingent. Now our life is unimaginable without them».

We all form a team; we are

Sisters committing ourselves to carry this responsibility together for the sake of the mission. And as Pope Francis said, "The question, dear Sisters is therefore not whether

to proclaim it, but "how" to proclaim it, and this "how" is joy ... the joy of living interculturality-mission for the Kingdom. So let us **Go Forward...**

Final Prayer



The participants joyfully gathered for the closing prayer.

Everyone felt the joy of being together and journeying

together for this special purpose...

"The very purpose of intercultural living is to enable us to move from the relative security of our community or comfort zone in order to reach out and encounter people. Our ultimate desire is not survival but greater commitment to God's plan".

At the end, everyone joined in a circular dance, which invited to receive God's energy from each other and to celebrate the universal network of life in which we are.

