

THE FIRST HOSPITALLER EUROPEAN CONGRESS ON DISABILITY
AT STRAUBING, JUNE 2012.

Opening Address.

Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General

<p>Welcome</p>	<p>Dear Participants, Dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality, Ladies and Gentlemen:</p> <p>Today all roads lead to Straubing! We have come from all over Europe for this very important Congress. I wish to join with the organisers of the Congress in welcoming you all here to Straubing and I wish you an enjoyable and fruitful experience.</p> <p>We have had other congresses with themes related to a specific topic that related to one or other of the great variety of ministries in which the Order is involved, but this is the first European Congress on Disability that we have organised.</p> <p>You are all here because you have a particular interest in the topic under discussion be it as service providers -</p>
<p>Inclusion - experiencing and enabling participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- as members of the Family of Saint John of God;- as experts in providing assistance to persons with disabilities,- as politicians and scientists. <p>During the coming days, we will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- explore the topic of "participation or inclusion" from many different angles;- develop good ideas for implementing the notion of participation in our services and how we might go about improving the quality of life of the people who live and work there;- we ourselves will experience "participation" in concrete terms by spending time together at this congress.

	<p>If one were to define participation, it would include <i>the active involvement</i> of citizens in the processes in society, within an organisation or in the fulfilment of common tasks. At this congress, we will be learning a great deal about how we can improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, how to help them experience active participation and to be make personal choices for their way of life.</p>
<p>John of God model, inspiration and guide</p>	<p>Fundamental to this and for participation to succeed, there has to be an attitude of respect for the human being and respect for their civil and human rights with a willingness to engage them in dialogue.</p> <p>Our founder ó John of God ó is our model in all that we do in relation to our ministry. John clearly shows us how we can successfully build sound relationships based on a process that has a spiritual, ethical and human foundation.</p> <p>The reason why John of God is such a wonderful model and inspiration for us is the fact that he himself suffered exclusion from the community, you might say that he was expelled from the community. It doesn't take much imagination to understand just how exceedingly painful this experience was for John. However, it is even more interesting to see how he managed to turn it into a transforming experience. Because of this John became the <i>ultimate advocate</i> on behalf of those who are pushed to the margins of society. John experienced it all - marginalization, stigmatization rejection and discrimination. He suffered humiliation and the pain of separation and isolation from the community because he was perceived to have a mental illness. In response to this negative attitude by society towards him instead of fleeing in a state of righteous anger, which would have been understandable under the circumstances, John decided to do something about it í he established a <i>House of Hospitality</i> not just as a refuge for people, like John himself, whom society had rejected, to flee to - the poor, the mentally ill, orphans, widows, women caught up in prostitution, but a home for people who were deeply wounded psychologically and spiritually as well as for people who were just poor and lonely, so that they could experience the transforming love of God for them, in the way the</p>

<p>In line with Jesus own pastoral strategy</p>	<p>John himself had experienced it.</p> <p>Bringing those who have been marginalised back into the fold of society, into the centre, allowing them to find a place there, meeting them on a basis of equality ó these are the values that underpinned Jesus <i>pastoral strategy</i>. This is what Jesus lived, taught and practiced. John Ciudad took Jesus example as HIS model and inspiration to such and extent and lived it with such passion that the people of Granada gave him a new name John OF GOD ó extraordinary when you think about it. What manner of men John must have been to have provoked such a response from the citizens of Granada? The gift of Hospitality that John received and lived is the legacy that has been passed on to us his followers. John-of-God-Hospitality is at the heart of who we are; it is the very foundation, the rock on which our mission rests.</p>
<p>Variety of institutions and services providing assistance for persons with disabilities</p>	<p>For almost 500 years, the Hospitallers of Saint John of God (brothers and co-workers) have established and run a great variety of services and institutions across Europe in response to the needs of people and people in need. Not only that but through its missionary endeavours the Hospitality of Saint John of God like a great fire has fanned out across the world in more than 50 countries bring healing, the good news of salvation and the hope of a better future for countless numbers of poor, sick and needy people.</p> <p>As can be gleaned from our General Statutes our mission is clear:</p> <p><i>õIn imitation of Jesus Christ and by virtue of our charism, we seek and welcome with charity and benevolence those who need our service, without any discrimination.õ í ..õOur Apostolic Works are, and define themselves as, Catholic. This characteristic commits us in a special way, both within the Church and society, to observe and defend gospel principles, the social doctrine of the Church and the norms relative to human rights.õ í .. õThese</i></p>

Coping with change	<p><i>fundamental principles that characterise our apostolic works are: we affirm that the centre of interest is the person being assisted; we promote and defend the sick and needy person's rights, taking account of their personal dignity.¹</i></p> <p>In our work for people with disabilities in dialogue or conversation with each individual and listening to his/her wishes, obviously within the realism of possibility, we provide accommodation, housing, occupation and leisure-time activities. We support children and adolescents, women and men, as well as the elderly, always fully respecting their specific needs.</p> <p>In some centres there are people that have a dual diagnosis that have their particular needs provide for. Others may have multiple disabilities whose needs cannot be fully met even within the framework of a well-designed system of assistance. To them we offer hospitality, a home and all the professional assistance that is required for them to have the best quality of life possible.</p>
Moving into the community	<p>A great deal has changed over recent decades in the type of services that are provided to people with disability. We are now moving people into the community in family-like units or group homes, supporting living, independent living and so on. This is really excellent and the way to go, but there needs to be support systems in place that provides support and protection. Some of these individuals are naive of the ways of the world and are therefore vulnerable to harassment, abuse and manipulation. Many experience loneliness and because of a lack of social skills find it difficult to integrate themselves fully into society, the cultivating of healthy friendships. Forging lasting relationships can be a challenge for many. Members of society, church bodies, social groupings, clubs etc need to be educated and made aware of their social responsibilities in terms of standing up for their fellow citizens, especially the weaker ones, who may be abused, ridiculed or put in harms way².</p>

¹ General Statutes 47;49;50

² See the TABLET June 9 2012; Discrimination: Care, not despair, in the community by Carwyn Gravell

<p>Images of the human being</p>	<p>I should now like to focus, in particular, on the image of the human being because is fundamental to what we do and why we do it.</p> <p>In the days of John of God, in the 15th and 16th centuries, people with disabilities were excluded from society, hidden from public view. Because society did not recognise that these were human beings that had an innate dignity with human and civil rights, families were left on their own to cope with a family member with disability. In desperate situations even small children with an intellectual disability were sent to public mental hospitals where they were often housed with psychogeriatric patients, neglected and oftentimes abused by the patients and the staff.</p> <p>Unfortunately, for many people -dis-abilityø implies a lack of something on the part of the person who presents with a disability, compared to or judged by the standard of the so called -completeø person, which of course really doesnø exist because we are all incomplete, we are all disfigured by sin and in need of healing and transformation. In the words of Fr. Henir Nouwen we are all <i>wounded healers</i>. In medieval society - in general - people with a disability or as they say in India, people -differently abledø were seen to possess special gifts which were indicative of their privileged status as recipients of God's grace³.</p> <p>For almost 150 years the Order across Europe has engaged in the provision of services for people with a great variety of disability both physical and intellectual. This centre here at Straubing can trace its beginnings back almost 130 years.</p>
<p>Denied all human dignityí not</p>	<p>Sadly, during the time of the Nazi regime, many of the men with multiple disabilities in our institutions in countries such as Poland, Austria and Germany, were deported and murdered in gas chambers or shot in the forests. This is a painful memory of those dark days in which the Brothers did all that was humanly possible</p>

3 Donatus Forkan. Presentation at 50 International Eucharist Congress Including People from the Margins

worthy to be alive	to protect their charges by hiding them in the forests and elsewhere, but sadly many fell victim to the frequent raids by the Gestapo.
Works of charity	<p>Many of the institutions for people with disability in the 19th century were built by the church, in particular by religious orders. They took in these unfortunate human beings out of charity. However, because of the level of scientific understanding of disability, especially intellectual disability at that time, together with a lack of professional preparation by the sisters and brothers who cared for these children and adults, the services provided were mainly of a custodial nature.</p>
Pioneering work	<p>Inspired by the example of Saint John of God and impelled by the example and teachings of Jesus to love our neighbour as ourselves⁴, the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God in the spirit of the founder responded generously and creatively to provide the best possible service according to the lights and resources of the day. Here in Germany the Order was one of the first to provide training and formation for those who worked with people with an intellectual disability. This obviously had the positive spin-off effect of raising the quality of service and the introduction of educational opportunities for children with an intellectual disability. In Ireland the Order, together with the Sisters of Charity and Stewarts Hospital pioneered the work for children and adults with a mental handicap as it was called then. They were so successful that in 2003 The Special Olympics World Summer Games were hosted in Ireland. The first time outside of the United States.</p>
Self-Advocacy;	<p>Happily the image of people with disability has changed dramatically in recent decades, even if there is still much to do be done in this regard. It hasn't been an easy road to travel, it has taken much effort and perseverance. Because of the coming together of <i>parent and friends groups</i>; the increase in research, self-advocacy by individuals groups of people with disability, the work of lobbyists and most importantly <i>the education of community leaders and the general public</i>, that a more positive</p>

4 Matthew 22:39

civil and human rights	<p>image of people with disabilities has emerged. These people, our brothers and sisters, are no longer seen as mere objects of care, but as human beings in their own right with gifts and talents that enriches lives and benefits society as a whole.</p>
Globalise hospitality	<p>I am speaking of Europe of course when I say this, in other parts of the world it would reduce one to tears to see the conditions in which people with disability live and die. We must never become complacent but continue to <i>globalise hospitality</i> by reaching out across the world to heal and to hold our suffering brothers and sisters in an embrace of love. Only in this way will society be humanised and every individual be cherished and loved as his/her dignity deserves.</p>
The glory of God is the human being fully alive	<p>When I visit our centres here in Europe in particular, but also in so many of our Centres in the developing countries where we have a presence, I meet people who are who are aware of their rights and are self-confident. They are being educated at school or as adults engaged in vocational training; or are gainfully employed in workshops or have jobs in the community. Many people I know that have a disability of one kind or another show very clearly the truth of the phrase of Saint Irenaeus - <i>the glory of God is the human being fully alive</i>⁵. So many people with disability do indeed show the glory and beauty of God by their love of life and the joy of living, by their resilience, the confident way in which they display their gifts and talents and the non-judgmental way that they see and relate to other people.</p> <p>People with disabilities are able and willing to participate, to shape their own lives, to take decisions that affect their future. They want to be part of our society; they want to contribute to society. Obviously, within Europe, conditions differ from country to country (legal provisions, economic and financial resources, attitudes). What we Hospitallers have in common however - something that transcends territorial boundaries is the profoundest respect for the dignity of the human person. Each human being is known to God by name. God has called him/her into existence⁶.</p>

5 Irenaeus of Lyons, Adv. Haer., 4, 20, 7;

6 Isaiah: 43:1

<p>People with disability wish to and do contribute to society</p> <p>Including People from the Margins</p>	<p>God has made each one in his own image and likeness. It is no surprise therefore to find it written into our General Statutes that recognition of and respect for human rights is the very basis of what we do. In short every human being is God's work of art, is loved passionately by him and is destined to be with God in heaven.</p> <p>I had the privilege of speaking at the International Eucharist Congress in Dublin two weeks ago on the topic <i>Including People from the Margins</i>. In my address I made the point that we have wonderful documents and international agreements related to the civil and human rights of citizens. Governments have committed themselves to have legislation that protects human and civil rights, e.g. the United Nations Convention of Human Rights; The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Bill of Human Rights and The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and other documents and writings on the subject of disability that promotes human and civil rights of all citizens. There is in addition the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are eight <u>international development</u> goals that all 193 United Nations member States and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. They include eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, fighting disease, epidemics such as <u>AIDS</u>, and developing a global partnership for development.⁷</p>
	<p>In addition to the above, I made the point that we have our holy books ó bible, the Koran, The Veda (of Hinduism), The Torah of Judaism. Inspired and supported by any or all of the above it is obvious that inclusion and participation is a basic human right. However noble these objectives may be in paper, on the ground however, we still have discrimination, isolation, exclusion and stigmatization on because of colour, disability, religion, nationality and the list goes on.</p> <p>We Hospitallers promote an <i>ethic of hospitality</i> that is grounded in gospel values that is inclusive, orientated towards a community</p>

⁷ United Nations Millennium Development Goals website.

<p>An ethic of hospitality</p>	<p>that is pluralistic and defends the individuals right to live with dignity, the right to the <i>light of education</i> and work opportunity. To this we, the Brothers, have committed ourselves by vow and our colleagues and Co-workers have committed themselves through their acceptance to <i>be co-responsible</i> for the mission of the Order.</p> <p>The values that underpin, motivate and inspire the mission of the <i>Family of Saint John of God</i> as defined in our General Statues are:</p> <p><i>Hospitality</i> is the core value. From Hospitality emanates or flows the following values: <i>quality, respect, responsibility and spirituality</i>.</p>
<p>Value-oriented action</p>	<p><i>Quality</i> means: excellence, professionalism, comprehensive and holistic care, sensitivity towards the new needy, a model union with our Co-workers, care in the manner of St John of God, a welcoming structure and environment, collaboration with third parties.</p> <p><i>Respect</i> means: respect for the other, humanisation, the human dimension, reciprocal responsibility between co-workers and brothers, understanding, a holistic approach, promotion of social justice, participation and involvement of relatives.</p> <p><i>Responsibility</i> means: fidelity to the ideals of St John of God and the Order, ethics (bioethics, social ethics, management ethics), respect for the environment, social responsibility, sustainability, justice, fair distribution of our resources.</p> <p><i>Spirituality</i> means: pastoral service, evangelisation, spiritual help for members of other religions, ecumenism, collaboration with parishes, dioceses, other confessions</p>
<p>Formation for Hospitality</p>	<p>As I stated earlier, for John of God qualified care for the sick and other people forced to live on the margins of society was most important. Before John himself began his ministry he went to study at a Monastery of the Jeronymite Monks so that he could do more than provide the basic needs of his guests. Inspired by John's example it is interesting to note that the followers of John of God almost from the beginning have consistently aligned themselves with universities and other centres of learning so that each generation of poor sick and needy people will have the best</p>

<p>Personal choices for clients</p>	<p>that modern science can offer at any given time. We lay great emphasis therefore, on initial and continuing training for all Hospitallers. This congress is just one example of this commitment that is widespread around the world where we have a presence.</p> <p>As we have seen earlier, a professional approach to serving his guests was important to John of God, so it is important to us too. Therefore the provision of educational opportunities, vocational training and meaningful employment ó in so far as it is possible, for our clients is part of our vision. This means that we are open to networking with other likeminded agencies that share our philosophy and values, so that people with disability will have the widest range of possibilities to choose from when deciding how they wish to live life so that it will be fulfilling, enjoyable and meaningful for them. For all of us besides professional preparation, which is hugely important, we need a òformation of the heartö, as indicated by Pope Benedict in his first Encyclical Deus Caritas Est. A new, creative approach is essential if we are to integrate hospitality into the changing professional and legal framework.</p>
<p>From Europe hospitality spreads to the whole world</p>	<p>During the opening ceremony, we had a chance to follow the path travelled by John of God. When Cardinal Roncalli, later to become Pope John XXIII, visited the Basilica in Granada that is home to Saint John of God's mortal remains or relics, he is reported to have said <i>when I visited Granada they showed me its beautiful monuments and of course the Alhambra. But when I visited the Basilica of Saint John of God I was reminded that John of God was possibly the most cultured man in the Europe of his day.</i> Whatever be the truth of this story, we do know that John of God has truly left his mark in Europe. I would say not only Europe but around the world. John's followers now numbering in their tens of thousands are bringing John's style of Hospitality to the remotest barrios and bush in Africa, to the heights of the Andes in Peru and Bolivia, to the inner cities, into prisons and</p>

<p>One Family one Mission</p>	<p>other forbidden and dark places where poor, sick and needy people are suffering and dying.</p> <p>There are links, twinning of hospitals of centres in Europe with those in the developing countries. This connects Hospitallers around the world, offering support, developmental, professional and growth opportunities, material aid, moral and spiritual support and other needed recourses. We are one Family one Mission. We have Regional conferences, such at this one on various themes related to our mission, this also serves the purpose of networking, they emphasise our common strategies and our forward-looking approach.</p>
<p>Building bridges</p>	<p>At our regional conferences we develop future-oriented, creative and imaginative ideas that will help us consolidate the present and shape the future. This is happening within the Order a <i>new face of the Order</i> is being shaped even as I speak⁸. It is true that we are living in a "global village," it is important therefore that we use the same technology that has brought about such easy communication etc, to build bridges across not only geographical divides but social and religious ones also.</p>
<p>Office at the heart of Europe</p>	<p>In Europe we are endeavouring to further strengthen and expand ties across province and national boundaries. To further this project recently the General Government has established a European office in Brussels. At a recent meeting in Rome of the representatives of Provinces across Europe with members of the General Government and Dr. Carlo Galasso, the Director, the potential of this office was discussed - and it has great potential in my opinion. Much has already been done by Dr. Galasso, but we are only at an initial stage. Active support and involvement from the Provinces across Europe is essential for this project to succeed. At the same time so as not to expect too much too quickly, Dr. Galasso made the point that the Provinces need to be realistic about their expectations of the Office and its possibilities</p> <p>The reality of our world is well know to all of us, there is a universal sense of hopelessness generated by the globalisation of</p>

⁸ Br. Donatus Forkan, *The Changing Face of the Order* ̄2009

<p>Dream the impossible dream</p>	<p>violence, fear and terrorism unprecedented in history, in addition to the hardship and uncertainty caused by the present very serious economic crises, for which there don't seem to be an immediate resolution. I am not going to dwell on this topic here, just to state that Europe is facing severe problems in terms of social and economic policy: unemployment is high in many regions, and our institutions are not immune to financial crises. It is always the poor, the lower income bracket of people, those who already are on a very tight budget or lack necessary support systems ó like so many of the people we serve, that take the blunt of cutbacks and when there is the termination or down sizing of services to save money. In many areas there are cut backs in terms of programs, personnel being let go, with the consequence that education and other essential services for a decent quality of life for our people are being curtailed or eliminated all together.</p> <p>Against this background, it may be necessary in some cases to take a political approach by lobbying politicians, engaging the support of other interested groups so that the rights of people with disabilities are preserved. In a climate such as the one we are experiencing at this present time making genuine participation a reality is a real challenge, but we must be hopeful, maybe we need to <i>dream the impossible dream</i>⁹ ó but then that is what John of God did. It sounds the craziest dream every! Listen a man penniless, homeless and friendless <i>no dream of having a place of my own where I can bring the poor and the neglected mentally ill and care for them as I wish</i>. What an impossible dream? But that dreamer was none other than John of God. Because John believed, his dream became a reality. If we believe and do all that we humanly can to realise our dream, then our dreams too will be realised.</p> <p>Before concluding I would like to share with you a success story. It is the story of two friends of mine Patrick and Patricia McGuiness¹⁰ ó husband and wife. They are both in their 80s and have lived in Australia for more than 30 years. Patrick was an orphan boy who at 15 because he had a mild learning disability was brought to the Brothers of Saint John of God that is almost 70</p>
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⁹ The Impossible Dream Lyrics by Joe Darion Music by Mitch Leigh

¹⁰ Pseudonym

<p>A sad story with a happy ending</p>	<p>years ago. Patrick recounted his experience with the Brothers. In those days, Patrick states, the Brothers, there were no lay people in the centre, maybe few handymen in the garden and kitchen. The Brothers taught us the three R's, (reading, writing and arithmetic) but they were of the opinion that a trade would be much more useful for us lads than spending a lot of time in the classroom. So I was taught carpentry, shoe repair, electricity and painting and I have used all of these trades down the years. Patrick also told me one time as a teaseí .I was a trade union official at one time he said, and with a big smile he would addí this is something I didn't learn at the John of Gods.</p> <p>Patrick married Patricia. They didn't have any family and Patricia developed a mental illness. Had she been married to anyone except Patrick she would have needed institutional care. Patrick cared for, loved her and helped her to maintain a level of health and wellbeing where she manages quite well. Patrick is an avid golfer and has several trophies to his credit. He is also a volunteer with the local nursing home, where he befriends an elderly person who has no visitors. He takes his friendø for a drive, or to the doctor or just sits with him/her.</p> <p>Patrick and Patricia live in social housing, there are many people from Russia in their apartment block some of whom wouldn't have much grasp of English, so Patrick is their spokesperson, handy man and advocate. He is very active in his parish and has introduced the Legion of Mary to the parish.</p> <p>A few years ago they got a new parish priest and when I asked Patrick what is your new parish priest like, he replied - Don, he is very kind, he is open, helpful and very interested in us ó he is so good he could be a Brother of Saint John of God. Isn't that nice to hear, giving the times that we are living through! Through Patrick, I have met the parish priest and he is exactly as described by him ó I agree with Patrick he would make a fine Brother of Saint John of God.</p> <p>I like to call Larry on the phone from time to time; he usually says ó hearing your voice Don makes my day! The Brothers have been Patrick and Patricia's family all those years. So on a recent</p>
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<p>Hospitallers gather to celebrate</p>	<p>visit to Australia at an afternoon tea in the presence of the Brothers in a simple but very significant ceremony, Patrick and Patricia were made affiliate members of the Order.</p> <p>In conclusion, this congress has brought us together from all over Europe to Straubing. It is not just a business meeting or a serious of seminars, but rather members of the Family of Saint John of God coming together to share, to listen, to pray and to play together. So it a unique occasion to get to know each other; there will be special events, with lots of music, dancing, good food and hopefully moderate beer drinking, laughter with friends ó I wish you all an unforgettable experience that gives us all renewed strength to face the future together with courage and hope. Hospitality is about friendship; Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger, Hospitality is about consolidating old friendships and creating new ones. Hospitality is at the heart of who we are - clearly celebration, enjoying each others company is a beautiful expression of Hospitality. Enjoy therefore, be happy and may God bless you all!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank you for your attention.</p>
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