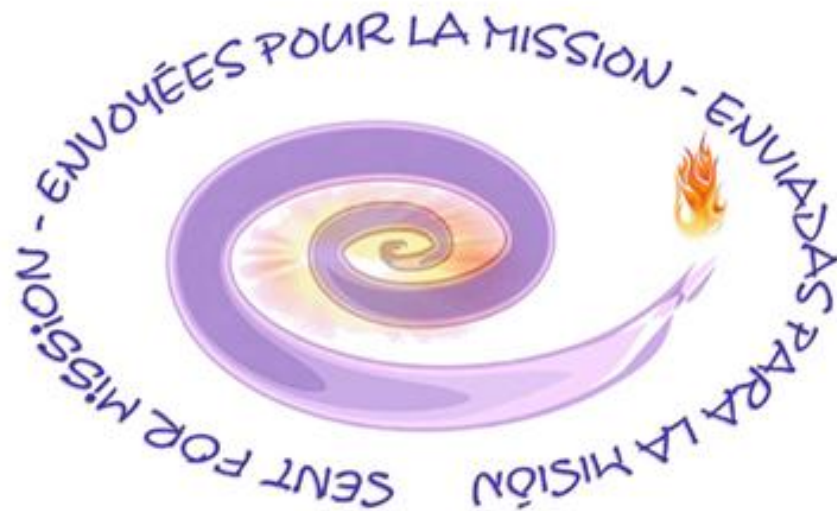


19th GENERAL CHAPTER

2014

INFORMATION ON THE CONTEXT

EUROPE



*If we don't dare now, then when?
Si nous n'osons pas maintenant, alors quand?
Si no nos atrevemos ahora, entonces ¿cuándo?*

Dear Sisters,

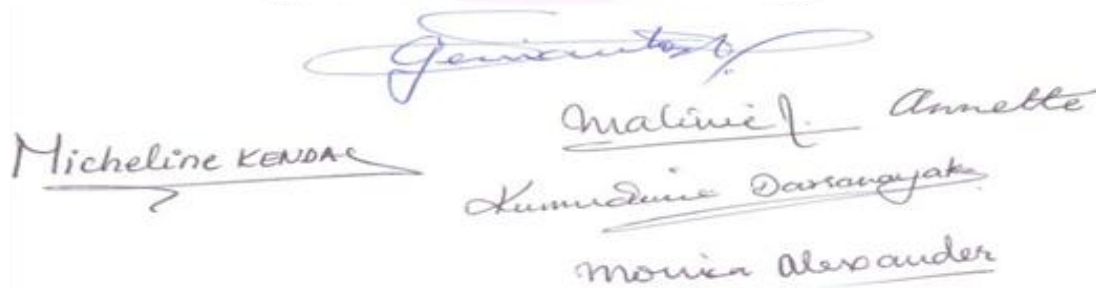
As you know, each Unit has been asked to present its situation briefly in preparation for the General Chapter.

In the publications which you will be receiving, you will find descriptions of the various situations in the places where we are present throughout the world. These documents show in a few freely-chosen words how the *Holy Family* sees itself, the situation of each country and, consequently, the situation of the Institute.

We have decided to publish these documents continent by continent so you will receive four publications. You will be able to find these on our website also in the area reserved for the Institute (1). This is the second document.

The aim of all this is to help us to get to know better the places where we are living, to enable everyone to access the information and to ensure that each Chapter Delegate has the material at hand. Thank you for sending in your reports.

Reading these documents, will enable us to be in contact with one another aware of being part of the Family united by the same Charism for the Mission of Christ in today's world.



Handwritten signatures of the Pre-Chapter Commission members:

- Micheline KENDAC
- Genevieve
- Malini J. Annette
- Kumudini Dassanayake
- Monica Alexander

The Pre-Chapter Commission

Website: www.saintefamillebordeaux.org

1. To access the area reserved to the Institute,; On the Home Page of English, click on "Reserved Area" in the left-hand menu, then on "The Institute and then sign in:

User name: **Institut**

Password: **institut**

Then you will be able to access the relevant documents. When you have finished, close the document and then on the left-hand menu of the Home Page, click on Disconnection.

N.B: Will the Chapter Delegates please bring these documents with them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FROM UNIT

SPAIN

APOSTOLIC RELIGIOUS

Form of Government:
CONSTITUTIONAL/
Parliamentary
Monarchy.

This is one of the forms of government existing in contemporary Western democracies, in which the King acts as the head of state under the control of the legislature (parliament) and the executive (government). It is divided into 17 autonomous regions.



The official language is Spanish or Castilian, although there are other languages spoken in some autonomous regions (Catalan, Euskera, Gallego ...)

The official **religion** is Roman Catholic, but we can say that 23'6% say they have no religion. There are also Islamic minorities, Protestant, Orthodox (1.9%).

Population of approximately 46.500.000; this is changing due to the return of many emigrants to their home countries. It is an

aging population due to low birth rate (10%) and Lower Mortality Rate (8'2%).

Since 2008 we are suffering the effects of a very serious **financial crisis** that has created nearly 6,000,000 unemployed, many of them young people seeking their first job. This represents 26% of the workforce. It is true that this number decreases in holiday periods but these are only temporary jobs.

Unemployment occurs in all sectors: Construction, Services, industry ... but it

has been noticeable in relation to construction, which catered for many jobs (carpentry, plumbing ...), many small businesses have been forced to close and render their employees jobless.

This crisis has made the government slash aid and has decreased the number of jobs in the service sector.

In the last five years the number of people in social exclusion served by CARITAS has doubled; most are families, children, the homeless. It is also noted that there are now middle class families who are coming, and not only the working class, as had previously been the case.

Health Care is covered by the state (Social Security), but because of the economic cuts made by the government waiting lists for consultations, treatment by specialists and even surgery suffer considerable delay. There is social unrest because the government is committed to privatizing

health and at present, is sending many people to private clinics

Education is covered well by the state in their centres or through subsidies to private schools that cater for much of the school population.

Regarding ecological disasters, we suffer most from wildfires on the mountains and in the forests in the summer, and pollution in the big cities.

At church level there is a clear secularisation process, many people ignore the Sacraments. People attend Church less and less, outside social events, and a growing number of Catholics consider themselves non-practising or practising minimally, including the agnostics and atheists. The majority of the hierarchical Church distrusts the teachings of Vatican II, continue to promote a "Christendom" church. Alongside all these, there are also basic Christian communities who are incarnating their faith.

CONTEMPLATIVE RELIGIOUS - OTEIZA

The Apostolic Sisters of Spain have presented the report on the different contexts of our country. As citizens of the same country, we own that report, since it is a reality that affects us deeply.

As contemplative sisters, we have reflected on the question ***to what extent do these various situations (church, political, cultural, social, economic) affect***

our lives; what do we "see", what is our "listening" to them and what calls and challenges for us are contained in them.

At the time of writing this "report", we are moved, as is the whole world, by the natural disaster caused by typhoon that hit the Philippines, where Sister Death has so far taken 10,000 lives, plus all the other consequences associated with such a disaster.

With this particular event and all that happens every day in different contexts that appear immediately in the media, we can really feel that everything is interconnected and therefore the cultural, political, social, economic and ecclesial situations are part of that interconnection. Everything points to an enormous crisis, deeply rooted in a crisis of values, in which we are all involved and by which we are all, "tainted." But to what extent do they really affect our lives? How do we look and listen to events? To what extent do they challenge us? Looking at the reality, the first thing that seems to spring to mind is a superficial feeling of pessimism, seeing these events from the "outside"; but when we enter into it more deeply, we are shaken by Jesus' question: "Do you think that you are better than those that were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them, or better than those who were sent to their death by the cruel tyranny of Pilate? No, I tell you, and unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way" (cf. Lk 13: 1-5). We find at a deep level of experience that all reality is touched by evil, corruption, etc., and that this is a truth that we live in our own being, in our whole being. And it is even more true that in Jesus, God calls us to continual conversion of heart, of life, of attitudes. God seeks us, challenges us through all realities, and we firmly believe that God seeks each one of us.

In all that we live in following Jesus, we enter into his own attitudes, his loving gaze, his compassion, tenderness, mercy, forgiveness. Out of this call to conversion, and the recognition of our personal and community responsibility in both graced

and sinful events, we feel driven on by the Spirit of Jesus, a call that becomes a cry of confidence, of continuous intercession for this world in which we live. This prayer is transformed into life, a life that calls us strongly to be coherent; this is not a response expressed in direct ministry; it comes out of a life hidden with Christ in God, which opens out to the whole world, the whole universe.

We feel a strong need to go deeper, to do more to respond to the grace that God has given us through his call to the Holy Family, to communion. Faced with so many lies, so much pretence, such ambition, the desire to own more and more and to accumulate; faced with the culture of alienating and irresponsible consumerism, we feel strongly challenged by Jesus himself as he asks us again and again why we are so anxious, why so busy about things that have no real value. So many, many people, unknown to us yet at the same time known, are in extreme need and ... What is our lifestyle? In order to share with the needy, there is a compelling need to be more sober in all our choices : food, heating, the things we use, the paper we consume: before making a photocopy, see if it is really necessary, same for whatever we need to buy, etc.

Called to continual conversion, we try to make our own the sufferings and joys of our world. In faith, we recognize that the life which the Risen Jesus brings is emerging in this humanity which God loves so much. Everything is imbued with His presence and this fact supports our fragility, filling it with hope.

POLAND

POLITICAL CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC and ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

Poland has a parliamentary system of government; parliament plays an important role. Executive power is exercised by the President and the government. Democracy in our country is still in development. When we analyse the past, we find that the journey to this state of affairs has been long and tortuous. 123 years of partitions, followed by the communist regime, which lasted until 1989, and led the country to ruin. Although we are a democracy, we can still see violations of human rights and civil corruption, nepotism and lack of implementation of measures that answer the needs and interests of society. This has led a significant number of people to renounce any kind of impact on public life, as the low election turnout shows. Important unmet expectations related to the transition process only serve to increase their sense of social injustice and their resentment.

To understand this attitude, we must look at the political arena. Scandals and government incompetence, political lies and insults, corruption and political capitalism, the collapse of all moral standards, lack of State services, Justice and decency are the unchanging image of the Polish political scene. The politicians do not just abuse the democratic system, they use their position for financial gain. Due to the bad

political situation the following questions and problems arise, especially the problem of unemployment. The policy of reducing state expenditure has been unable to cope with this phenomenon. The frequent demonstrations that take place in Poland show that people are fighting for a minimum wage, which barely meets the basic necessities, such as food or clothing. The cost of living rises and pay remains the same. The proportion of the population living below the poverty



line in Poland (since 2012) is 7% - 13%. Young people especially (around 30%) emigrated abroad to seek employment and higher wages. Most of them did not return to the country. There is insecurity in the region affecting the ability to maintain a family and have stable permanent employment.

The aging of the population is another problem, along with the decline in the

birth-rate. There is the gap between rich and poor, and the middle class is disappearing.

There is a growing problem of broken families. There is also the phenomenon of child-rearing called "euro-orphans." Increasingly, children are raised by single parents or grand-parents. Without adequate support from the State non-sacramental marriages and civil unions are on the increase, with the imposition of the model of gender equality (homosexuality, gender ideology). There are efforts to destroy the model of extended family and Christian customs

and traditions, by the implementation of the social norms of increasingly secular countries, despite the fact that 92.2% declare themselves Catholic. State decisions contribute to the elimination of the Church, the largest arena of social life. The aggression of the Media towards the Church is becoming more open through continuous broadcasts, ridiculing religion, and publicizing the problems of the scandals linked to church officials. The authority of the Church is no longer clear. The Church is living a time of confrontation and questioning about the style and way of living the Gospel today.

PROVINCE OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Political and financial situation of Britain

The UK is a unitary democracy within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. The Queen is head of state and the Prime Minister Head of government. Scotland has its own parliament and Wales and N. Ireland have separate assemblies.

The current government is a coalition of Conservative/Liberal Democrat. The Green Party, promoting care for the earth, has increased support in



recent years. There has also been growth in support for the non-parliamentary party UKIP (UK Independence Party), mainly campaigning on EU withdrawal and in opposition to growth in immigration.

The UK has the 6th largest economy in the world, measured by GDP, and the 3rd largest in Europe. The UK is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union, G7, G8 and G20, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and the United Nations.

The UK economy is boosted by North Sea oil and gas production, agriculture, construction and manufacturing industries, tourism and other service industries. However there has been an

increase in privatisation of many state-owned enterprises and services.

The global financial crisis of 2007 has had a major impact on the financial status of the UK, though currently there is slow recovery. Increase in unemployment, drastic cuts in healthcare, education, social welfare services and benefits, housing allowance, has meant the poor have got poorer. Notable is the dependence of an increasing number of people on 'Food Banks'. At the same time bank managers and other top managers in industry have been paid gross bonuses, creating an increasing financial divide. On a positive note, the UKs financial contribution to global crises and international development has not been reduced.

Political and financial situation of Ireland

Ireland, also called the Republic of Ireland, has a population of just over 4.5 million. The country comprises 26 of the 32 counties that constitute the island of Ireland. The remaining six counties in Ulster are part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This division in the country has been at the root of what are known as "the troubles" in Northern Ireland when over the course of three decades more than 3,600 people were killed and thousands more injured and many disappeared.

The Republic of Ireland is a member of the EU, with a system of parliamentary democracy. The National Parliament consists of the President and two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Ireland is predominantly a Catholic country and in spite of the recent

abuse scandals Mass attendance is still very high.

Economy.

After decades of stagnation, high emigration and unemployment, the 'Celtic Tiger' (a term coined in 1994) emerged in the 1990s as Ireland enjoyed a period of unprecedented economic growth. However, growth became increasingly unbalanced by massive increases in public spending, and relaxed fiscal policy and credit. Then with the onset of the global financial crisis, the Irish property sector collapsed with prices of residential properties falling by 51 per cent from their peak in September 2007. The subsequent decline in construction activity and high bank debt triggered an economic recession in 2008. Between 2008 and 2011, GNP declined by 10.1 per cent and unemployment increased from

4.4 per cent in January 2007 to 15 per cent in January 2012. Poverty has greatly increased and in order to address these new needs our sisters help at “food banks”; deliver meals to the poor elderly and housebound; teach English to immigrants; are involved in linking emigrants in Australia, US and

Canada with their families in a Church settings at Christmas. They are also involved with agencies addressing the trafficking of women, refugees, the sex industry, and support for the unemployed. Sisters support families through parish ministries and work with the bereaved.

NETWORK OF BELGIUM – FRANCE – ITALY



The Network of Belgium-France-Italy has been in existence for 7 years. (December 30, 2006). French is our language in Council, but Italian and Flemish appear now and then – understanding one another requires efforts from each of us.

These three countries have **democratic governments** which form part of the

European Union, the seat of which is in Brussels while the Parliament is in Strasbourg.

The total population is 137 million: Belgium 11 million, France 65.6 million and Italy 60.4 million. All three countries can count many immigrants: in France, 25% of the population has an immigrant parent or grandparent.

The Economic Crisis has made things even more difficult for the new arrivals: racist reactions and rejection have arisen in a violent way, and isolationism paves the way for extremist policies. Families are hit hard by the crisis.

Unemployment is on the increase. More than 11% in France and 12% in Italy. The young and the older workers are particularly affected.

The number of families in **precarious economic situations** has multiplied, and touched the middle strata of society. Difficulties encountered give rise to feelings of abandonment, insecurity and violence, especially in large cities and their suburbs. Drugs and easy money have invaded these places, where young people roam about aimlessly.

Voluntary Associations in France count 13 million members and employ 1.6 million, plus all the volunteers. They are an essential component of the social fabric and meet all kinds of needs: services, sport, recreation, aid. In this time of crisis, charities are struggling to meet all the requests for aid that they receive..

Concern for the environment, and for the future of the planet is growing, and changing lifestyles: "ecology" parties have taken their place in the political system.

A "**solidarity economy**" is making its way in the financial market . Solidarity savings grew enormously in France during the last year. They support businesses among other things, and have helped create 36,000 jobs, the relocation of 4,400 people, and supported more than 1,000 microfinance institutions around the world.

Religious freedom is respected in our multi-cultural and multi-faith countries. The migration of the last century, and intermixing of the population in our three countries has resulted in different religions living side-by-side. Islam is growing, and is the second religion in France, with more than 4 million followers. The Catholic Church and the major religions are recognized in the three countries as partners and advisors in social problems (bio-ethics, caritas, euthanasia).

Former **Christian countries** have become mission territory. Postmodernity has shaken the foundations of social and political life; religious practice was not spared. The churches are emptying, the faithful are diminishing, the sacraments no longer mark important life-events.

The reality of the **Church as communion** is manifested by more active participation of the faithful. Hence initiation to the Sacraments, preparation of the liturgy and funerals are assigned to teams. Catechesis is evolving; the catechumenate is given special attention.

Parishes are changing. They are moving towards ecclesial communities whose care is entrusted to a team, where priests, deacons and laity, each according to his/her own vocation, are called by the Bishop to live the mission of the Church in partnership.

"Spiritual Families" have flourished in France, especially in recent years. In October 2013, a second gathering in Lourdes brought together 200 "Families" of many different kinds, represented by 1,300 delegates. 9 members of the Holy Family were present.

COMMUNITY OF LA SOLITUDE

We see the increase of encouraging initiatives which call for a collective conscience awakening and thus offer a good reason for hope. It is often little things which change the big things. People are committed to living solidarity and support for the destitute, the sick and persons alone...



We see that many ways of living Christian commitment exist. It is no longer a question of living for the Church but of living as Church, of living communion with all the dimensions of today's pluralistic society.

The Diaconate Assembly (Lourdes 2013) was an outstanding event and its final message: *“Fraternity is never an option, it is a necessity (...) Together, let us dare to change the way we look upon the weakest. (...) Together, let us change the public politics from local to international.*

(...) Together, let us dare to change our lifestyle in order to respect creation where human bonds are first and safeguard the future of generations to come. »

We see a society torn by crises, by different levels of social, economic and political views in competition; technological, political and economic changes which affect the lives of people, families and the life of the Church; the irruption in the public sphere of items that once belonged to the private sphere like life, death, sexuality, bioethics (VIG, CAPS, euthanasia...) the power of social networks and an **informational deluge** too dense, too noisy, too superficial to be truly enlightening and operative. (cf. JC Guillebaud)

We see social bonds becoming weaker and individualism stronger. Fragility, personal fear because many families, single people and youth are victims of various restrictions and look to the future with concern. Violence in family circles/to women/ to children/... Violence in schools... The French model of integration, of immigration is in crisis and is getting worse. Intolerance and the rise of fundamentalism are of concern. The risk is great of an extreme right supported in the polls by its fundamentals: immigration, Islamo-phobia and insecurity.

We see an «inefficacy of public speech» (JC Guillebaud). There is a lack of confidence in the political elite of the country, always a blatant discrepancy between their promises and

their actions; a depressive society that does not believe in its future and leaders who have a level of unpopularity which was never previously reached. The society turns away from the great ideologies and seeks an ideal of protection that shelters it from the turbulence of the world.

"In the midst of what is collapsing and what is emerging," we cannot lament or seek the culprits. There is an urgent need to go to the essentials of Christian newness to register it in the fabric of our society. (cf. Bishop Dagens). More than ever we must take care of the life and serving life.

"I came so that all people have life and have it in abundance".

LOCAL COMMUNITY – GENERALATE -Rome



We are:

- ♣ **An international and intercultural community** with its attendant wealth and weaknesses.

Out of ten members of what is called "the local community", four are from Sri Lanka, one from the Congo, and five from Europe. We therefore stress that it is not a *European* community,

although located in Europe. This requires respect and openness, in order to leave space for different cultural expressions and preferences. Intercultural living has its own demands: taking risks to build up trust, willingness to enter into dialogue, interest and acceptance of one another's culture. Differences can be

felt often, including at times of celebration, or with regard to hospitality, etc. For example, no-one lives Christmas or Easter the way she would do so “at home” – so we need to build up our own customs and traditions to strengthen the sense of belonging.

Language can be a problematic area. We all try to learn/speak French, which for the present remains the common language, but without Italian, one can feel cut off from the milieu. Lack of comprehension of the languages used can easily cause misunderstandings.

For us, as for any community, communication is vitally important, but we are handicapped at times when it comes to sharing reflection, prayer, or engaging in everyday conversation. Patience with ourselves and with others is very necessary!

♣ **At the service of the Institute in the Family - this is our *raison d'être*.**

Each one of us is here for direct service of the Institute, through her work in one of the “departments”: financial administration, the organisation of the Generalate, hospitality, the Information Service and the Secretariat. Since the 2008 Chapter, the community has been at its smallest ever, which has meant that members at times have to assume double roles – e.g. Secretary and Promoter of the Cause of the Founder, etc...

We take seriously our role at the centre of the PBN Family, and try to build up, in simple ways, a sense of

family through our communications and our presence to all the members.

♣ **Living our mission in collaboration with the General Leadership Team**

The GLT and the community are interdependent. The tasks are many and varied, according to the agenda, the meetings, Sessions, etc. The secretaries work in the three main languages, coordinated by the Secretary General; finding translators can at times be a matter of concern – it seems that fewer and fewer in the Institute are learning second and third languages, and of course, European numbers have diminished drastically.

In the present structure, the Secretariat and the Information Service work as individual teams, but we are not sealed off from one another, and try to help one another where possible.

♣ **In the Church of Rome**

This is a privilege which we seem to appreciate more since the election of Pope Francis! There is, however, a wealth of Catholic culture and tradition in the city which we perhaps take too much for granted. At local level, we have no involvement in our Parish. On the one hand, our commitments at home take our time; on the other, our impression of the Parish itself is one of distance, of lack of warmth and lay involvement. Although in community we have often voiced our desire to be more active “outside”, when we look at our reality we see too many obstacles.

♣ In Italy

In general, the community makes an effort to keep abreast of political and social developments in the country. Lack of Italian is of course a hindrance in this, and some of the members of the community have made some effort to learn the basics of the language. As of last year, permits to stay in Italy require a minimum proficiency in the language; courses exist in Rome – many of the priests and religious who come to study here have to learn the language first. In our

opinion, taking time to learn at least some Italian would not be wasted.

While Italian laws and bureaucracy are extremely complex, and as a result we have had difficulties regarding residence permits, driving licences, banking etc., we have usually found the people helpful and warm towards us. Rome is one of the most visited cities in the whole world; the people here are used to foreigners, and are in general friendly and encouraging.



Holy Family of Bordeaux
Communications / Information Service
Rome
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