



Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy

Congregación de la Hermanas de la Misericordia

January 23rd 2020.

Dear Sisters

Greetings and blessings for the New Year, now well on its way.

On December 6th last we wrote to you with a brief account of the **recent Plenary meeting**. Now we want to focus on the progress we made in relation to the **'Chapter Mandate'** (revision of Chapter 4 of our Constitutions). The Plenary was the first opportunity since 2018 that as a whole congregation (through the leadership teams) we could engage with *God's Call* – with the serious and transforming journey of changing our structures for the sake of mission today.

Dreamers

In advance of considering this issue at the Plenary Conference, we invited a small group of sisters (as mentioned in *Mercy Alive* November) to consider, in an imaginative way, the possibilities regarding a new structure (Branch) which would replace our province/region structure. The group worked in a gentle contemplative way, listening to the story of our journey so far. They recounted that as they worked they became inspired and enthusiastic by this opportunity for change in our congregation, and by the idea that we had 'come-of-age' so to speak in our jubilee year. They spoke with conviction as they presented their findings to the Plenary. The plenary group was most grateful to the 'Dreamers' for the hope, excitement and challenge, which their ideas presented.

Options

The 'Dreamers' placed emphasis on our Oneness, and envisaged the Congregation as a large Tree. They gave three possible scenarios for what 'Branches' might look like:-

1. Branches based on a common interest or identity – around a ministry or project where members might be scattered very widely
2. Branches established as new geographical entities – not unlike provinces/clusters/large areas – with flexible boundaries
3. Branches incorporating charism carriers (including lay partners/associates).

Scenario 2 – Geographical Branches

The Plenary Conference spent two days considering these possibilities with the help of the canon lawyer Lynn Jarrell. Scenario 2 - Branches as defined geographical areas - **emerged as the preferred option**. The size and shape of these geographical branches would depend on the reality on the ground, and some could be large while others might be small. It is envisaged that boundaries would be more open and interconnection would be more feasible than is our current situation. Scenario 2 would allow for easy change of boundaries if needs be – such as extending or merging branches – and also would have the capacity to include and enable situations as described in scenario 1 and 3.

Rachamim

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All Branches would be connected to CLT through their leaders, who would have delegated authority and shorter terms of office. The Branches would have responsibility for the life and mission of their local communities, encouraging contemplative living and arranging necessary supports.

A critical new element however, would be the setting up of a ***special common-services-structure*** to deal with large administrative tasks such as finance, property, budgeting, safeguarding, formation etc. This element is already indicated in the Draft 3 Constitutions (no. 78 and 79) and will be covered in detail in the Statutes.

As you can imagine there is a good deal of work ahead of us yet. In line with the indication of the Plenary meeting we agreed that scenario 2 would be the structure best suited as we begin to tease out the implications of change. An Extraordinary General Chapter will make the final decision on this matter in due course.

In the meantime it will be for us all to continue the process of engagement, education, research and exploration as the mandate requires. Over the coming months we will discern together how to make progress on this journey.

We will keep in touch as we go.

With every blessing and love,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Marie Louise Anna Bernie Cáit Helena". The names are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marie Louise White, Anna Burke, Bernie Ryan, Cáit O'Dwyer, Helena O'Donoghue.
Congregational Leadership Team

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