**OPENING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE FAMILY**

Rome, 18 – 22 September, 2015

Welcome to this Council of the Family. The community that is welcoming us here wants us to feel at home and hopes that we will have a “Family experience” among ourselves during our time together.

As we begin this meeting, we need to become aware of the fact that we are here as the Council of the Family. As such, we not here as representatives of our own Vocational Group; each one of us has the responsibility of feeling and acting **in** and **for** the Family as a whole. We are an inter-Vocational group, co-responsible as equals for the present and the future of the Family of P. B. Noailles.

The objectives for this Council of the Family are:

* To review the impact of the Fourth Congress of the Family, 2012
* To move forward in our understanding of our identity as a Family
* To examine today’s reality, and discern our commitment as a Family.

The theme:  ***“Family de Pierre Bienvenu, are you Mission in Today’s World?”***

A challenge inspired by what the Pope says in *Evangelii gaudium* puts us on the alert:

“My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. It is something that I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. *I am a mission* on this earth; that is why I am here on this earth.”[[1]](#footnote-1) We can apply these words to ourselves as the Family of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles. We cannot separate Charism and Mission. The Mission is something alive which begins when God called us into being, which was confirmed in Baptism and which we took on in a more conscious way when we committed ourselves freely on the spiritual path which the *Holy Family* offers us.

What does the “Mission” consist of? Remembering what I have just quoted, it is certainly much more than something we can say or do – although both of these are essential to it. It is, rather, an inner awareness, an attitude which leads us to see ourselves as “channels” through which Life finds expression in all circumstances. That was how Jesus lived his Mission. We are his witnesses, disciples and followers and consequently, as people who continue his mission, we are called to act in a similar way.

The Mission we received as a Family from the very beginning is *“to spread and strengthen the faith everywhere.”*  Where and how do we need the Spirit right now to spread and strengthen the faith that we are all the Family of God? Responding clearly and with discernment to this challenge can lead us to a vital transformation of the way we live the Charism and Mission today.

We are all aware that we are going through a profound global crisis (ecological, ethical, economic, political, religious…) which affects both human beings and the Planet. Let us look, for example, at what is happening in Europe and in the countries from which thousands of people are fleeing in an attempt to save their lives from war, hunger… and to find a safer place and new opportunities. This scenario confirms what some are saying about living in chaotic times caused by complex situations, mind-boggling changes – without the time to assimilate them – and continual unpredictability. We often experience insecurity, fear, anxiety, loss of identity…and we feel we no longer have a firm hold on things that used to have meaning for us. This global context makes it more difficult to confront the period of history in which we are living with clarity and boldness.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Each one of us can remember many situations and experiences which confirm this because, generally, we find it easier to critique causes and see consequences than to have proposals or solutions for such complex matters.

We need to broaden and deepen our gaze if we are not to remain just at this level of our perception of reality which does not show us other important dimensions. We need to realize that while one thing is dying, something new is being born, and we have to make an effort to see these very fragile buds that are already appearing. “It is only the Christian who is able to see the signs of hope that underlie the process of change who will be able to become part of history and be present to the present moment.” (García Roca) Discovering and caring for these new buds, which direct us towards another way of living our inter-relationships, will give us reasons to hope and also help us to stay with the commitments we already have and/or to commit ourselves to new projects.

As people who believe, we know with certainty that every time is a time of Salvation, and that nothing can prevent the fulfilment of God’s Plan which is the bearer of abundant Life for the whole of Creation, through channels of compassionate love and reconciliation. In order to understand this very profound truth which is hidden by reality, we need to be able to see things with the eyes of faith nourished by the Word and contemplation. Do we take the time to look calmly and deeply at what we are living personally and at what Humanity and the Planet are living? Are we willing to share this with others?

Throughout our 195 years of existence, our way of fulfilling the Mission has changed, depending on the needs of the contexts where we have lived or are living. It is essential that we have a clear “vision” with regard to our Mission because that is what tells us the direction we must go while, at the same time, enabling us to be flexible and creative in choosing the ways and means to respond better to the current cries of Humanity and of the Planet.

The words of Pierre Bienvenu, at the beginning of our Foundation, invite us and challenge us once again to search for clear and more appropriate responses to the reality that we are living today, “*… it is very rare that the ideas and needs of a century that is drawing to a close respond to the ideas and needs of the one that is beginning… that is why we have seen new Societies succeeding older ones. Their objectives are the same but, nevertheless, they adopt new forms and new means in order to adapt to the circumstances that caused them to be founded.*"[[3]](#footnote-3). And we can also welcome Pierre Bienvenu’s other desire, *“Do not separate yourselves from those who live under the common law…accompany them on their journey, support them in their struggles…and share with them all the risks and dangers of the journey.”*[[4]](#footnote-4) Present-day society presents us with great challenges but also with many opportunities. If “we are Mission in this world” what response can we give today as a Family?

In *Evangelii gaudium*, the Pope says, “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always ‘new’”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Our Mission is the mission of the whole Family. We are gradually developing our awareness that we are “ONE Family on Mission, gift in a changing world” and that each member and each Vocation is responsible for the Whole and for making our Charism known and visible, witnessing to hope and joy in our world.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Each Vocation contributes to the common Mission on the basis of its own identity and this is a gift from God to the other Vocations because it enriches and complements us. Therefore, we either carry out our Mission together and in collaboration and complementarity with one another or we not faithful to the Charism we have received.

It is essential that we be aware that we are all leaves and branches of the same tree, nourished by the same sap and sustained by the same roots. Connected to these roots and to the same trunk, we can carry out our Mission with a great diversity of lifestyles, activities and commitments. This is the parable of communion that we wish to live as a Family in the reality of the present-day world. This is our mission, our reason for being in the Church and in the world. Are we flexible and creative enough to respond to the needs of today’s world without losing our connectedness with the Charism and with one another?

When a tree is healthy, it has life and there is harmony between all its parts. When the Family of P. B. N. – lay associates, priests, consecrated seculars, contemplatives and apostolics – live in an interconnected and interdependent way, our life of communion flows, we all gain in vitality and invest more energy and fruitfulness in the Mission, enlivened by the Spirit of God Alone as it was lived by Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

In order to move forward in our awareness of being ONE Family on Mission, we have to delve into the fundamentals that constitute us as that family. Our Family is not united by bonds of blood or kinship but by other ties: a common vocation to follow Jesus and to collaborate in his Mission. This is what unites us more strongly than anything else and generates closeness, a sense of belonging and co-responsibility in the Mission.

The Holy Family – lovely image of the Trinity – which is our source of inspiration, loved, sought and desired God Alone in all things. It was the will of God and God’s Mission that constituted them as a Family. By accepting the Will of God, we too have been incorporated into the family of Jesus[[7]](#footnote-7) and his Mission of “gathering together all the scattered children of God”[[8]](#footnote-8) and forming one single family which includes the whole of Creation.

May this meeting of the Council of the Family be the opportunity to grow in awareness and experience of what we are and what we are called to be – Mission in today’s world.

Ana María Alcalde

1. Evangelli gaudium, 273 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A Spirituality for a Time of Emergency, E. Martínez Ocaña. Narcea Ediciones, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. General Rules, 1851 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. General Rules, 1851 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. EG 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Fourth Congress of the Family, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mk 3: 31-35 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jn 11:52 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)