

# LINES OF ACTION AND PRIORITIES OF THE 68th GENERAL CHAPTER

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 68th General Chapter of the Order, held in Fatima (Portugal) under the title “*The St John of God Family at the service of Hospitality*”, studied and analysed the present state of the Order and projected it into the future. Acting on the mandate given to it by Chapter, and with the help of an *ad hoc* Commission, the General Government has drafted and approved a document containing *lines of action and priorities* which we are now presenting to the Order as the core working plan for the animation and governance of the new Government of the Order.

The General Chapter set out the following core *lines of action* to address the challenges that the Order will have to confront, and to plan its future over the next few years:

The vision of the Order as the Hospitaller Family of St John of God is appropriate and adequate according to the present and future state of our Institution, consistently with the indications enshrined in the General Statutes of the Order, and must be seen as a process with a gradually developing structure and substance.

It is a matter of priority to keep the Charism and the mission of the Order alive and topically relevant, dedicated to serving the poor, the sick and the needy, in accordance with the spirit, the values and the ethos which St John of God has inspired in us. In particular, we must be sensitive to the new states of poverty that exist in the world, caused by the economic crisis, inequalities and injustice, which are expressed in the faces of the most vulnerable members of our society.

We have to pursue the process of renewing the Order, in terms of both the Religious Life and the mission to which the Church continues to call us, and which was given a particular impetus during the past Sexennium.

We must continue animating the spiritual and community life of the Brothers as well as their initial and continuing Formation, in order to strengthen and drive forward the mission which the Church and the Order is demanding of us at the present time. The Chapter wishes us most especially to foster vocations to the Hospitaller Religious Life, by providing the necessary human and spiritual resources for this purpose. Similarly, it deems it necessary to foster the vocation to Hospitality among our co-workers.

- We must be grateful for, and appreciate the value of, the participation and presence of our Co-workers, above all in the mission of the Order, for which they are co-responsible. We consider it essential to hand on the Order's values and provide Formation for Co-workers, as well as models of co-responsibility and participation in the Order's charism, mission and spirituality.

Looking ahead to the future, it is crucially necessary to continue thinking out and seeking new formulae for the Order's structures, in order to ensure its continuity, presence and mission.

## II. THE HOSPITALLER FAMILY OF ST JOHN OF GOD

The Hospitaller Order of St John of God, which has been given canonical recognition by the Church as an Order of Brothers, has been able to develop throughout its history thanks to the cooperation and commitment of many different people. It is this that has enabled us to make progress in viewing the Order as the Hospitaller Family of St John of God. To this end, it shares its charism, mission and spirituality with the Co-workers, as provided by no. 20 of the Order's General Statutes.<sup>1</sup>

In each part of the Order, according to the local culture and context, there are different possible ways of being and living the Hospitaller Family of St John of God.

As Brothers, we foster the universal vision of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God with all those who have ties with the Order and identify with our values and with the ethos of the Order. There are different levels of affiliation, as indicated in no. 22 of the General Statutes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The General Statutes of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God (GS). Rome 2009. N° 20: "Hospitality according to the manner of Saint John of God transcends the ambit of the professed Brothers of the Order. We promote the vision of the Order as the "Hospitaller Family of Saint John of God" and we welcome, as a gift of the Spirit in our times, the possibility of sharing our charism, spirituality and mission with Co-workers, recognising their qualities and talents".

<sup>2</sup> GS N° 22: "The Co-workers can be linked with the charism, the spirituality and the mission of the Order in one or several of these levels:

- through the competent execution of their professional duties;
- through their adhesion to the mission of the Order, from their human values and/or religious convictions;
- through their commitment to the Catholic faith".

Our family of Brothers and Co-workers, as defined in no. 21 of the General Statute,<sup>3</sup> wishes to give special consideration to those who form the centrepiece of our mission, namely, the people for whom we care, and their loved ones.

The Order encourages the establishment of movements and associations governed by Statutes, intended for Co-workers who share the Order's charism, spirituality and mission.

It is possible to become members of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God by formal or non-formal membership based on respect for the traditions and cultures of the places in which the Order is present.

The General Government will encourage the Provinces to promote the establishment and development of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God as the tangible expression of our commitment to Hospitality with sick and needy people.

### **III. THE MISSION**

The Hospitaller Family of St John of God's principal mission is to offer the best possible service to the sick and those in need, thereby contributing, through Hospitality, to evangelisation and intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

To carry out its mission, the Order has defined the values which identify it and which it intends to promote: hospitality, quality, respect, responsibility and spirituality.

In our world's global and plural environment the Order relies on fostering the transmission of these values through the Brothers and Co-workers in order to imbue them with the manner in which the Order is present, and with its care models.

To carry out this mission, the Chapter stressed the need to continue driving and developing the following:

- Charismatic management
- Schools of Hospitality

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<sup>3</sup> GS Nº 21: "From the beginning, the Order has had Co-workers who participate in its initiatives and Apostolic Works, pursuing its objectives and performing its mission.

For the purposes of the present General Statutes, the different types of Co-workers in the Order are:

- a) Employees: people who express their capacity to serve their neighbour in the centres of the Order, with an employment contract.
- b) Volunteers: people who dedicate part of their being, in fact their time, in a generous and unselfish way to the service of the Order and its Works.
- c) Benefactors: people who help the Order economically, materially and spiritually.
- d) Others who are linked in different ways to the Order, in conformity with the present Statutes".

- *Ad intra* and *ad extra* cooperation (Networking)

and to continue fostering the identity of the mission by applying the following priorities and proposals:

1. Each Apostolic Centre must provide a spiritual and religious care service run by properly trained people. This service will have its own pastoral plan based on the guidelines and the criteria set out in the Order's Pastoral Care document.<sup>4</sup>
2. The General and Provincial Ethics and Bioethics Commissions must be strengthened so that they can guarantee formation and appropriate decision-taking in respect of these matters throughout the whole Order.
3. Teaching and research must be promoted consistently with the criteria set out in the Order's Charter of Hospitality, and networking between all the Provinces, Regions and Apostolic Centres.
4. Since the Order opted preferentially to serve the poorest people from the time of its inception, our priority is to establish new forms of Hospitality to meet the needs stemming from the present economic and financial crisis, which is spawning new forms of poverty.
5. We must encourage volunteers and benefactors to serve in our Apostolic Centres. Whenever possible, the Provinces should put in place a team responsible for fostering and coordinating volunteerism.

### **III.I Charismatic management**

The management of our Centres and Services is based on the charism and mission of St John of God's hospitality.

Things have to be done well and meaningfully, based on the principles which justify and define our Institution and its mission.

The General Statutes and the Charter of Hospitality describe the mission entrusted to us and the criteria for performing it properly.

These principles, which might appear to be somewhat abstract, must be applied in practice striving to constantly improve our service, which must be verified through evaluations and audits.

In this way we shall ensure the sustainable development of our Centres and services according to the spirit of St John of God.

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<sup>4</sup> "Pastoral care in the manner St John of God". General Curia, Roma 2012

6. The document on Charismatic Management in the Order<sup>5</sup> must be implemented in all our care services, tailored to the actual situation as it exists, and in accordance with the different cultures. The software for evaluating Charismatic Management can be useful in this respect.
7. The Brothers and Co-workers must receive formation and be accompanied in Charismatic Management consistently with the Order's main documents.<sup>6</sup>
8. We must listen particularly to the voices of the guests in our care, in order to safeguard their rights and improve the quality of the care we provide them with.

The Order's project can be implemented sustainably on behalf of the sick and people with disabilities, and the needy, if there exists a solid financial basis for it.

9. To galvanise our evangelising work and guarantee its charismatic development the Provinces and Centres must give themselves a strategic plan which includes lines of action and a budget.
10. Before opening a new Centre, a feasibility study must be conducted, to ascertain whether it is needed, and to ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are available. Every Centre must draw up and evaluate a short- and long-term financial plan, in order to appraise their viability.
11. It will be difficult to achieve the financial autonomy of certain social works which the Order has established in poorer places and regions. However, we must carefully take into account the value of the charismatic testimony they provide.
12. The General Chapter reiterated the value of almsgiving in the tradition of the Order. It therefore urged the Provinces to encourage

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<sup>5</sup> "Charismatic management in the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God. Guide for evaluating and improving our apostolic mission". General Curia. Rome 2012

<sup>6</sup> "The Order's Charter of Hospitality". General Curia. Rome 1999

Charismatic management in the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God. Guide for evaluating and improving our apostolic mission". General Curia. Rome 2012

"Pastoral care in the manner St John of God". General Curia. Rome 2012

"The Formation of the Co-workers. Manual for formation in the philosophy and values of the Order". Rome 2012.

Forkan, D. circular letter "The Changing Face of the Order". Rome 2009

Leone, S. "Ethics in St John of God". General Curia. Rome 2012

fundraising using modern methods and asked everyone who manage funds to do so transparently, and to give account of their stewardship.

### **III.II Schools of Hospitality**

Formation in Hospitality must lead us to a dynamic continuing process of growth and becoming fully imbued with the concepts, attitudes and conduct which identify us as Hospitallers.

The Schools of Hospitality are intended to foster the Hospitaller culture and Hospitaller formation wherever the Order is present.

This formation, which includes both knowledge and experience, is a common space for both the Brothers and Co-workers in which we enrich one another and animate each other to continue becoming more deeply imbued in the values and principles<sup>7</sup> that stem from hospitality. This formation includes theoretical and practical elements which have been gathered together in the Order's document on the Formation of our co-workers.<sup>8</sup>

13. It is proposed to conduct an evaluation of the work performed by the existing Schools of Hospitality – evaluation of the formation, the training programmes and their practical application in the mission – and to encourage the Provinces and Delegations to establish them where they do not yet exist.

14. Thought must be given to the feasibility of establishing an International Formation and Spirituality Centre for the Brothers and Co-workers, in Granada for example, to promote the purposes for which the Schools of Hospitality exist.

### **III.III *Ad intra* and *ad extra* collaboration (Networking)**

The General Chapter was mindful of the possibilities opened up by being able to share and cooperate as an Order which is present in every continent, to help us to jointly develop and promote the charism and the mission of Hospitality.

The General Chapter stressed the importance of continuing to organise and enhance meetings and commissions on a Regional basis – in Africa, America, Asia-Pacific and Europe – while maintaining unity and communion with the whole Order.

The Chapter proposed the following aspects to be considered priorities:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. G.S. N° 50

<sup>8</sup> "The Formation of the Co-workers. Manual for formation in the philosophy and values of the Order". Rome 2012.

15. To improve the exchange of knowledge and experience built up by the Order throughout its long history, through networking and by using the new communication technologies.
16. To promote Twinning between Centres performing similar activities, in order to improve the mission, professional practice and formation and training.
17. To foster cooperation with the political authorities in order to cooperate in setting welfare and health care policies.
18. To seek funding from governmental and other institutions in order to implement projects to facilitate the provision of care to the most disadvantaged individuals and communities.
19. To encourage and stimulate exchanges of people, Brothers and Co-workers, for specific purposes and with regular internships, to support or cooperate with projects of other Provinces, and to share their knowledge and experience.
20. The General Government, through the Missions and International Cooperation Office shall:
  - Foster and coordinate solidarity within the Order.
  - Establish viable forms of financial cooperation to help to sustain and develop all our Centres
  - Gather and publish information on everything that is being done throughout the Order in the matter of cooperation.

#### **IV. THE BROTHERS**

*“The future role of the Religious in the Family of God or People of God can be best compared to yeast in the bread... a living witness to the radical following of Jesus and clear expression of the special gift or charism that they have received for the Church.”<sup>9</sup>*

By virtue of the gift they have received and of their consecration, the Brothers are the depositories of the Charism, and they are duty-bound to maintain it and to develop it across time, handing on the spirit of St John of God to those who cooperate with them.

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<sup>9</sup> Forkan, D. op. cit. 3.2.2

In the course of its deliberations, the Chapter emphasised several times that over the next Sexennium, the Order must continue working on the renewal of the religious and spiritual life of the Brothers, stressing the importance of ensuring consistency between our prayer life and our apostolic life.

This makes it a matter of priority to pay particular attention to *promoting new vocations*, to the quality of initial and continuing formation for the Brothers, and to pursuing a renewed, authentic and coherent *style of community life* which we are called to live by.

#### **IV.I Vocations Promotion**

- 21.A Pastoral Care of Vocations/Vocations Promotion Commission should be instituted at the General Curia and in the Regions of the Order, and be encouraged to network, and to involve the Co-workers in their deliberations and activities.
22. The Order should promote a Year dedicated to the Pastoral Ministry of the Hospitaller Vocation. It is suggested that the Provinces, Delegations and Communities should do this in conjunction with other Church authorities. They are to be equipped with the media they require and communicate in contemporary and accessible language.
23. Emphasis should be given to what is specific about the vocation of the Brother of St John of God, namely, hospitality towards the poor and the sick.

#### **IV.II Initial and Continuing Formation**

All our formation, whether initial or continuing, is directed to meeting the needs of our mission and to helping us to live our Religious consecration consistently with what the Church is demanding of us today.

24. The Formation Programme for the Brothers<sup>10</sup> must be implemented in every place, tailored to the local situations and cultures, and must be kept up-to-date according to present circumstances.
25. The recent documents published by the Order should be incorporated into the Formation programmes, especially the *Spirituality* document.<sup>11</sup> Order-wide guidelines should be laid down to evaluate the formation and how far it is assimilated.

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<sup>10</sup> "Formation Programme for the Brothers of St John of God". General Curia. Rome 2000.

<sup>11</sup> "The Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St John of God. The Spirituality of the Order." General Curia. Rome 2004



26. Formators should be provided with appropriate formation, and be kept up-to-date, and regional and/or interprovincial meetings should be organised.

27. During the period in temporary vows, the Brothers should be helped to persevere in their vocation, increasingly identifying with the charism, spirituality and mission of St John of God. To this end, all the material and human resources required should be provided, placing particular stress on personal accompaniment.

28. Courses in Preparation for Solemn Profession should continue at the level of the whole Order.

The Chapter reiterated the absolute need to lay down Continuing Formation programmes in the Provinces and Regions as required by no. 89 of the General Statutes.<sup>12</sup>

29. The process of renewal must continue to be fostered, stressing the Brothers' spiritual life.

30. Workshops and meetings should be organised to enable the Brothers to assimilate the Order's most recent documents.

#### **IV.III The renewed community and spiritual life**

In view of the present situation, the Chapter reiterated the fact that Brothers and Communities are being called upon to play a fundamental part in the Order's mission.

To this end, the Chapter made the following proposals:

31. Community life should be monitored and promoted, so that it will enable the Brothers to renew their spiritual life, strengthen fraternity, revision of life, fraternal correction and a deeper sharing of the life of faith.

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<sup>12</sup> GS N° 89: “

**89.** In accordance with article 61 of these General Statutes, the Provinces must have a plan of ongoing formation.

The Communities must include a programme of ongoing formation in their Programme of Community Life.

Each Brother must implement in a responsible and active way his own plan of ongoing formation, in harmony with those of the Community and of the Province”.

32. Alternative forms of community life should be established, involving Co-workers who feel called to live the charism and mission of the Order. Pursuant to no. 26 and no. 28 of the General Statutes.<sup>13</sup>

## **V. THE LITTLE BROTHERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

At its 68<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, the Order of St John of God welcomed and accepted the request of the Little Brothers of the Good Shepherd to join the Order.

The Chapter urged all the members of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God to view the merger of the two Institutes as a source of mutual enrichment.

The preparatory process leading to full union must be pursued with the closest attention.

## **VI. MISCELLANEOUS PROPOSALS**

33. The next General Chapter should be organised in two different stages, the first phase would be open to the Co-workers, and be dedicated to the mission, while the second would be reserved for the Brothers alone, to deal with matters relating to the Brothers' Religious Life.

34. To improve the animation and governance of the Order, the General Chapter urged the new General Government to submit a proposal to the next Assembly of Major Superiors for the reorganisation of the General Curia.

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<sup>13</sup> G.S. Nº 26: "The Co-workers who feel called to a more active participation in the charism, in the spirituality and in the mission of the Order, together with the Brothers may form organisations or movements in the Provinces.

These must have their own statutes or regulations and affiliation protocols that must be approved by the General Definitory on the proposal of the Provincial Superior with the consent of his Council. The Superior General and his Council will coordinate the different initiatives of the organisations or movements created in the Provinces".

G.S. Nº 28: "The Provinces can form, in a provisional or permanent way, Communities to share some aspects of their Hospitaller religious life with the Co-workers. The Provincial Superior and his Council define the norms that must regulate these communities."