

# Handwritten Notes of Mary Abbott, SSND, October 1-15, 1956

Generalate Archives  
11<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

October 3, 1956

North American delegates reasons given for move:

1. We are a large international congregation: it is therefore convenient to have the generalate in Rome which is neutral
2. Mother Theresa, who had difficulties with the archbishop would certainly want the move to Rome because of the spread of the congregation to different lands.
3. There are several branches of our congregation. If one of them establishes a generalate in Rome before we do, no other branch can have a generalate there – we have heard this from an authoritative church source. Because we are the original congregation, we should move first.
4. Many bishops and priests in the U. S. have expressed their surprise that we – such a large international congregation – have not yet moved our generalate to Rome.

-Business with CRIS (Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes) can be carried on more quickly if the generalate is in Rome

-Many bishops in America no longer recommend the congregation since it has its motherhouse in Germany

-M. Almeda has already permitted a house in Rome to be bought for the generalate. All American provinces sacrificed much for that. It would be a great disappointment if we had to say on our return that the sacrifice was for nothing.

The American sisters consider the move an essential contribution to the preservation of the unity of the congregation. The move should be seen as strengthening unity.

This unity was greatly desired by Mother Theresa and M. Caroline and passed on to us as a holy legacy. May the decision to move be so interpreted.

October 5, 1956 Additional Comments:

One can expect easier access to the Holy See through this move.

Moving to Rome would be a sign of our faith and loyalty to the Holy Father

The wish to move the generalate to Rome should not be seen as a belittling of Mother Theresa

Moving to Rome supported because the Sisters behind the Iron Curtain may not acknowledge that they belong to Germany

With the impression that moving the generalate to Rome would be the most difficult decision of the chapter the morning session closed.

October 5, 1956

M. Bettina opened the afternoon discussion with a reference to Article 287 of Holy Rule: "The most important obligation of the general chapter is to guard as a precious treasure the unity of the order."

The emotion created by the words "If the wish of our American Sisters is not fulfilled, then the unity of the congregation can be endangered," still filled the meeting room.

After another question M. Andrina also asserted this danger.

M. Bettina asked others to speak.

After a silence S. Laurentine said: "It is self-evident that we yield to moving the generalate to Rome in a spirit of faith. I think I may say in the name of all the European and South American superiors and Sisters that from our side unity will not be endangered by the move.

M. Bettina proposed a list of technical difficulties which make a certain interim period necessary. Then she brought the meeting back to the question: Shall the American general commissariat continue and shall such structures be established or not?

M. Hilaria asked that it first be decided whether the generalate will be moved to Rome.

M. Bettina referred to what M. Laurentine had said.

M. Annunciata called for the vote.

To the question: Shall the next general superior be asked by the general chapter to move her residence to Rome, there were 45 Yes votes and 5 No.

Then the answering of the question of the continuation of the commissariat was continued.

Monday, October 8, 1956

His Eminence Cardinal Wendel opened the election day with Pontifical Mass in the school chapel. Then he assumed the chair in the chapter room. He clarified that he was ready to answer questions and to clarify doubts.

M. Bettina asked him to repeat for all the ideas expressed at the audience with herself and M. Ambrosia. His eminence said two questions had been brought to him: the change in election method for the general assistants and moving the generalate to Rome.

The second question posed at the audience – said His Eminence – is no question but a concern: moving the generalate to Rome. His Eminence's thoughts about this concern: The decision about the location of the generalate is a concern of the congregation itself and requires approval of the Holy See. When I speak to it, that is advice, not a decision.

I would not see it as good if I exercised a deciding influence because then each other bishop could validly do the same and the congregation would be torn apart. But that would be unfortunate because unity has a decisive meaning for the blessing and the strength of the work. I understand that the development of the congregation of the Poor School Sisters brings with it a certain difficulty for the congregation is active today in both the old and new world.

Therefore the danger of a break is great. I have read the sermon of my predecessor, Cardinal Faulhaber, at the last general chapter in which one point dealt with was the unity of Europe and America. When I became bishop the youth sent me a word of St. Ignatius of Antioch. "Be concerned about unity. There is nothing better than this." So when I speak with you about your present concern, I do it only to help you, that you yourselves come to clarity.

His Eminence asked the American Sisters their reasons for advocating that the generalate be moved to Rome.

#### **M. Ambrosia replied**

1. Since we are an international congregation it should contribute to unity if we had our generalate in an international city. We hope that then the congregation could spread even further because Rome is neutral and the center of the church.
2. We think it is the wish of the Holy Father; [Pius XII] we have heard that Pius XI expressed it when he was dying. Because we are a congregation of pontifical right and we think Rome is especially appropriate for the location of the generalate.
3. We think we could carry on business with CRIS [Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes] better in Rome and so questions which occur could be more speedily handled.

4. We consider the next as far from the most important reason, but very many American bishops and priests wish and advise that we move the generalate to Rome.
5. If advice is given about the danger of communism in Italy, I think that the same situation is possible in every other land.

His Eminence replied to some of the points immediately:

Concerning the neutrality of Rome, you must not overlook the fact that the generalate would be not in the Vatican but in the city of Rome. Then he spoke to the essential ideas: Rome is and remains the heart of the church and the living bond with Rome is self-evident. But the heartbeat toward Rome and to the church began with the foundress who lived and worked in Munich, from here went out into the world to help all, who from here went home to God and is buried here. It seems to me to have great meaning and deep value for a congregation of Sisters when the way to Rome is from the heart of their mother.

M. Hilaria said that the American Sisters also venerate M. Theresa and desire her beatification as the European Sisters do – but even so they see Rome as the most appropriate center of the congregation.

His Eminence gave an analogous example: a congregation which was founded in Aachen moved their motherhouse to Rome at the urging of their American Sisters. After a short time there was a sharp split in the congregation

M. Hilaria said she could not see where difficulty would come from, after we had lived 100 years in unity and peace.

His Eminence saw in this a danger precisely that a hundred year tradition can be suddenly changed. He drew a comparison with a person's life. When a person 30 years old is operated on he recovers from the operation; if he is 100 years old, he dies from it.

His Eminence sees the difficulty precisely in the long tradition, because the move is not only a question of organization or of outward appearance but very strongly also one of psychological preparation. Communism works exactly from a knowledge of this today. It is their openly announced effort to tear people away from their home environment because it is far easier [for them] to lose their foothold.

In connection with this His Eminence cited a religious association in Germany which has chosen as principle a close bond with their place of origin – and this not least because of their opposition to the materialistic spirit of the times.

His Eminence understands well that the nationalism of the New World looks strongly to Rome: he himself has his education for priesthood and his studies in Rome. It is not a

question of rejecting Rome but of whether a transplanting is good in the present situation.

His Eminence pointed out another difficulty: the general superior who goes to Rome lives there in a certain isolation from the rest of the congregation. She no longer has the personal contact of the living community with the Sisters, novices and candidates as here. That brings a danger, especially in this unquiet time.

His Eminence further recalled that for the provinces behind the Iron Curtain it would be a great spiritual stress if they hear about this change suddenly.

He summarized: The times are very confused and muddled as one can probably see in the New World, too. Therefore His Eminence sees it more beneficial and more fruitful for the congregation to strengthen as many bonds as possible to strive for peace rather than to loosen bonds and arouse insecurity. Therefore His Eminence advises against a sudden change, an immediate move of the generalate to Rome.

His Eminence asked if someone wanted to speak further.

M. Basil said that the congregation loses many vocations because the young girls don't want to enter a congregation whose generalate is in a foreign country. His Eminence sees in this a confirmation that in our times the national threatens to overcome the catholic. If M. Theresa had thought in this way, there would be no School Sisters in America today. Although for the young congregation there was enough work in her homeland, she went to America to serve the Church. We are in danger in the church today that the catholic is too little seen and national too much. It is exactly the task of Catholic education to work against this false attitude. Beyond that, it is certainly true that good vocations come from the Holy Spirit without respect of person and nation.

Because he understood from the various statements of the American Mothers and Sisters that from their viewpoint they were convinced that the only right thing to do was to move the generalate to Rome and that this was not the opinion of the European side, His Eminence advised: It is hard at the moment, practically impossible, to find a solution satisfactory to both sides. The new general superior, especially if she is an American, should first have experience here in the principal motherhouse, then she can decide whether the move is necessary and appropriate.

His Eminence thought it not possible to set a definite date.

At this point M. Hilaria said: It is not only the American sisters who want the move. Many European Sisters are also for it. In a ballot, 45 of the 50 chapter sisters indicated their readiness to ask the new general superior to move her residence.

At the surprised and questioning look of His Eminence M. Erentrudis clarified the situation: "By this vote the unity of the congregation was seriously in question; that was

the strong reason which we discussed for this decision. We said the greatest good for us must be unity.

After urging from M. Callistina, M. Laurentine repeated what she had said in this difficult situation: "We submit ourselves in a spirit of faith to preserve unity. Under these conditions the vote referred to was taken."

His Eminence showed full understanding for the situation and suggested we make the final decision.

At this stage, M. Hilaria said that the American sisters with permission of the deceased superior general, M. Almeda, with the approval of CRIS and with great sacrifice had bought a generalate house in Rome in the hope that moving of the generalate to Rome would be decided at this general chapter.

M. Bettina added that M. Almeda had made no decision about the time of the moving that, on the contrary, she had given permission to the American sisters to provide for the future.

His Eminence pointed out the constitutional principle for moving in Article 277: "The Superior general on assuming her office may choose for her residence any house which in her opinion is the most suitable."

The decision seems to him too far-reaching to leave to a single person.

His Eminence considers it his duty to advise and to ask the general chapter whether this decision should be left in the hands of the general superior alone. It seems best to put the question now when there is no general superior. Changes in the constitution are for the general chapter to decide and Rome to approve..

After further discussion which in animated questions and answers of the general chapter, His Eminence posed the questions for decision:

1. Where the generalate shall have its permanent residence? No one agrees
2. Who agrees that in future the general superior alone does not determine the permanent residence of the generalate.

In two ballots the general chapter determined that the general superior alone will no longer determine the permanent residence of the generalate.

His Eminence left it to the general chapter to determine after the election who will work with the general superior [to determine the site of the generalate]

Then His Eminence conducted the election.

Wednesday, October 10, 1956

The newly elected superior general, M. Ambrosia Roecklein, presided. She set as first item on the agenda is the passing of a resolution about Article 277, the residence of the superior general. It is still to be decided who makes this decision with the superior general.

After some remarks for clarification and the formulation of texts of the motions the vote was taken [in writing and secretly]

1. Shall the general superior after listening to the generalate be able to determine her residence?  
All voted NO
2. Shall the general superior with the consent of the generalate be able to determine her residence?  
46 NO      4 YES
3. Shall the general chapter determine.....  
47 YES      3 NO

Thereby the general chapter determined with an absolute majority that the current designation of Article 277 will be changed to the designation:

“The permanent residence of the superior general is determined by the general chapter.”

After a short pause M. Ambrosia then posed the question to the general chapter: Where shall the newly elected generalate have its residence, Munich or Rome?

M. Rotrudis asked again: Does the unity of the congregation depend on moving?

M. Ambrosia left the question unanswered.

M. Hilaria said again that the American half of the congregation saw in the approval of M. Almeda the purchase of land in Rome the approval of M. Almeda for the move of the generalate to Rome. M. Bettina repeated what she had said earlier. Rev. Mother [Almeda] had for her part given the consent to purchase an appropriate piece of land, something which is very difficult in Rome. She did this in the sense of providing for the future when some day the generalate should be moved to Rome.

After longer remarks by M. Evangelista, M. Ambrosia repeated the question for voting [in writing, secretly]

Shall the generalate remain in Munich or be moved to Rome?

And she added “Each sister shall so vote that she can take responsibility before God and her conscience. Whatever the result we will accept it as God’s will.”

On 4 ballots Munich was written; on 46, Rome.

By this vote the general chapter decided by an absolute majority that the generalate be moved to Rome. M. Ambrosia announced the result and added: "Although we know that hearts are bleeding, we recognize this result as God's will.

The next topic concerned the dissolution of the American Commissariat. In brief remarks M. Basil spoke for the dissolution of the commissariat: all provinces should be alike, but delegates should be set up.

M. Ambrosia put the question for voting: Shall the American Commissariat be dissolved?

The vote was written and secret. 48 votes were for dissolution, 2 were against. By this vote the general chapter determined the dissolution of the American general commissariat.