



Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

31st Congregational Chapter 2021 Direction Statement

*“In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God...
through the Word all things came into being...
The Word was made flesh, the Word lived among us.”
(John 1:1-14)*

“Drawn by Love, Passionate for Justice”, we, the Apostolic Sisters, Contemplative Sisters, and Partners-in-Mission, following in the footsteps of Jesus the Good Shepherd, participated in the 31st Congregational Chapter.

While journeying through a global pandemic and an unprecedented humanitarian and planetary crisis, we created a truly historic event in the life of the Congregation with this virtual Chapter. Through our discernment and dialogue, we embraced *Radical Transformation* and to act justly in our relationships at all levels. We commit to implement the *New Governance Structure* having mission at the center, fostering communities characterized by inclusivity, reconciliation and healing. We envision the full engagement of Partners-in-Mission - propelled to witness to a contemplative, prophetic and apostolic presence that hears the cry from the margins, we respond by giving the best of ourselves.

Drawn by Divine Mystery and inspired by the spirit of Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia we commit to respond with a new vision, to cross boundaries, to take account of local and global realities, and, the intense sufferings of our time.

*“As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning...
Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life,
the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for
justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”
(Cited in “Laudato Si”, Paragraph 207 - Earth Charter, The Hague 29 June 2000)*

Trusting in the grace of transformation we pledge to respond to the new that is emerging. We set directions to be integrated, sustainable, and ecological. Informed by updated theological perspectives, systems-thinking and rights-based approaches, we will implement, monitor, evaluate and adapt accordingly with good policies and practices in relationships and ministries.

Courageously and wholeheartedly, we commit to the **Calls to Action**¹:

¹ Refer to “Calls to Action” documents A - F with rationale.

A. NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Adopt the new governance structure as reviewed by this Chapter body in order to promote the mission more effectively; addressing the need for leadership among vowed members and promoting full engagement of partners-in-mission.

B. INTERNATIONAL FORMATION TEAM

Establish a Congregational International Formation Team that envisions formation of apostolic and contemplative sisters for religious life, both initial and continuous; and formation of Mission Partners, sisters and lay, for Mission Effectiveness.

C. UNIVERSAL CULTURE OF JUSTICE

Address areas of internal injustice within the Congregation:

1. Design and implement policies and guidelines with tools for ongoing evaluation and accountability that will:
 - identify and dismantle systems, attitudes and practices that perpetuate cultural bias, racism and inequality, which keep privilege and relationships built on power/superiority cemented in place;
 - promote formation, personal transformation, and a rights-based approach.
2. Create safe spaces for relevant and inclusive dialogue about the injustices we have participated in but that have never been recognized or named, the resulting loss and grief that have never been reconciled, and other issues so relevant to our desire to live our consecrated life in a prophetic way.
3. Continue to work for the full integration of all the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in the light of the reunification process.

Address areas of external injustice through our respective ministries:

1. Make a firm Congregational commitment in alignment with the “Laudato Si’ Action Platform” and the Congregational Position Papers to address the catastrophic consequences of the destruction of our planet caused not only by greed but also by apathy.²
2. Put Congregational processes in place to assess and strengthen our existing works of justice, engage with emerging needs of today and invest resources and personnel to make our justice structure more sustainable.

D. PARTNERS-IN-MISSION

Further the work of the International Committee regarding Partners-in-Mission outlined in *‘Zeal Calls Us to Respond (2019)’* with the following actions:

² *We acknowledge Blessed Aguchita, a martyr, who sacrificed her life in the face of injustice.*

1. Strengthen our relationships based on the Universal Culture of Justice with attitudes that invite us to embrace equality, collegiality, and shared experience of mission that will evolve out of a deepened relationship model of being together.
2. Create flexible frameworks, policies and role descriptions that are adaptable, culturally sensitive, and implemented throughout the congregation with co-responsibility for mission.

E. CONGREGATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

In order to set direction and priorities for ongoing sustainability, relevance, and accountability, we will:

1. Determine an integrated pre-planning process and a means of documentation for adoption at the next Chapter. This process is informed by the implementation of the 31st Congregational Chapter Directions.
2. Engage all Congregational Offices and the Good Shepherd International Foundation in a process of developing and implementing common strategies, points of collaboration, and a method of accountability that align their work and resources in furthering the Mission.

F. FINANCE RESOURCES

Ensure equitable sharing of resources as an important component of a universal culture of justice and good stewardship of resources for sustainability of mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Mother House International Community

That the Congregational Leadership Team using a consultative process review the purpose, composition and feasibility of sustaining an International Community at the Mother House.

2. Mother House Commission

That the Congregational Leadership Team using a consultative process review the role of the Mother House Commission and determine the best means for providing support and co-ordination for the Mother House entities.

AUTHORIZATION

The Congregational Chapter entrusts to the Congregational Leader and her Council/Councils the interpretation of the official documents of this Chapter, and the completion and implementation of unfinished matters. (Constitutions, Article #153)

6 December 2021

Chapter of Affairs - September 16 to 22, 2021

Chapter of Affairs and Elections - November 18 to December 17, 2021



31ST CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

A. NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

CALL TO ACTION

Adopt the new governance structure as reviewed by this Chapter body in order to promote the mission more effectively; to address the need for leadership among the vowed members; and to promote the full engagement of partners-in-mission.

RATIONALE

In response to the Chapter Direction Statement of 2015, the Congregational Leadership Team initiated a process of reviewing our congregational structures:

- Current structures were devised for a Congregation of 12,000 vowed Sisters;
- We are now 3,000, and declining in numbers even in areas with large numbers of active Sisters;
- Looking six and twelve years into the future, the numbers of Sisters able and willing to fulfil roles of canonical leadership will reduce rapidly;
- At present, there are many situations where there is not enough leadership available.
- If we make no changes to our structure, leadership capacity will continue to diminish. This will negatively impact the community and personal life of the Sisters as well as the quality and effectiveness of our ministries;
- Partners-in-mission presently support our work in many areas of responsibility. Over the years there has been a movement for full engagement of partners-in-mission, and
- The new governance structure offers a way to work and plan together now, rather than waiting until current structures prove themselves unviable.

RESPONSE

To address these concerns, the new governance structure incorporates three interdependent components:

- Movement from Provinces to Regions;
- Addition of Extended Leadership Teams at the Congregational, Regional and – where desired—local levels; and
- Creation of a Congregational Implementation Committee.



31st CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

B. CONGREGATIONAL INTERNATIONAL FORMATION TEAM

CALL TO ACTION

Establish a Congregational International Formation Team that envisions formation of apostolic and contemplative sisters for religious life, both initial and continuous; and formation of Mission Partners, sisters and lay, for Mission Effectiveness.

RATIONALE

Sisters

The idea for an **International Formation Team** came from the Formation Reflection Group and the CLT. It evolved from:

- ♥ Our experiences of working with the different Units;
- ♥ Contacts with formators at the local level;
- ♥ The 2018 preparation program for perpetual profession sessions, *“Love, the Heart of the Universe”*;
- ♥ Retreats that were held throughout the congregation, and
- ♥ E-Course being held for formators.

The need became more evident in the light of the dramatic changes taking place within religious life and all societies in the world today. We hear a pressing call to re-envision the congregation’s approach to formation.

As we grow deeper in our awareness of our evolving universe, our understanding and experience of God also needs to deepen. This consciousness must inform our initial and continuous formation programs at all levels.

We see a need for a common understanding and implementation of the Formation Guidelines particularly as it relates to the educational and life experiences of women entering or seeking to enter the congregation. There is also a need for a more comprehensive formation plan at regional/continental/congregational levels.

Mission Partners (Sisters and Lay)

Belonging to a global congregation, it is important that we have a **standardized approach** to mission effectiveness that prepares us to respond to our global mission, while honoring the particular local reality and culture.

Having listened to the congregation's concern around Mission Partners expressed through "*Zeal Calls Us to Respond*", during the virtual ICAs, the pre-Chapter videos, and the work of the Life Seekers, it is evident that formation and mission effectiveness education are a great need.

SUGGESTED ACTION FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The main task of this Team would be to oversee formation at the congregational level, **ensuring quality formation and good practices in formation and mission effectiveness**. They would also put in place **accompaniment and mentoring** at the local level in keeping with the local reality and culture in the process of implementation. This would be done by **close collaboration** with the regional and local teams. This is very important because in our experience while we have good programs and documents in place for formation, when it comes to implementation there are many gaps. Therefore, constant accompaniment at the local level is crucial.

We do believe that when a Team for this purpose is put in place it has the freedom to implement the recommendation in the way it will be best. This would be done after it has had time itself to **assess and understand the diverse realities of formation** throughout the congregation.

The Team will be accountable to the Congregational Leadership Team who will also approve the implementation plan.

When

Once the new Congregational Leadership Team is confirmed at the Congregational Chapter, it will begin the implementation. For continuity, the Formation Reflection Group will be available to assist during their transition.

"Partner(s)-in-Mission" are staff, volunteers, benefactors, board members, associates, companions, etc., who choose to accept co-responsibility to work collaboratively to forward the mission".
(*"Zeal Calls Us to Respond"*)

"Mission Partners", while not formally defined, is being used throughout the congregation as the collective term for sisters and lay working together to forward the mission.



31st CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

C. UNIVERSAL CULTURE OF JUSTICE

Justice in the service of love is integral to our mission and our spirituality but without congregational support, evaluation and accountability, the work of justice languishes. A congregational commitment to justice will move the concept/understanding of justice from a theoretical conversation toward a justice that is woven into the very fabric of our being and permeates all our relationships – with ourselves, in community, in our ministries and with all creation. It will ensure well-defined organizational support for the congregational structures of justice and implementation of congregational documents.

CALL TO ACTION

Address areas of internal injustice within the Congregation:

- 📍 Design and implement policies and guidelines with tools for ongoing evaluation and accountability that will:
 - 📍 identify and dismantle systems, attitudes and practices that perpetuate cultural bias, racism and inequality which keep privilege and relationships built on power/superiority cemented in place, and
 - 📍 Promote formation, personal transformation, and a rights-based approach.
- 📍 Create safe spaces for relevant and inclusive dialogue about the injustices we have participated in, but that have never been recognized or named, the resulting loss and grief that has never been reconciled, and other issues so relevant to our desire to live our consecrated life in a prophetic way, and
- 📍 Continue to work for the full integration of all the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

Address areas of external injustice through our respective ministries:

- 📍 Make a firm congregational commitment in alignment with the “Laudato Si Action Platform” and the Congregational Position Papers to address the catastrophic consequences of the destruction of our planet caused not only by greed but also by apathy; and
- 📍 Put congregational processes in place to assess and strengthen our existing works of justice, engage with emerging needs of today, and invest resources and personnel to make our justice structure more sustainable.

RATIONALE

Spirituality of Justice

The foundation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd is love, expressed in works of justice, beginning with a response to the social violence perpetuated upon the women in the 17th century, in France, that led to a pathway for healing and wholeness. Our Constitutions remind us that: *“Our commitment to reconciliation demands that we promote justice and peace in a world disturbed by sin and conflict”* (Constitutions, Article #6) and that: *“Our relationship with those we meet should be for them a means of encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd”*. (Constitutions, Article #5).

Justice, then, must be the garment we wear in order to be faithful to the demands of our relationship with God, witness to the absolute primacy of God and build relationships rooted in respect for the dignity of each person. Enabling, promoting, and living in right relationship with all of creation is the framework for the Holy Work that Mary Euphrasia and John Eudes entrusted to us. It is our mission and extends to our relationships with all people.

Injustice within the Congregation

Throughout the years, colonialism, patriarchy and our own sinfulness have tarnished our embodiment of right relationship with all creation. Jesus’ covenant community of love, equity and inclusion has been weakened by attitudes and actions that oppress, discriminate and marginalize others. We are an intercultural congregation but often, instead of embracing our diversity, we allow judgments, decisions and behavior based on culture/race/ethnicity/position and other imagined boundaries to divide us.

During our Chapter journey, we have heard the pain and frustration among our Sisters and lay partners who have experienced injustice in our ministries and communities.

Cultural bias, racism and economic inequality have resulted in patterns of injustice in our communities and within our relationships with one another in mission. There is a yearning to be heard, to be included, to be visible, and to be treated with respect and dignity.

Global Issues of Injustice

We also have heard a clear yearning for the Chapter body to act boldly and responsibly in addressing the issues of systemic injustice beyond the congregation. There is a deep desire to embrace a culture of justice that deepens relationships and strengthens capacities.

In our mission, we need to anchor ourselves in the Congregational Position Papers and the teachings of the Church so that we respond more effectively to the emerging realities that cry out for our attention. Vulnerability and risk taking (personal and communal) are essential if we are to respond in a meaningful way.

In *“Laudato Si”*, Pope Francis has invited us to set out on the long path of renewal (LS 202) to care for the earth. As the earth is exploited, those already impoverished by economic and social injustice are the most adversely affected, often resulting in mass migration of peoples. Pope Francis recognizes that we need *“A new ecological approach that can transform our way of inhabiting the world, our lifestyles, our relationship with the Earth’s resources and, in general, our way of looking at humanity and of giving life.”* (Video message of Pope Francis to launch the new *“Laudato Si”* Action Platform,” May 2021)

The seven categories of sustainability goals, as outlined in the *“Laudato Si”* Action Platform”, as well as our Congregational Position Papers, provide a pathway toward an integral ecology, and challenge us *“to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”* (*“Laudato Si”*, 19). The urgency of Pope Francis’ appeal is one we cannot ignore.



31ST CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

D. PARTNERS-IN-MISSION

CALL TO ACTION

Further the work of the International Committee regarding Partners-in-Mission outlined in *'Zeal Calls Us to Respond'* (2019) with the following actions:

- 🌱 Strengthen our relationships based on the Universal Culture of Justice with attitudes that invite us to embrace equality, collegiality, and shared experience of mission that will evolve out of a deepened relationship model of being together, and
- 🌱 Create flexible frameworks, policies and role descriptions that are adaptable, culturally sensitive, and implemented throughout the congregation with co-responsibility for the mission.

RATIONALE

Mission Partnership is necessary, if not critical for the relevance, thriving and vibrancy of our Mission globally. The International Committee's document, *'Zeal Calls Us to Respond'* (2019) has been widely used as a foundation for the definition, principles, guidelines and continuum of Mission Partnership.

It is clear that Mission Partnership has many degrees of involvement from all staff members, to volunteers, to those committed to living the Congregation's charism, values and spirituality as a lifestyle

Mission Partnership is an ever-evolving relationship that demands a broader understanding of communion, mutual respect, trust, commitment, freedom to live and grow full-and-free in the vision and spirit of St John Eudes & St Mary Euphrasia Pelletier.

This emerging understanding allows us to be open to a fuller commitment and engagement in Mission.

"Partner(s)-in-Mission" are staff, volunteers, benefactors, board members, associates, companions, etc., who choose to accept co-responsibility to work collaboratively to forward the mission".
("Zeal Calls Us to Respond")

"Mission Partners", while not formally defined, is being used throughout the congregation as the collective term for sisters and lay working together to forward the mission.



31ST CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

E. CONGREGATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

CALL TO ACTION

In order to set direction and priorities for ongoing sustainability, relevance, and accountability, we will:

- ☺ Determine an integrated pre-planning process and a means of documentation for adoption at the next Chapter. This process is informed by the implementation of the 31st Congregational Chapter Directions, and
- ☺ Engage all Congregational Offices and the Good Shepherd International Foundation in a process of developing and implementing common strategies, points of collaboration, and a method of accountability that align their work and resources in furthering the mission.

RATIONALE

Congregational Leadership Team Report

In the 2021 Congregational Leadership Team Report, the Congregational Offices and Good Shepherd International Foundation noted the following needs regarding planning:

- ☺ In the area of Mission Effectiveness, there is a need for each unit to draw up a five-year Educational Strategic Plan. This effort is currently at different stages throughout the Congregation;
- ☺ The 2015 Congregational Direction Statement called for the development of clear strategic plans in each of the units. The initial work focused on skill development and creating the Safeguarding Policy. The broader scope of strategic planning is at different stages throughout the Congregation;
- ☺ The Congregational Treasurer's Office stated the need for a congregational strategic plan with a strong financial component to support the equitable distribution of resources. Linked to this report, the Congregational Office of Administrative Affairs reinforced the need for property assessment and management;
- ☺ The Communication Office, expressing current and future needs, called for developing and implementing a strategic plan and structure for centralizing the work and responsibilities of the Communication Office in order to better align with the units throughout the congregation;

- 🕊️ The Spirituality Centre recommended that the Ad Hoc Committee established by the Congregational Leadership Team study and produce a strategic plan for the Spirituality Center;
- 🕊️ The Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office expressed concern about lack of personnel, resources and the needed structure to engage across the Congregational Offices, Good Shepherd International Foundation and in the global arena - all of which speaks of a need for strategic planning, and
- 🕊️ The Good Shepherd International Foundation, in doing a five-year plan and seeing the benefit, raised the question around a congregation-wide plan with common strategies for the Congregational Offices to generate focus and maximize support for Mission.

RESPONSE

In developing the pre-planning process for a strategic plan, there were some consistent themes to include in the implementation:

1. A common plan or vision across all Congregational Offices is needed;
2. The Congregational Leadership Team and the heads of the Congregational Offices need to plan together with significant grassroots engagement;
3. The spirituality of justice needs to permeate the plan;
4. The restructuring needs to simplify the current structure. There is a desire for integration while respecting the distinct roles of each Office;
5. There is a desire for Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office and Good Shepherd International Foundation to integrate their work, complement one another's work, or combine Offices;
6. There is a strong call for the equitable distribution of resources throughout the regions and at the local level;
7. The feedback is about the need for building relationships and networking prior to a crisis or only when there is a crisis;
8. There needs to be adequate funding for creating a common strategy;
9. Consistent communication, keeping all informed, creating awareness and learning are critical for this type of planning to be successful;
10. Ministries and properties need to be assessed and ministry data collected, and
11. The strategic pre-planning and the governance planning processes can be integrated into one process.

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31st CONGREGATIONAL CHAPTER

F. FINANCE RESOURCES

CALL TO ACTION

Ensure equitable sharing of resources as an important component of a universal culture of justice and good stewardship of resources for sustainability of mission.

RATIONALE

- 🕊️ The call of ***Economy at the Service of Charism and Mission*** for good stewardship and re-thinking economic matters in order to build a better future with emphasis on evangelical structures of sharing and communion;
- 🕊️ Chapter journey on universal culture of justice and the call for just and equitable sharing of resources;
- 🕊️ The principle and mindset of abundance, recognizing the abundance of resources that we have and can share as a congregation and with a rights-based approach in sharing resources, and
- 🕊️ As the congregation shifts into a global vision, our way of stewardship of resources also needs to shift to a wider vision of equitable sharing of resources across the congregation.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 🕊️ Affirm/re-affirm our commitment to internalize and put into action the values and principles of good stewardship:
 - Promotion of the common good, human dignity;
 - Evangelical values of solidarity and communion;
 - Inclusion, participation, and co-responsibility;
 - Operating from empowerment model, rights-based approach and abundance mindset;
 - transparency and accountability, integrity and credibility.
- 🕊️ Review and renew all Finance Policies to establish the concept of “common congregational goods” and the systems and procedures for the implementation of the values and principles of equitable sharing of resources and good stewardship.

- 🌀 Continue providing adequate and appropriate formation/training on economic and administrative dimensions of our life and mission;
- 🌀 Plan and adopt strategies that can realize our desired results/outcome:
 - Congregational strategic planning that has a strong financial component, particularly in the areas of: medical/infirmarary care, property management, formation/mission effectiveness, and ministries/programs;
 - Assess and strengthen management of General Fund and Central Fund (Funds for the needs of the sisters) in view of emerging areas that call for re-thinking our financial realities;
 - Establish a Global Mission Fund from our internal resources and develop an effective, efficient and coordinated (centralized) system and structure for income generation (contributions from Units and/or pooling of resources), management and allocation of funds for our global mission, in coordination with Good Shepherd International Foundation and the Mission Development Offices, and
- 🌀 Have a strong finance/administration network and coordination system that will ensure co-responsibility, inclusion, transparency, and accountability at all levels.