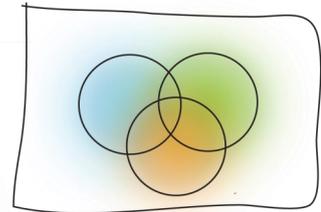
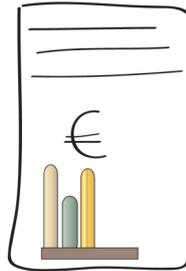
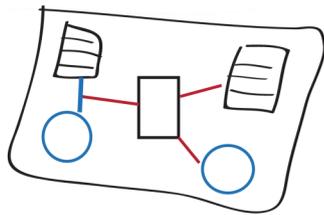




# Echoes

27 Feb - 18 March 2021



Online Discernment

*Journey towards the General Chapter*

The event of our 20<sup>th</sup> General Chapter is long-awaited ... The new reality emerging from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to “live with unexpected change,” during the in-between time. It well describes the fact that we cannot have control over life nor can we navigate it as we wish.

When the possibility of travelling and coming together were suspended, as a body – as an Institute - the Holy Family of Bordeaux, like many others, looked for alternative ways of moving forward, and implemented digital capabilities for the first time. Our Chapter Preparatory Commission, together with our facilitator Matthieu Daum designed a new approach: an ONLINE process of DISCERNMENT

As we all know, discernment requires that we look deeply at our reality, paying attention to the interior movements revealed in our thoughts, dreams, emotions, feelings, inclinations, desires, repulsions and attractions as we listen to what God is trying to tell us through all these.

Using a virtual Platform for this holistic process was not without its challenges, difficulties and moments of confusion. However, to our surprise, the Zoom sessions created many positive insights and enabled a great impact on the whole Body of the Institute.

What was the rationale behind the Online Process as envisioned by the Facilitator and the Preparatory Commission for the 20th Chapter?

*An extract from the Description of the proposed capitular journey states:*

- ⇒ “General Chapter” can now be thought of as a *process* with several stages:
- ⇒ A moment of collective discernment via Zoom in February-March 2021
- ⇒ A period of integration and prayer about the fruits of this discernment
- ⇒ A face-to-face meeting in Rome, to discern the implications of this call from God in terms of purpose, mission, structure and functioning, and to elect the new General Team - in other words, to hold the "General Chapter" itself.
- ⇒ What will emerge is a message from God in response to the fundamental question that has guided us so far: "Can we still live out our Purpose at the beginning of our third century? ».

*How the online meetings developed*

The total number of capitulants is 55 from 18 Units, including the Generalate, Vicariate and the General Leadership Team. Our Facilitator, Mr. Matthieu DAUM had already suggested that the Preparatory Commission divide the capitulants into different types of groups; sets of three, four, and five. Accordingly, each time they met in different groups and sometimes in the same group.

Normally, the sessions started at 12 noon, Rome time, with an opening prayer for the day, followed by Mathieu’s introduction to the day’s work. During the four and a half hours that followed, there were two meetings in groups with short breaks in between, and a plenary after each group work time, into which feedback was given by way of a report or spontaneous sharing

of insights and inner movements.

The Facilitator always provided points to guide the reflection, reminding the participants of the importance of generative listening, encouraging each one to contribute to the discussion and to make sure that all had an opportunity to share their thoughts. He also instructed on how to ‘Break into discussion groups’, providing them with a discussion topic.

The plenary sessions were times of intense listening, at the end of which Matthieu indicated the direction to be taken in connection with the day’s work.

After each capitulants' session, further questions were assigned for prayer and personal reflection before the next meeting.

## *Other important aspects in this online discernment process:*

### **March 2, 6, 10 and 15 – Unit/Vicariate conversations**

During these days, the capitulants from each Unit/Vicariate met with their Sisters, to share what they lived as the capitulant group, taking them through the same experience. And where possible, this same process was extended, in individual communities.

### **March (4, 11 & 16) Inter-Unit conversations:**

This was another level of involvement of the whole Body as the process moved on. The different Zoom conversations with Leaders, Inter-Unit, within Units, held by the Unit's responsible representatives. Whatever the method, this has shown the possibility of including as many as possible in the ongoing Chapter process, and has generated a lot of energy and commitment. Every member was invited to go deeper; they were connected to one another in a greater body-consciousness, growing in sense of belonging, community and greater awareness of Mission.

Every time the Inter-Unit meeting was held, more than 275 Sisters participated in it. They were divided into 42 groups according to language, having 6 or more in each, allowing them sufficient time to share their insights, desires and concerns.

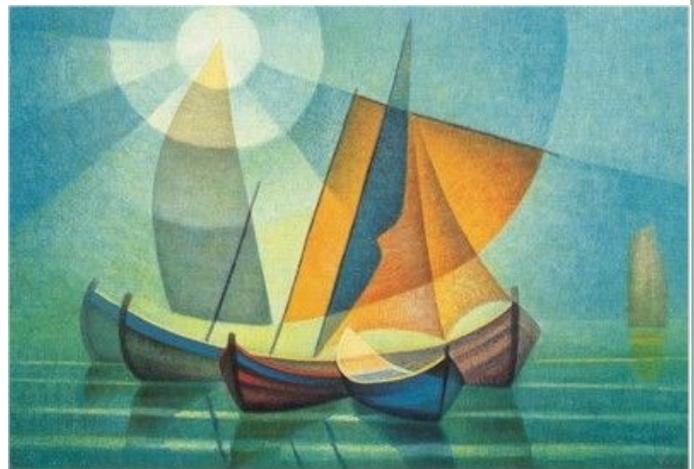
Each session ended with a plenary, where representatives from a few selected groups had the privilege to share what they heard, and the most resonating points were shared in their groups.

It was interesting to see that even the limitations and complexities of technology were not a barrier; all participated enthusiastically, and many echoes were received appreciating this way of integrating and contributing with groups and whole body.



### **Collective prayer: - 27 Feb (Opening prayer), 9 March (Kenosis) and 18 March (Final prayer):**

All members were invited to join the collective / common Prayer through Zoom, where more than 320 members/communities/groups of our institute participated from the different places where we are present. A powerful experience, where together we invoked the Holy Spirit to continue to work in all of us, especially in and through our capitulants.



March 9th was the second time the whole Body of the Institute joined the capitulants on screen, for a prayer together. The theme of the day was 'Kenosis' - self-emptying, letting go. It was a meaningful prayer based on the Gospel text of Mark 4: 35-40, where Jesus invites the disciples with his powerful words - "let us go over to the other side." This introduced all, into "a ritual of what must no longer continue, so that something new may emerge."

The prayerful atmosphere was intended to help all to be ready to let go, to take the risk to enter into the heart and spirit of the capitular journey.

The Final prayer scheduled for 18 March - the final day, was a recalling of the key elements in



the journey we had made; an invitation to understand the 'gift' God offers us (Jn. 4: 10) and embrace the changes that we are going to encounter as we move on.

These moments of praying together to integrate what we heard God telling us and being grateful were indeed powerful. This however, was not an ending, but a place to begin anew.

### Prayer, Retreat and personal reflection:

Rather than thinking of the General Chapter as one single event, at a particular moment in time,

the process includes all members in the "Chapter Journey", in which the Body is involved at different levels, at different times, yet in a way that is as inclusive as possible.

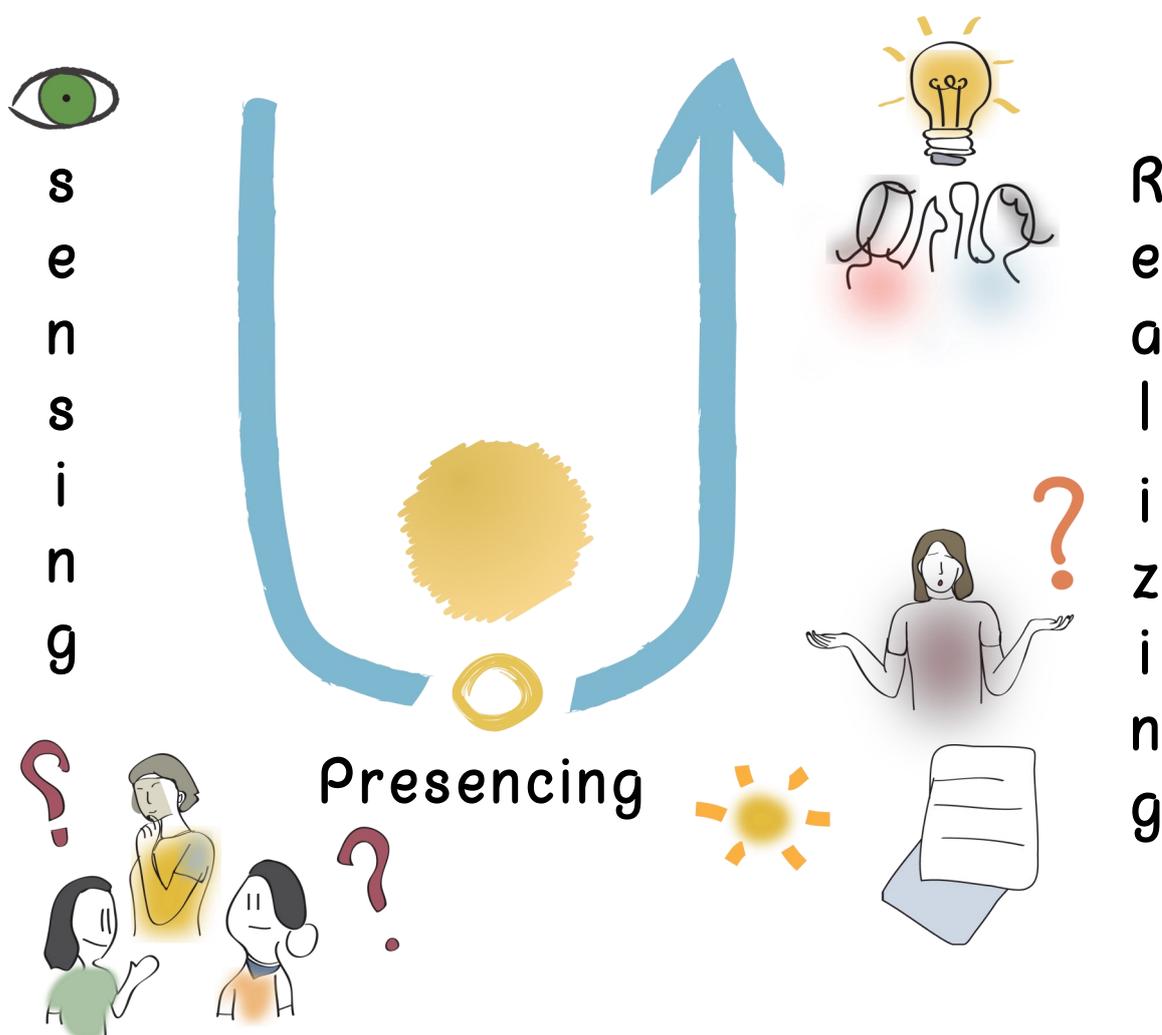
This allowed Sisters to make space for God, to open to God's Spirit and enjoy God's presence, thus opening them towards many possibilities.

Some Units entered into a mode of retreat in the conscious presence of God, spending time with God, to focus on the process.

### *The methodology used:*

During the last two EGCs held in 2018 and 2019, the Facilitator Matthieu Daum worked with us using the "U" process, which enables us not to jump from issue to conclusion but takes us through 3 major moments of – **Sensing, Presencing** and **Realizing** – before we reach a final decision.

The same "U" process was used for this online discernment – starting from the present reality of the Institute and to move down the 'U' – observing and listening to the reality, to our inner movements, and to God.



## SENSING:

Hence, during the first few days, the focus was on **Sensing**.

This sensing was done with the help of the summary of the ‘Murals’ of the Units and Vicariate, reports of the Apostolic General Council and Vicariate Council, report of the Bursar and some statistics about the Institute. The participants, at individual and collective levels observed the strengths-weaknesses, consolations-desolations, fragilities, opportunities and threats with regard to the situation. Later, with the guidelines introduced by the facilitator, the capitulants reflected deeply on the fragilities that block living life fully. This exercise required not simply talking at a rational level but involving all inner movements, thus sensing the critical situation of our Institute-Body.

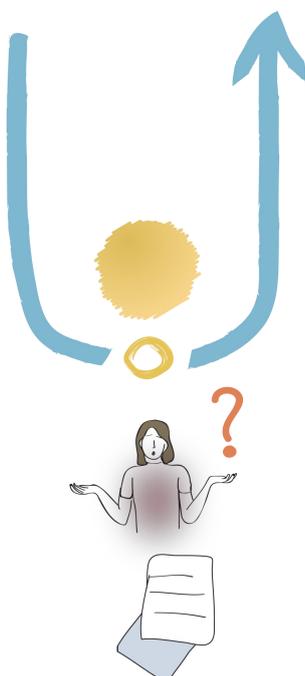


Everyone was invited to situate herself to realize her own part of the problem; what blocks moving from knowing to transforming action - “If you are not part of the problem, you cannot be part of the solution”.

The Capitulants worked in an atmosphere which demanded open mind, open heart, and open will.

### *Some of the aspects that indicate critical conditions are:*

- ◆ Identifying with ministry and not with common mission of HF
- ◆ Dysfunctional members
- ◆ Issues of culture – living interculturality
- ◆ Lack of leadership and quality discernment at all levels
- ◆ No harmonization between power and authority
- ◆ Unstable structure of the Vicariate
- ◆ Different views regarding Formation
- ◆ Inconsistency, inability to let go of past models
- ◆ Lack of strategic plans
- ◆ Feeling of powerlessness, Slow moving, Impatience, Frustration



Having discovered the critical situation of the Body through the process of sensing, they moved to the bottom of the “U” - the moment of Presencing.

## PRESENCING

Presencing means listen to the Spirit to know the direction of the Spirit because the solution comes from beyond us. This exercise enabled all to begin to sense from the whole that is wanting to emerge.

It was a significant moment, slowly entering into “Letting Go and Letting Die”. The facilitator invited the participants to think over the process lived so far and to say where they were now. Through much reflection and sharing, they entered courageously into this life-giving step.

The online collective prayer “Kenosis” helped all to move, asking relevant questions: What are we holding onto? To what are we clinging? What is holding us captive? From what do we want the Lord to release us? Of what do we have to let go?

These reflections at the bottom of the U, allowed them to name what to

drop - that which isn't essential.

The facilitator invited them to an interesting dialogue with the Sisters of 2040. To imagine that they will be filled with gratitude towards the 2021 capitulants, who were able to break the repetitive patterns that had been draining energy for years, and were the people able to change the history of the Holy Family of Bordeaux.

*Some points came out from this reflection:*

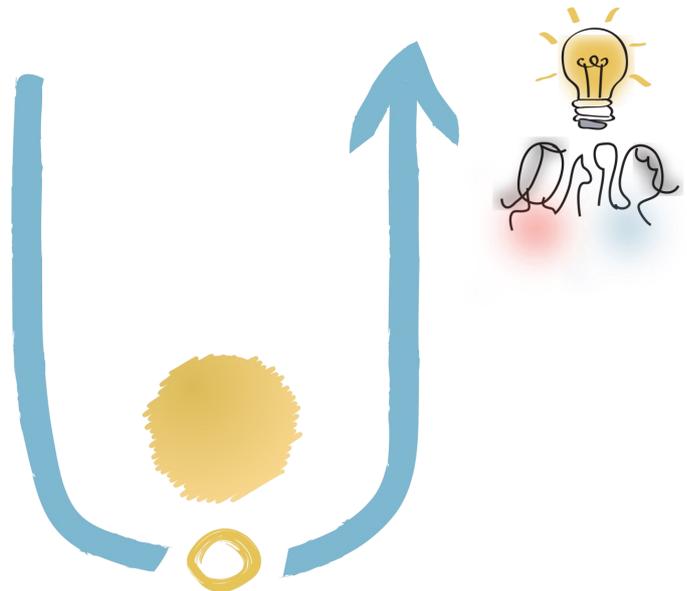
- ◆ Intercultural community in all countries
- ◆ Life giving structures at all levels – leadership, initial formation, community...
- ◆ Holy Family sisters live in full freedom, to choose what is right and life giving
- ◆ More professional, sisters adequately qualified for the mission
- ◆ No dysfunctional members in the communities, each person committed to mission and radical changes are always possible
- ◆ Discernment is the only way the Holy Family cherish to hold, in making any decisions
- ◆ There is financial sustainability

## REALIZING

The last few days, the participants worked in different groups on the key issues on which the historical transformation will have to work and the main obstacles for each. With this, they moved to the moment of 'letting-come', taking the issues a step further.

At this point, the Facilitator underlined that it is not their role now to find solutions to all issues but to think how the Body as a whole could move forward. There was a lot of convergence in the issues identified and they named them under 10 topics.

There the necessity arose that they need to take right steps in order to encourage the emerging future:



*The final days of the meetings:*

In the history of the Holy Family of Bordeaux, there had been many junctures where our Sisters took radical decisions to make a journey forward. Here, the capitulants of 2021 put their energy together...

*10 specific areas of Calls / urgency heard by the participants:*

- 1. Formation:** Change of mentality, discernment process to focus on quality than quantity, to have consistency, linking initial and ongoing formation
- 2. Finance:** role of lay members in the fields of administration, Functioning of CIO (A Charitable Incorporated Organization based in one country), circulation of funds and administrative legislations
- 3. Leadership:** points about community leaders, membership / role of each member, structure of the whole body
- 4. Community life:** animation to help members to live their role, capacity to dialogue, discussion and

discernment process, mission-oriented community living, balancing community activity, personal time, ministries, prayer and integration., Individual responsibility

5. **Vicariate:** what kind of transformation the contemplative community needs, ensure the possibility for contemplative living, approaches to identify concerns and asking the involvement of Superior General

6. **Units at the twilight of their lives:** Some Units will disappear; possibility of losing some Units not because of aging members, but because there are no vocations; fear to begin from scratch, when the membership role is weak, serious issues on arising regarding finance, family spirit of PBN

7. **Structures:** Although this topic was often mentioned as an area that demanded serious review, little in the way of new or radical suggestions came to light at this point. However, it was pointed out that structures are involved across the board.

8. **Intercultural Communities:** we have begun to look at why “interculturality” is not an option, if we take our Charism seriously. Involve Sisters in conversations, questions about the challenges of intercultural living at General, Unit and local level. Responsibility of the Unit leaders, formators to discuss with the formees about interculturality.

9. **Dysfunctional Sisters:** The term “dysfunctional” though it emerged from the process, later provoked some unease. Initial formation and pre-admission are extremely important for discernment of motivation and capacity to live religious life; enough space is needed for personal formation. When “dysfunction” emerges later in religious life, can leaders help members to identify their own situation, to cooperate with the given support? Do they have the capacity to accept them, and journey with them seriously?

10. **Family PBN:** relevant literature to get to know the idea of a Family. Periodically have discussion on our ideas, viewpoints with GLT member in charge. Some countries have the possibility to interact with the members of 5 vocations. Common formation team is there, how they are going to focus what the members really need, to embrace each member of different vocations. The importance of charismatic family? Creating more integration from the side of our Holy Family Youth.



Introducing the last day's work, the facilitator underlined that they have made a long journey, working on how to move forward with the transformation desired by all. Now it was necessary to make space for the new to be born. So, he invited the participants to get into groups and work on what is going to really make a difference – to name the ‘tipping’ points and the kenosis needed.

### *Conclusion:*

With that done, they were ready to end this discerning process, trusting on the ongoing work of the Chapter Preparatory Commission. The results of the last group work done on ‘Tipping points and Kenosis’ could be the main source to move on to the next step.

Mr. Matthieu explained that he, together with the Preparatory Commission, will continue to work till November, in designing how to engage the whole Body to move towards this transformation.

The final prayer with the whole Institute Body gave hope and courage to move forward with responsibility.

The 20-day session came to a close with words of appreciation and gratitude for all participants, the Facilitator, the translators, the Chapter Secretary, the Information Service, secretaries and those who helped in the technical aspect for the smooth functioning of this Zoom meeting.



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