

## **Challenge to Refound the School Sisters of Notre Dame Walking the Talk**

The following introductory letter is taken from the 1982 revision of *You Are Sent*.

My dear Sister,

At a specific moment in your life you made a commitment to observe poverty, celibacy, and obedience according to the rule of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. That rule, which is now called our constitution and general directory, has changed during the last fifteen years, due to the mandate of the Second Vatican council and in response to our changing times. Through a process of personal and communal prayer, reflection, and dialogue, we have attempted to respond to the call of this ecumenical council that "constitutions (and) directories...are to be suitably revised." (*Perfectae Caritatis* No.3) Accordingly, we have struggled together to rediscover the charism of Mother Theresa, to reflect on our lived experience, and to express these realities in a text that is applicable to our times.

You now have in your hands the result of these 15 years of work: the new constitution and directory of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. I ask you to accept this constitution and directory in deep faith as the way that God calls you to live out the gospel in your life as an apostolic religious woman, and I call you to realize the ideals of these documents in your life as carefully, lovingly, intensely, and joyfully as possible.

Our constitution and directory flow from our lived experience and are the work of more than 8,000 of us. The Vatican Council documents assure us that "Successful renewal and proper adaptation cannot be achieved unless every member of a community cooperates." (P.C. No.4) Accordingly, we have worked together to express God's gifts and call to us. Through the revision committee you have shared with the chapter delegates your experiences, hopes, and vision. The delegates have made every attempt to be faithful to God's call and to your call. You will find many of your personal and provincial suggestions in the text; you will also recognize in the text the influence of the international and universal character of our congregation. In this work, we have followed the tradition of Mother Theresa who repeatedly sought the opinions and the wisdom of the lived experience of her sisters as she worked on the rule for her congregation.

In this jubilee year as we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our foundation as a congregation, we follow Mother Theresa's example as we present our constitution and directory to the church for ecclesial approval. If changes are necessary as a result of dialogue with the Sacred Congregation for Religious, they will be made.

Through God's grace we have accomplished a great work. I thank you for your wholehearted participation which, I know, has demanded much personal and communal suffering. We have experienced again the truth of Mother Theresa's words:"All of God's

work is accomplished through suffering.” However, the documents themselves and the joy experienced by the general chapter delegates on November 19 when this constitution and directory were unanimously accepted provide us with experiences of the next part of Mother Theresa’s words: “then, however, their roots are sturdier and their flowering the lovelier.” (No. 2277)

We begin now to live and implement this constitution and directory as our way of life as School Sisters of Notre Dame. These documents “contain the statutes common to the entire congregation.” By our vowed commitment, we have freely bound ourselves “to be faithful to this constitution and general directory, seeing in them God’s call to us to live the gospel in the spirit of Mother Theresa.” (Const. II, 30d)

With the acceptance of this new document, we begin again together; we take a new step to refound, to renew the life of our congregation. I call you to accept this constitution and directory as your way of living out the gospel “so that the world may believe.” (Jn. 17:21) I send you, imbued with the spirit of Christ and Mother Theresa, to “proclaim the good news, directing (your) entire life to that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent.” (Const. No.4). I send you with the blessing of our mother:

May God the Father care for you and keep you faithful and true to your holy calling.

May God the Son save you from all evil of sin; may he be the way that you go, the truth that you follow, the life that you lead.

May the Holy Spirit keep you in his love and grace!

May Mary, mother of divine grace and mother of our congregation, take you in her maternal, loving heart and be with you in life and death.

May the strength and blessing of God remain with you always. Amen.  
(Ltr. 714)

Gratefully, prayerfully,

Sister Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND  
General Superior