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THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ORDER.

A REFLECTION

“Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5)

TO THE WHOLE ORDER.

Feast of Our Lady, Mother of Good Counsel
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My dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality,

PREAMBLE

Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful, it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful, it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident, it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better - the confident see change as a source of inspiration, viewing all challenges as an impetus to do things even better in future.

1. RENEWAL

1.1. Renewal, what is it?

Organisational renewal¹ is a process of initiating, creating and confronting needed changes so as to make it possible for an organisation to become or remain viable, to adapt to new conditions, to solve problems, to learn from past experience and move towards greater organisational maturity.

¹ Cf. Lippitt, 1969

In our case, renewal means getting to know the origins of the Order, the story of St. John of God and his philosophy of life. Not just to remember John, showing paintings and pictures of him, or telling stories about him, but more importantly, to endeavour to embody his spirit with enthusiasm, expressing it in practice, through our attitudes and actions towards the persons we serve. Working with others will enable us to shape a single vision of the future, reaching out confidently to give direction to the mission and restoring hope² to people who are suffering.

Renewal, like conversion of the heart, is something we have to be involved in daily, because it is “*the love of God that impels us*” (2 Cor 5, 14). Using the analogy of St Paul, like the athlete we must constantly strain for what is ahead because we realise that even “*If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing*”.³

For renewal to take root it has to be embarked upon in every aspect of our lives. Every Province needs to draw up a strategic plan for the renewal of the Province, of each Centre and each Community. The process must involve the Co-workers as well as the Brothers; all of us require a “*formation of the heart – having a heart which sees*”⁴ in order to practise the hospitality of John of God in a world torn apart by war, violence, corruption, marginalisation and suffering.

It was Brother Pierluigi Marchesi, a former Prior General of the Order, who set the Order on the path of renewal. He used a single word to sum up what really needed to be done in terms of renewal – *Humanisation*. For Brother Pierluigi, Humanisation had become the unifying and integrating bond to help us put the renewal process into practice: *Our culture has to be completely revised. It is a wonderful opportunity to diagnose our state of health... In order to renew ourselves profoundly, and become genuine witnesses of humanisation, it is vital for us to rediscover the values we possess... humanising a hospital means pulling it closer to the spirit of its founder.*⁵ Here we have what is meant by renewal: regenerating, revising, and continually re-reading!

1.2. Biblical-theological bases

In this document I am addressing an issue with deep biblical and theological roots in which it is possible to identify a number of salient features, of which these are the main ones:

² Cf. John Paul II: *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, I.

³ Cf. 1 Cor 13, 3.

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 31a, b.

⁵ Bro. P. Marchesi, *Humanisation*, Rome, 1981, pp. 34-35.

- Gospel *metanoia*. Change is demanded above all by the message of the Gospel whose original preaching (prior to the proclamation of the Easter kerygma) related specifically to “conversion”, a term which inadequately translates into modern languages the density of the original Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means “a changed mind”. For the approach which the Gospel proposes entails a radical change in the way of thinking, and consequently of acting, which is so beautifully expressed in the Beatitudes. For these place happiness not in this life but in the next, basing it moreover on elements which the "world's logic" radically rejects, such as poverty, renouncing revenge-taking, suffering for the commitment to justice.
- *Adapting the Apostolic Church*. But it is not only the Gospel which demands a change of mentality. When the early Apostolic Church found itself without the physical presence of Jesus, under the guidance of the Spirit it had to find the most appropriate solutions for meeting the demands of evangelization, in practical terms, such as the institution of deacons, but also in the more specifically pastoral field, such as the confrontation with the Jewish world on the one hand and the Hellenic world on the other. But that confrontation was not without its disputes (one only has to think of the stand-off on circumcision, the confrontation between Peter and Paul at the Council of Jerusalem). For us, this must stand as an exemplary benchmark, bearing witness to the fact that even in such a spiritually powerful community as the Apostolic Church, change is not without obstacles, opposition, perplexities and stand-offs. However, all of them can always be overcome under the guidance of the Spirit and for the purpose of pursuing the one and only mission of charity and evangelisation.
- *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. This ancient Latin saying emphasises not so much what happened at the time of the Protestant Reformation but a kind of perennial attitude which the Church must always adopt towards herself. The reform of the Church does not necessarily mean that there is something "wrong", but it does indicate that there is a need for a constant pursuit of growth, internal improvement, of avoiding considering that she is perfect – in terms of the human aspects – but always acknowledging that there is room for further improvement. But for this to be done it is necessary to acknowledge the deep-seated social changes that have already taken place and which constantly take place in the world in society, the economy, the family and bioethics, making it impossible to address these aspects in the way they were handled one hundred years ago. Furthermore, the history of the Church is a constant act of witness of these continual adjustments. In addition to the clash with the world of Greek paganism, let us also remember the Middle Ages, in which the whole of theology was “rethought” and worked out afresh in terms of the categories of Scholastic philosophy; and let us recall the so-called “Counter-Reformation” after the Protestant Reformation, with the flourishing of the Religious Orders, the

- *The Second Vatican Council*. There is no doubt that this has been the greatest “ecclesial innovation” in the modern age. Basically, the fact that we are writing these pages at all, urging ourselves to embrace change, is due precisely to the gates thrown open by Vatican II. First of all, we have a different concept of the Church today, no longer seeing it as a pyramid, but as communion, viewed as the people of God on the move, in which God himself raises up different vocations and attributes different ministries. Secondly, there has been a return to Biblical, but also Patristic, sources (the *ressourcement*, to which Paul VI so often referred). And then there has been the renewal of the liturgy and moral theology and so on. It is precisely this far-reaching renewal and “*aggiornamento*” which has laid the foundations, in the Church, for making renewal a constant attitude to be expressed in different ways, according to different conditions of life, in various existential situations and in different historical circumstances. In particular, as far as we are concerned, Vatican II laid the foundations, which were subsequently developed further, for a far-reaching renewal of Consecrated Life, incorporating it more deeply into the ecclesial and social environment, in which the dimension of the vows is seen more as self-giving than as self-denial, in which the Christological icon stands as the exemplary benchmark dimension, and in which charity becomes the central expression that also characterises the contemplative life.

This short overview must necessarily have the eschatological projection of God who “*makes all things new*” (cf Rev 21, 5), as its common benchmark, as a kind of watermark running throughout it. We must therefore not limit ourselves to “renewing them”, as if we were giving them a novel make-over or just tinkering with a few structural adjustments, but really “make them new”; in other words, take what already exists as the source of newness. And this is precisely the perspective to which the Spirit is calling us today and which I shall be advocating in the pages that follow.

1.3 Renewal is the work of the Spirit

When it comes to renewal there is no one single *method* or process that suits all. However, I believe that it would not be in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II were an individual or a group of individuals to claim that *renewal is not for us*, or *renewal does not apply to us*. To refuse to respond to the call to renewal or not to take it seriously would be to go against or resist the Spirit of God, who is always active and who is guiding his Church and guiding our Order. Through the scriptures, through the Eucharist, through loving relationships, through prayer of all kinds, through beauty, through the people we serve, even through silence, God speaks. Whether we realise it or not, we are enfolded in a life-changing, life-giving message of hope. All we have to do is to be present and open up our minds and our hearts. As the disciples discovered,

Jesus will appear among us, bringing God's peace and the power of the Holy Spirit. Filled with the Spirit, we can break free to share the good news with everyone we meet.

Renewal therefore is the work of the Spirit who is constantly renewing our Order. For us what is important is that we are *aware of what is happening* and cooperate fully with God. An essential element in renewal is purification of our motivation, conversion, openness to the Spirit, reflective dialogue, personal prayer and listening for the gentle breeze of the Spirit who breathes where He will⁶. As our God is a God of surprises, let us allow Him to lead us, inspire us and surprise us, which He most certainly will. When we feel vulnerable or insecure, which is normal when confronted with major change, this will give us great comfort, joy, satisfaction of being a part of something greater than ourselves, something that does not depend totally on us. We will take pride in and give thanks for the privilege of being part of something that is unfolding, something beautiful, something we never thought possible. This transformation is already taking place in many parts of the Order through individual Brothers and Co-workers, something that in the end, in terms of our mission, makes perfect sense.

This understanding of renewal will keep us on our toes, so to speak. We can never be complacent about what we do, or how we live. In terms of renewal it is also obvious that not all will, or will be able to, advance at the same pace, nor is it required or necessary for them to do so. What is important, however, is that the leaders of the Province/Delegation/Community or Service, with their teams, councils, (Brothers and Senior Co-workers) study the relevant Church and Order documents on renewal, and together formulate a plan or programme that will include study, application and – where necessary – experimentation, that is applicable to each unique situation.

As Religious we are at the heart of the Church and at the frontier of her mission of evangelisation. We therefore live and exercise our ministry in ordinary space as distinct from other Church workers e.g. bishops and parish priests, who, it can be said, exercise their ministry in the sacred place of a parish, church, retreat house, and so on. They accompany and nourish God's people by word and sacrament. Obviously, as members of the one family, the Church, we share the same goal and work in harmony to bring about the Reign of God on earth.

The way we do this is through the exercise of our hospitaller ministry. Our mission is **evangelisation through hospitality in the manner of St. John of God**. Hospitality practised the way of St. John of God *is evangelisation*. It is when we are true to our mission that we will have social impact, make a difference in the lives of people and make a significant contribution to the Church's mission of evangelisation. For many people we are the only bible that they will ever read. To bear witness to Christ, we need to be in a constant state of conversion and renewal. We are working with others in the Church to bring about the Reign of God, but we cannot expect leadership to come

⁶ John 3, 8; 1 Kings 19, 11-17.

from the local Church in terms of our mission. This is why Religious have a 'special status' in the Church, to be free to seek out those who live in darkness to go where others cannot or do not wish to go. Our vows free us to do what others cannot do, to reach out to those uncared for and, as a result, feel unwanted and unloved. In a word, our mission is to show, in a concrete way, love for those who feel unloved, misunderstood, marginalised and unwanted – to love them into wholeness, in the way shown to us by our brother Jesus and St. John of God. This is our mission.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT

Chapter 1 –Renewal

For the Brothers

1. Choose one of the biblical texts cited in the document and analyse it in the light of the state of the local community, looking to the Word of God in relation to renewal.
2. Apply the notion of "renewal" to the Charism of Hospitality, and indicate the operational forms it can take.
3. Find and comment on the many prayers or hymns to the Holy Spirit which you feel are most appropriate for a discussion of the issue of renewal.

For the Brothers and Co-Workers (Co-workers on their own in places where there are no Brothers.)

1. In the light of the biography and the letters of St John of God analyse the effect of renewal that he brought to the society of his day.
2. Apply these criteria to a possible "renewal plan" for your own local center.
3. What contribution can Lay spirituality make to the renewal of the Order?

2. THE HISTORY OF RENEWAL IN THE ORDER

The changes called for, and needed, so that the Order could be transformed into an active apostolic institute after the Second Vatican Council were of enormous proportions. As is always the case in times of radical change, nobody could have possibly known, predicted, dreamt of or imagined how things were going to turn out. This is the gift of history. Looking back now, we can see that when the Order embarked upon the renewal process, it made a quantum leap forward, a leap of faith, in terms of its understanding of itself, its mission and its focus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the changes, adaptations and sacrifices made by the members of the Order in the pursuit of authentic renewal were truly of seismic proportions. The result of this was a verification of the process of renewal and the assurance that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. The renewal undertaken by the Order resulted in a more original and authentic understanding of Hospitality, and of the Order's mission and place in the Church. This in turn has resulted in a dramatic expansion and development of services for people with a variety of needs, and an increase in the number of people who come to our centres and services. I have no doubt that this is something of which St. John of God is very proud indeed.

2.1. The historical background to perennial renewal

2.1.1. 'The Heart Commands'⁷

Allowing the heart to 'command' has led the Order to discover new horizons, new frontiers, new challenges and new opportunities. The Hospitaller Order of St. John of God continues to be a credible instrument in God's hands for bringing about His reign on earth because of its fidelity to its mission. This is so not because certain members of great intellectual prowess have left us libraries full of their works, although we do have valuable works that contain the collective memory of the past and others that have interpreted the story in the light of the times they lived in. Rather, the Order of St. John of God is what it is today because its members allowed the 'heart to command', to listen to the voice of the poor. A heart that sees where love was needed and acted accordingly.⁸ Hospitality in the way of John of God is like a golden thread that spins across centuries keeping the fabric of the Order together and intact. It is like a

⁷ The Arms of the Venegas Family, which can still be seen over the doorway of the house that had once belonged to this important Granada family, bears *a heart pierced by a sword*, with the motto "El Corazon manda" ('The heart commands'). With the permission of the owner Don Miguel Abiz de Venegas, John used to sleep in the doorway. However, as John had a heart that was not deaf to the voice of the poor he invited them to take shelter with him in this temporary haven. The doorway however, soon became so crowded with poor and sick people that John brought there, the people of the household found it difficult to enter and live in their own dwelling. Understandably, John was soon asked by the owners to move on and take his 'friends' with him. We might say that it was here that *John's style of hospitality was born* – in a doorway.

⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 31 b.

multicoloured garment whose colours are an image of how it has been expressed in a variety of ways down the centuries according to the exigencies of time, place and the needs of people, with the charism of John's hospitality being the golden thread binding it together.

Faithfulness to the original inspiration, that is St. John of God and the legacy of Hospitality that he has left us, is the constituent element that has enabled the Order to continue to grow. I use the phrase 'continue to grow' advisedly, because an organisation or an organism that does not grow gradually dies. Life in an organisation is measured by its ability to grow, expand and ultimately by its ability to recreate itself, and to produce results.

2.1.2. Every life form must grow or die

It may sound a somewhat crude way to describe the work of a religious institution as 'producing results'. We know that the results we seek are spiritual, which obviously cannot be measured. The means we use are the corporal and spiritual care of suffering humanity.⁹ By being faithful to this sacred mission the Order continues to be a viable instrument of evangelisation in the world of health care. Unless the farmer cultivates the land, sows the seed and gives nutrition to the growing plant there will be no harvest. In the same way, in order to have spiritual effect, evangelisation, there must be social impact. The Order of St. John of God today cares for more people than it has ever done in its history. Annually, more than 20,000,000 (twenty million) people's lives are touched by a follower of St. John of God. It does this through a wide-ranging expression of Hospitality not dreamt of before Vatican II. It also carries out its mission in a manner and at a level of excellence not thought possible just 40 years ago.

As a point of interest, before the updating called for by the Second Vatican Council, the Vow of Hospitality only came into effect when *we cared for male patients in our own hospitals or those entrusted to us*.¹⁰ The revised definition of the Vow of Hospitality contained in the Constitutions of 1984 reads: "*With the vow of hospitality we dedicate ourselves, under obedience to our superiors, to helping the sick and those in need, undertaking to provide them with all those services they need, even the most humble and the most dangerous to our own lives, in imitation of Christ, who loved us even to the extent of dying for our salvation.*"

Our greatest joy lies in living in contact with those to whom our mission is directed; we welcome them and serve them with the loving-kindness, understanding and spirit of faith which they deserve as persons and as children of God, and we place all our energy, talents and skills at their disposition in the various tasks entrusted to us."¹¹

⁹ Cf *Hospitaller Order of St. John of God*, Constitutions 1984, Chap. I.

¹⁰ Cf. 1927 Constitutions, art. 79a.

¹¹ Cf. 1984 Constitutions, (art 22).

2.1.3. An original, authentic understanding of HOSPITALITY

While the process was difficult, even turbulent at times, courage and dedication to renewal in the spirit of Vatican II eventually led to the emergence of a *new face of the Order*. The Order began to present itself as an Order made up of men consecrated in Hospitality to live radically the following of Jesus as religious Brothers, together with men and women who, fascinated by the ‘John of God Story’, committed themselves to continuing his mission, according to the philosophy, ethos and values of the Order.

A new face of the Order has emerged because of serious engagement in the renewal process. The journey of renewal is long, sometimes arduous, often times exciting and enjoyable but always challenging, which will last as long as the Order exists. Should the Order at any given time, either as a whole or any of its constituent parts (Provinces, communities), cease to engage in the process of renewal, recreating itself, re-founding, re-focusing or whatever term one wishes to use, it will die. However, there are no guarantees that should the membership wholeheartedly enter into the renewal process the Order will continue into the future. Longevity, or the continuation of the Order into the future, is not the purpose or the motivation for renewal. The future is not our concern. The future is in God’s hands. Our responsibility is to do what is pleasing to Him. By seeking to interpret the signs of the times, following the guidance of the Spirit, we will be an effective instrument in God’s hands in carrying out His work at any given time and place. Through deep reflection, community and personal prayer, each of us must always strive to be in tune with what God wants, “*Set your hearts on his Kingdom first...and all these other things will be given you as well*”.¹²

2.2. The way we were...

2.2.1. The Brothers before Vatican II

I understand that some of the people who will read this document or watch the accompanying DVD, may not be fully aware of our history. I will briefly give some background information that may help people to understand where the Order is coming from. I think it will be of interest to hear of the way that we lived, ministered and functioned as a Religious Order in the pre-Vatican II era. In truth we were not that different from other religious institutes of the time. I believe this may also serve the ‘new hospitallers’, both Brothers and Co-workers, to appreciate and take pride in our long history of service to suffering humanity. It is interesting to note that despite many challenges, persecutions and vicissitudes met by the membership down the centuries, as a religious institute the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God has remained true to its mission. It has always aligned itself with people on the margins, those rejected and neglected or treated unjustly because of the nature of their illness or disability; people

¹² Mt. 6, 33.

who were poor, sick or suffering in any way. It goes without saying that in order to get the full picture, so to speak, of who we are, and to get some understanding of the mission and what motivates and inspires us, it is essential to study the life of St. John of God because he is both our Founder and our inspiration. We have a great deal of material in this regard but pride of place must be given to the first biography of St. John of God by Francisco de Castro, Rector of the St. John of God Hospital, Granada, in 1585.

Basically the Order is emerging from a long monastic tradition in which the ‘monastery hospital’ and the monastic way of life dictated how we used to live. In the past we saw ourselves as monks, who had a hospital ministry, with a strong monastic structure for our way of life, our prayer, observing the great silence, enclosure and daily routine. We exercised our ministry caring *‘for male patients in our own hospitals or those entrusted to us’*.¹³ The ‘monastic style of life’ was not the choice of the first Brothers of St. John of God it was imposed on them by the Church. One of the positive aspects of this situation however, was that the dwelling and workplace of the Brothers was known as a ‘monastery hospital’. This meant that the Brothers lived very close to the patients; their accommodation was either in a building close to the hospital or within the hospital itself. As the Brothers were relatively numerous with the help of a few lay helpers they were able to staff all departments within the hospital. Despite the ‘monastic setting’ the Order was given the privileges of Mendicant Orders by Urban VIII, (1624), which meant that among other things, they could leave the house to quest for alms or beg for the hospital, in the same way John of God did in order to support his hospital in Granada.

However, prior to the reforms of Vatican II, John of God did not figure greatly in our understanding of who we were, our mission or our spirituality. While we made a Vow of Hospitality it was the three ‘Vows of Religion’ i.e., poverty, obedience and chastity, that set us apart in a *state of perfection* and different from the laity. The emphasis seemed to have been on what made us different from others in the Church, rather than what we had in common with all of God’s people.

Vatican II instructed Religious to use as an instrument of renewal, the scriptures and to get in touch with the original inspiration of their founder or foundress. In addition to the Documents promulgated by the Council, the post Vatican II Popes and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published many documents related to the religious life¹⁴. The leadership of our Order took the directive of the Council to renew very seriously. A number of initiatives relating to renewal were undertaken at both international and provincial levels. Many

¹³ Cf. 1927 Constitutions, art. 79a).

¹⁴ Vita Consecrata JP II Encyclical, 1996; Fraternal life in Community (1994), Starting Afresh from Christ, 2002 and At the Service of Authority and Obedience, 2008 - all by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

documents were published by the Order¹⁵; special chapters and congresses were held; there were courses and retreats for the Brothers conducted by experts in the teachings of the Vatican Council. There were periods of experimentation in ministry, community living and prayer. This was a defining moment for the Order. The membership was asking questions like: Are we monks? Are we Apostolic Religious? Are we lay or clerical? What is our mission in the Church? To whom is our mission directed?

For some, especially those in leadership positions, it wasn't an easy time. There were so many questions, new freedoms, crises, and disagreements on how to move forward; Religious and priests were leaving the ministry. For some it was a time of change, challenge and opportunity in ministry, while for others it was a painful experience full of doubt with a deep sense of loss. All of this has taken place within a 40-year period that, in terms of the 460 or so years of history of the Order, can be considered a short space of time. It was an exciting time, however, with new freedoms of thought and expression; new theological insights gained; respect for the individuality of Religious and diversity in ministry. Many say this is only the beginning and we have no idea where it will lead. This is true, but what we do know for certain is that the future is in God's hands, so all will be well.

Another factor that played a role in isolating Religious, even of the same institute, from each other up to the period of the Council, was the fact that travel was difficult and expensive. Consequently, there was little opportunity for Brothers to meet each other except those who participated at a General Chapter, which was the only type of international gathering that existed for Religious of that period. In this type of setup, Provinces became rather independent, especially within our Order. As one Prior General stated, he felt as if he were Prior General of a federation of 20 different Orders, rather than one Order made up of 20 Provinces. The Provinces were not only independent of each other, but also from the General Curia in Rome. Communication with the General Curia was for specific reasons as stipulated by canon law and our Constitutions and usually by letter. To receive a response would take a long time, only in urgent matters was a telegram sent. It is important to recall that what was happening in religious life reflected, as it does today, what was happening in society. Society at that time was slow-moving, with little change, few developments, communication was slow, travel was difficult and time consuming, influences from one country to another were also limited.

We are now living in a state of rapid, constant change, the so-called global village, with instant communication, easy travel, transnational influences, and developments in medicine that were unimaginable a few years ago. In order to have social impact in this new world, the Order recognised that it, too, had to change, update and rejuvenate itself.

¹⁵ Humanization; The Brothers of St. John of God on the Threshold of 2000; Brothers and Co-workers Together to Serve and Promote Life; The Formation of the Hospitaller Brother of St. John of God; The Charter of Hospitality; Hospitaller Spirituality in the Manner of St. John of God.

The impetus to change in terms of ministry within the Order came from reflecting on the life and ministry of St. John of God. What we found when we took a fresh look at the life of John of God was truly a revelation. The stature of John in terms of spirituality and mission is incredible. This discovery has been the most exciting, challenging and defining moment of the renewal process and has had the greatest impact on the life of the Order since 1572, when Pope St Pius V formed the followers of John of God into a Religious Institute.

It is worth noting that St. John of God has had enormous influence on nearly every decision taken in terms of the mission of the Order over the past 40 years or so. The question most commonly asked during this period was, *what would John of God do in this situation?* This discovery has a huge influence on our life, the way we do things, the way we have come to understand the mission, *hospitality being at the core of who we are*, and the incredible variety of ways that hospitality began to be expressed. This was something we never thought possible. Therefore it was, and still is, a life-giving experience. The Order gained a profound understanding of itself and of its mission, comparable to a re-founding experience.

For the Brothers the discovery of St. John of God through the renewal process revolutionised the way we began to see ourselves as Religious Brothers, our mission in the church and our relationship with our fellow travellers on the road of life, be they clerical, religious, lay, Christian or non-Christian. We began to judge and see things through the prism of hospitality with new possibilities for living and expressing it. All of this was both exhilarating and challenging.

2.2.2. The Brothers of the Vatican II era

I wish here to acknowledge and express a deep sense of gratitude for the great legacy of hospitality left us by past generations of Brothers, going back to St. John of God himself. These men have been models of what is best and most noble in the vocation of the Hospitaller Brother. Their dedication to the service of the sick, day and night even at risk to their own lives, and their austerity of life and devotion to prayer can serve as a benchmark for our present generation to appreciate the core values of the Order, and what lies at the very heart of the vocation of the St. John of God Brother. What the Order has today in terms of orientation towards the care of the most neglected and needy members of society, with a passion for excellence in service, stems from the conviction which the Brothers have always had, that each human being was made in God's image and likeness and that nothing – poverty, deformity, disability or illness – could in any way destroy or diminish this inner beauty. It is this rich heritage which we have received from past generations of Brothers that links us to a proud past dating back to John of God himself.

We are also blessed to have still with us many of the Brothers who initiated the renewal process after Vatican II and continue to be active; others are advanced in age but still contribute to the Order's mission in diverse ways. Other Brothers have gone to their eternal reward. There is a sizable number of Brothers who exercise their hospitaller ministry today through prayer and suffering because of the infirmities associated with ageing. Each of these Brothers, according to their particular circumstances, are still contributing to the mission of hospitality and engaged in the renewal process. I have not met a single Brother who experienced the pre-Vatican II way of life and who engaged in the renewal process who would wish to go back to the old ways.

Renewal in the spirit of Vatican II must not only preserve, but strengthen the linkage with the past, taking what is essential from the past, disregarding what is not relevant today, and planning for the future. We therefore need to pause, reflect and choose what is essential to preserve the John of God identity that is the trade mark of all that we do.

2.3. ...and how we are today

2.3.1. The effects of renewal.

When renewal is entered into seriously the effects are palpable. There is life, vibrancy and enthusiasm. But most importantly the effects are felt almost immediately by the recipients of our care in a way that is life-giving for them, and this is the objective of the exercise in the first place. The reason for renewal, therefore, is not that what was done in the past was wrong but so that the Order can continue to be true to its mission and be relevant in today's fast changing society. The Order is in a constant state of change. As the English Cardinal Newman said 'to live is to change, to have lived long is to have changed often.' Well, the Order has 'lived long', which means it has changed dramatically down the years. What has remained the same, however, is its fidelity to the mission of hospitality. Renewal therefore, is not about a feel-good therapy for the Brothers or Co-workers; it is about survival of the mission, fidelity, being authentic, faithful and true to the original inspiration that is St. John of God.

Investing oneself in the hospitaller project leads gradually to an awareness that one is involved in something worthwhile, something greater than any one individual or group, as I said earlier. While hospitality in the way of St. John of God is a charism and a gift of God, it is not something static or fixed. The word 'charism' has a spiritual meaning e.g., a grace, a power, generally of a spiritual nature, a gift freely given by God. It is also used in social psychology in secular circumstances to indicate that someone with this quality influences other people individually or as a group. Religious institutes use the word to describe their spiritual orientation and any special characteristics of their mission or values that might be exhibited because of the vows that members have taken and the orientation of the institutes to which they belong. An example of a specific charism is how the works of the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God emphasize

service of the poor, the sick, disadvantaged people with a certain spirit - **Hospitality in the manner of St. John of God**; this is the value that underpins its mission.

To be effective the charism needs to take root and grow in the life of the person who has received the gift. This is why the late Holy Father, John Paul II said of John of God “he not only practised hospitality but, if I might put it this way, *he made himself hospitality*.”¹⁶ This fusion happens when the individual exercises a service to others, especially to people in need, who invite or call for a personal response from us. It is like the pomegranate, when it is ripe it opens itself out in a selfless gesture of self-giving, offering food, nourishing life, giving strength and energy. Hospitality being a dynamic gift, and not something inert, requires a personal investment by the individual, and when this happens *hospitality itself is enriched* and the reward for the individual is both exhilarating and professionally fulfilling.

These regenerating effects of the renewal process unleashed new energy and enthusiasm for John of God and his work. There were new spaces, new porticoes, new needs that called for a response. All this gave the flower of hospitality new space to grow, to bloom and spread its perfume across the world of suffering, bringing with it healing, a sense of well-being, hope and joy to millions. ‘Hospitality in the way of John’ is the special gift that God wishes to give to the world and society. Having been released from the constraints of old and outdated structures that inhibited its growth and development, it has blossomed to the benefit of many millions each year.

2.3.2. Renewal has led to something new

It is true that the renewal journey so far has had its ups and downs, high points and low points, successes and failures, joys and sorrows. Understandably, it has been painful at times for some because real sacrifices had to be made. Letting go of the past and the familiar, letting go of what worked for so long was not easy. For some Brothers there was a deep sense of loss, confusion and a feeling of being rudderless at times. There was a sense of insecurity and a feeling of vulnerability, of no longer being in control, with the possibility of failure. It took humility, trust in God and trust in one’s companions on the journey of life to persevere in the renewal process.

But in the end something very special began to materialise. *Something new was born*, something very beautiful and significant has begun to emerge. Just as new growth gradually emerges into the warm spring sunshine following the winter, the Order has begun to unfold and blossom. I am quite sure that it has not yet reached full bloom; but even now it is a wonder to behold. Seeing the Order as a soothing, healing presence spreading out across the world of suffering, one has to raise one’s heart to God in prayer of thanksgiving.

2.3.3. The ‘New Hospitality’

¹⁶ Audience of December 2nd 1995 to Congress of Brothers and Co-workers.

The phrase ‘New Hospitality’ comes from the theme for the General Chapter of 1994 “New Evangelisation and Hospitality on the Eve of the Third Millennium.” The only thing that is ‘new’ about hospitality is the great variety of ways in which it is now being lived and expressed throughout the world, wherever the Order of St. John of God has a presence. Seeing the Order’s mission not only as an adornment of the Church but enabling it to continue Christ’s healing ministry is an insight that is both exciting and challenging. As new expressions of hospitality began to multiply the numbers of Co-workers also began to increase. This was happening at a time when the age profile of the Brothers was beginning to rise in the industrialised north and the number of men joining our Brotherhood began to decline. At the same time, the number of Brothers in the so-called developing countries began to increase, as did new centres and services. The urgency that this new situation provoked led to a discovery that the Co-worker could play a key role in enabling the Order to fulfil its mission.

Some might hold the view that because of the decline in the number of Brothers the Order was forced to have the Co-workers assume a more active role in the administration and management of its centres and services, which one has to admit is not entirely without foundation. God has his own ways of working. It has to be admitted that if there were sufficient Brothers then perhaps the Order would not have viewed the Co-workers in the same light. At the same time, the Provinces that had the foresight and the vision to look to their closest collaborators for help, advice and cooperation in planning a new way forward for the mission of hospitality, as well as in the area of administration and management, have benefited enormously.

This is how I see the evolution that is taking place in the Church, *not the disappearance of religious* rather *the emergence of the laity*. As I stated earlier, Religious will always be at the heart of the Church and the frontier of its mission of evangelisation. The manner of their presence may be very different from how it was in the past but they will always be there because they form part of the Church’s life and holiness.

As a result of engagement in the renewal process two things began to happen at the same time over the past number of years. Firstly, because of the education associated with the renewal process, the Co-workers demonstrated a real desire to be of service, gradually gaining confidence that they too could be leaders of hospitality. Secondly – and perhaps the real driving force for change – was the insight gained by the Brothers that ‘the Order does not have ‘copy right’ over John of God, he belongs to society and the church’,¹⁷ neither is hospitality the sole possession of the Brothers, for lay people also share in the ‘hospitality of John’ and bring with them their own gifts, talents and professional competence that enrich this great gift of hospitality that we have receive from the Lord.

¹⁷ Br. Pascual Piles – ‘Let yourself be led by the Spirit’, 24/09/96.

Both Co-worker and Brother, having received the gift of hospitality, are made **brothers and sisters in hospitality united in mission**¹⁸. As brothers and sisters we are therefore members of a family – the *Family of St. John of God*. This is a true reflection of the way John of God himself related to the people he served, the people he worked with, the people he encountered when doing the rounds of the city to collect the sick and dying or when begging for alms. It is a relationship or bond that is based on mutual trust, respect, friendship and a shared vision. This development in the understanding of the relationship between the Co-workers and Brothers is not only refreshing, liberating and empowering but, I have to say, also challenging...but it is the way of the future.

The implementation of this vision for the future of the Order requires that not only are Co-workers given major responsibility in management and administration but it is necessary that they receive **suitable formation** to enable them exercise their role according to the spirit and manner of St. John of God and the philosophy, values and ethos of the Hospitaller Family of St. John of God. The School of Hospitality will have a very important role to play in this process.

2.3.4. Purifying the memory

While presenting all the magnificent things that have been done through history in the service of the sick, poor or marginalised, we cannot pass over in silence the inevitable shortcomings and the fragility of what we have done. Following the masterly example of John Paul II and his powerful plea for pardon which he solemnly made in the 2000 Jubilee Year, the Church invites us to do likewise.

This is obviously not the place to list the shortcomings and inadequacies or make a critical analysis of our history, whatever weaknesses there may have been. But we must learn from history for the purposes of the present and the future. Admitting our shortcomings therefore takes on the significance of purification and, hence, also of renewal. We are not the "perfect" people who talk to sinners, but Brothers who wish to work together to build up the Kingdom along a path that is also strewn with failings. However, every fall is also an implicit cry for help, for a fraternal hand to prevent us from falling, or for helping us to our feet. Moreover, if that fall has hurt someone else, we must also humbly and sincerely request forgiveness from the person we have offended, who must generously grant it. For while we are invited to "confess our sins to one another",¹⁹ we are also invited to pardon those who offend us "not seven times but seventy times seven".²⁰ Let us therefore seek forgiveness for our wrongs, first and foremost between ourselves as Brothers, but also between Brothers and Co-Workers. In a special way seek forgiveness from those who for whatever reason found themselves in a St. John of God Centre for a period of their lives. We know that there cannot be renewal unless the confession of our weaknesses leads us to overcome them.

¹⁸ 2006 General Chapter..

¹⁹ Jas 5, 16

²⁰ Mt 18, 22

Among these wrongs we must certainly include:

- our failure to comply with commitments undertaken in the Consecrated Life;
- failure to give optimum care to clients, patients and other individuals who came to our centres or availed themselves of our services;
- offending the dignity of the people we serve;
- having failed individuals who, because of the way they were treated, were made to feel less than who they truly are as children of God and our sisters and brothers;
- failing to properly live fraternal life;
- failing to show understanding and to listen to others;
- inadequately appreciating our Co-workers;
- allowing the rationale of power to prevail over the rationale of service;
- being personally attached to the community goods, etc.

2.3.5. A new partnership

Today, the Co-workers and the Brothers working together in partnership are continuing John's mission. The Order no longer sees itself as made up only of the Brothers, with sole responsibility for the mission, but in partnership with its Co-workers. This is so radical in its implications that some religious institutions in the Church either realised it too late or were not ready for the challenge and withdrew from services or handed them to the state or another religious body. For our Order, the renewal process, of which partnership with our Co-workers is one of the fruits, was a risk but a risk worth taking. In terms of the Order's mission, it has proven to be a positive experience, although not without its difficulties, but it has been worth the effort and the economic investment that was required. The 2006 General Chapter stated clearly that for the work of St. John of God to continue into the future as a growing, expansive, international, multicultural organisation, the transmission of its values to the Co-workers was essential.

Inspired by the teachings of Vatican II, and by subsequent theological insights gained since then, and perhaps in a particular way from the story of our Founder, St. John of God, the Order, as stated earlier, has begun to see itself as a 'Hospitalier Family'

The request from the first band of followers of John of God to be formed into a religious institute possibly came about as a means of preserving the legacy of John of God. After the death of the 'charismatic founder, John of God', there was the danger of disintegration, as often happens with certain movements or ideas and ways of doing things that are new. With the advice of close friends, in order to preserve the legacy of John, his followers applied to the Holy Father for recognition as a 'religious Institute'.²¹ We know however that even though they were given the status of a religious institute, this did not prevent outside interference – we might say, meddling –

²¹ G. Russotto, *San Giovanni di Dio e il suo Ordine Ospedaliero*, Roma 1969, vol. I, page 116.

in the internal affairs of the Institute by different interest groups and individuals. Eventually the Holy See had to grant to the Congregation of John of God exemption from the authority of the local Bishop. This meant that the Brothers and their mission were no longer subject to the jurisdiction of the local bishop. All this was in order to preserve the legacy of John of God.

2.3.6. A structure to preserve the legacy of John of God

When John of God died on 8 March 1550, there was a nucleus of ‘brothers’, – Antón Martín, into whose care John committed his poor and sick as he lay dying, Pedro Velasco, Simon de Avila and Dominico Piola and Juan García.²² These were men who were totally committed to Christ and the poor in the way they lived as exemplified by John of God.²³ Others like Juan d’Avila, Angulo, were married and others were volunteers. The first group, whose members we will refer to as ‘brothers’, even though they were not yet united by religious vows, constituted the ‘Fraternity’ or ‘Brotherhood’ referred to by Pius V, that had gathered around John.

When these men became Religious by taking vows as members of the new Congregation of John of God, physical separation from the other residents of the ‘House’ became necessary. However, it was not a separation from the world in the strict sense nor from their Co-workers. More importantly, they continued to carry on with their hospitaller duties as before. Following the formation of John of God’s little band of followers into a religious congregation, the people of Granada continued to see *“Brothers walking through the streets, looking for the poor people, and carrying them in their arms to the hospital and on their backs, where they looked after them with great love... Everyone knows that the Brothers gather up the poor in the streets, load them on their shoulders, and take them to the hospital.”*²⁴

Inevitably, certain adjustments in the lifestyle of the first Brothers had to be made in accordance with the Rule of the newly approved Congregation of John of God. It is important to note however, that nowhere is there mention that the Brothers deviated from the original inspiration and example of their Founder, John of God, after his death. On the contrary as quoted above, the people of Granada continued to see the Brothers *looking for the poor people, and carrying them in their arms to the hospital and on their backs, where they looked after them with great love.* Obviously, these first Brothers of John of God gave exceptional witness of the Gospel of Mercy and lived exemplary lives as Hospitaller Brothers in their love for and service to the sick and the poor.

²² G. Russotto, *San Giovanni di Dio e il suo Ordine Ospedaliero*, Roma 1969, vol. I, pages 111-112.

²³ Castro, *op.cit*, Ch. 23.

²⁴ Cf. J.Sánchez Martínez OH. ‘*Kenosis-diaconia en el itinerario espiritual de San Juan de Dios*’ pp 292, 307, 393 (unofficial courtesy translation into English).

2.4 The charism of Hospitality

2.4.1. The hallmark of the Brothers – Fidelity to Charism of Hospitality

These first Brothers and successive generations of Hospitaller Brothers were totally committed to continuing John's work not just in Granada but to the very ends of the earth. The Order has given the Church in its Brothers many saints and martyrs. These Brothers bear witness to a way of life that leads to holiness. The most recent examples are the Spanish and Colombian Martyrs, Brother José Olallo Valdés and Brother Eustace Kugler. However, by far the greatest number are the Brothers, not canonised, who lived the highest ideal of their holy calling in the service of the poor and sick throughout their lives with great joy, commitment and perseverance.

It is Hospitality that defines who we are. Our Order's official name is: Hospitaller Order of St. John of God. **'Hospitaller'** is the keyword in this title. Our title eloquently describes our charism and the way we live our consecrated life. However, over the centuries, the Order has seen a move away from the ancient ways in which the Brothers practised hospitality. For instance, the Constitutions of the Order published in 1587 had this to say of hospitality:

*"The fourth vow [hospitality] is understood as meaning service to the sick who are poor and go to complete the perfect Christian life. Therefore, in serving the sick poor through this vow [of hospitality], we are serving Jesus Christ himself."*²⁵

Four and a half centuries later our latest Constitutions (1984) state that:

"With the vow of hospitality we dedicate ourselves, under obedience to our superiors, to helping the sick and those in need, undertaking to provide them with all those services they need, even the most humble and the most dangerous to our own lives, in imitation of Christ, who loved us even to the extent of dying for our salvation."

*"Our greatest joy lies in living in contact with those to whom our mission is directed; we welcome them and serve them with the lovingkindness, understanding and spirit of faith which they deserve as persons and as children of God, and we place all our energy, talents and skills at their disposition in the various tasks entrusted to us".*²⁶

2.4.2. Hospitality is our legacy

The Charism of Hospitality is a dynamic virtue because it is enriched by those who have imbibed and lived it. The legacy handed down to us by St. John of God has been enriched and renewed by successive generations of Brothers and Co-workers, following the example of St. John of God, by endeavouring to respond to the poor and the sick people they encountered and served in the spirit and manner of St. John of

²⁵ Cf *Primitivas Constituciones*, Ch. 35 (unauthorised courtesy translation into English).

²⁶ *Constitutions*, Rome 1984, Article 22.

God. This gift is what we refer to today as the **Charism of Hospitality**. It is interesting and encouraging for us to see that down the centuries faithfulness to the gift received drove the Brothers to act creatively, imaginatively and with commitment in response to the human needs that existed at various times and in many places.

The imperative contained in the Hospitality of St. John of God is that we never turn aside from any human need or suffering. This imperative was kept alive and nourished in diverse ways by successive generations of Brothers despite the ‘monastic structure’ in which they lived. Encouraged by the Second Vatican Council to go back to the original inspiration of the Founder, new ways of expressing Hospitality began to blossom as never before in the Order’s history.

The early Christians came to understand that the Gentiles had also received the same gift that they themselves had received, namely salvation through faith in Jesus.²⁷ Similarly, one might say that what enabled the Order to blossom in terms of ministry was the fact that most Brothers came to realise that our Co-workers too have also received the gift of Hospitality²⁸. All this gradually emerged over a period of years, together with a re-interpretation of the Charism of Hospitality and the vow of Hospitality, which brought new life, freshness, creativity, imagination and urgency to the mission of the Order.

2.4.3. A totally trusting relationship

John had a very close relationship with Juan d’Avila, his trusted companion whom he called ‘Angulo’. It would appear that Angulo was a ‘majordomo’, equivalent to an administrative manager, whom John trusted totally. It also seems that Castro is referring to Angulo in his biography of John of God when he speaks of someone whom he describes as a: “*prudent and good living man who died only a little while ago. He had praiseworthily served the hospital for many years, and it was he who recorded everything that happened on the journey at the time.*”²⁹ It is plain, from Castro and the letters of St. John of God, that if anyone can be said to have accompanied him on all his journeys Angulo is that person. In his letters John of God leaves no doubt that Angulo was his favourite travelling companion.

John would often send Angulo on a specific mission to collect money or conduct other business on his behalf. Obviously there were other trusted companions among John’s Co-workers but he seems to have associated Angulo with his travelling – for example the trip that the two men made to Toledo with the four women whom John of God was trying to help give up a life of prostitution. On this occasion, as on so many others, Angulo stands out as one who was particularly close to John and had gained his unconditional trust.

²⁷ Acts 11: 1-18.

²⁸ General Chapter 2006

²⁹ F. de Castro, *Storia della vita e sante opere...* Ch. 13.

We do not hear of there being a special area for John and his companions to occupy in the 'House of God'. Indeed, we know that John gave up his own bed to a poor man because the house was full. His last wish was to die among his poor but this wish was denied him by the Bishop at the request of Dona Ana Osorio, wife of Garcia de Pisa.³⁰ Out of their shared love, respect and concern for John that they coerced him into going to the Casa los Pisa to be cared for properly. With a heavy heart John obeyed, not wanting to do his own will, but only God's will as indicated to him by the Bishop.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT

Chapter 2 – The history of the renewal in the Order

For the Brothers:

1. In addition to those mentioned in the text, what are the most positive elements that you consider that can be attributed to renewal within the Order, particularly after Vatican II?
2. Which, conversely, are the negative attitudes of which we still have to "cleanse ourselves" in order to ensure effective renewal?
3. Is there anything from the past which you miss and which, in your opinion, ought to be recovered and proposed once again?

For the Brothers and Co-workers (Co-workers on their own in places where there are no Brothers.)

1. Do you think that the analysis given in the text brings out the strengths and weaknesses in the Order's renewal process?
2. Do you think that the demand for renewal and everything that has already been done has been relevant and adequate?
3. How do you think you can better promote the role of lay Co-workers in the Order?

³⁰ F. de Castro, *op.cit.*...Ch. 20.

3. THE PROSPECTS FOR RENEWAL

3.1. The Order as “Family”

3.1.1. The Hospitaller Family.

What type of structure existed during John’s own life? I believe it to have been like that of a ‘family’. John refers to his place as ‘House of God’ in four places in his letters, or just simply as ‘House’ in sixteen places and ‘Hospital’ in two places. If one looks at how John managed *his house*, it was very much like a family. He himself was engaged in the house work, the caring, the listening, the peacemaking, leading the prayers and the bread winning.

*“In the morning, before leaving the house, he saw to it that they had enough provisions... At night when the house had settled down quietly and in spite of the fact that he felt worn out; he would not retire until he had gone around to visit each and every patient, he consoled them with his kind words, giving them both spiritual and temporal comfort.”*³¹ To provide for the needs of the house and the more than 110 guests meant that John spent most of his time away from the house begging for alms. There were times when he was away for weeks at a time, yet we get no sense that on John’s return he found chaos or huge problems that had to be solved. It would seem that the house was managed in his absence in the same way as he had arranged it, and managed it when he was there himself. One gets a sense that harmony, peace and *hospitality* reigned in *John’s House*, whether he was present or absent.

In the most recent documents and statements of General Chapters, the Order has defined its own nature as being made up of Brothers and Co-workers.³² The 2006 General Chapter stated in unequivocal terms that the *‘Brothers and Co-workers are united in the mission and the charism’*.³³ With our Co-workers we are committed to cultivating and promoting the values of the human person, to deepen the culture of hospitality. We have so much in common with our Co-workers, we share the same values and are united in mission, so almost naturally we have come to refer to ourselves as belonging to the *Family of St. John of God*. It is interesting to note that the International Conference of Religious has a similar idea, where it recently stated, *“We understand that consecrated life must reach out beyond the boundaries of our institutes, of our Catholic faith, of our Christian faith. For this reason we join with those lay sisters and brothers who share our Charism, in such a way that we identify ourselves not as an Order or congregation, but as a family, sharing our life and mission.”* I believe this to be our experience too, many of our Co-workers do not share our faith, but are very much committed to the work of St. John of God and share our philosophy and values, so they feel more comfortable with the term *Family of St. John*

³¹ Castro, *op. cit.* Ch. 14.

³² Cf. *Brothers and Co-workers United to Promote and Serve Life*: (where ‘co-workers’ are defined in no. 6).

³³ Declarations of the LXVI General Chapter. 2006. *The Mission of the Order*: 2.C.

of God. Seeing ourselves in this way, in my view, is another expression of the hospitality that we profess.

3.1.2. Learning from missionary Brothers.

We can note another interesting factor, in terms of how new experiences have influenced the way we minister. Before the Brothers in Europe began going out to the 'market place', so to speak, at the service of Hospitality, the missionary Brothers were already very comfortable doing this. Many poor and sick people could not come to the hospital so the Brothers and Co-workers, feeling impelled by the example of St. John of God, organised mobile clinics and started going to remote villages and leper colonies (as they were known at that time) to bring food, medicine and other necessities for the sick and children. As always, it was in response to the urgent needs of the people to whom they had gone to evangelise by charitable service that the Brothers began to move outside the traditional model that was customary in Europe. These actions by the hospitaller missionaries initiated a debate on the nature of hospitality that was enriching for the whole Order and led to a better understanding of the **Hospitality of St. John of God** as we experience it today. These Brothers began to pioneer new approaches in the area of mental health; palliative and hospice care of the terminally ill; orthopaedic and rehabilitation programmes; nutritional programmes and preventive medicine; educational and training opportunities for children and young adults with an intellectual disability; providing life-giving programmes and care for the elderly; night shelters; work for immigrants – the list goes on.

3.2. Towards renewal

There are a great number of ways, in fact limitless ways of expressing hospitality, as many as there are human needs. This calls for us to be creative, imaginative, outward looking and non-institutional in our approach. In addition, and this is most important, the greater the number of people who as followers of John of God are fired up by his example and motivated by his life, the more healing and hope will be brought into the lives of our suffering brothers and sisters.

The response of the Hospitaller Family to new and unmet needs across the world is constantly on the increase, as well as continuing to maintain the traditional expressions of hospitality. Consequently the membership of the Family of St. John of God has also increased to keep abreast with the development of services, here I make reference to the number of lay people i.e., Co-workers. With the growth in the number of services and the consequent increase in the number of Co-workers comes the necessity of transmitting the values of the Hospitaller Family of St. John of God to the Co-workers. The formation of Co-workers therefore is a matter of great importance for the future of the Order and its mission, which needs to include, the life of St. John of God, a clear understanding of the mission, knowledge of the history, philosophy, ethos and values of the Order.

To match the *changing face of the Order* that has been gradually unfolding, with its ever-expanding services that are being provided across the world, a new vocabulary with phrases like Co-worker, as distinct from staff member; mission instead apostolate; the values that underpin and guide the mission and of course **The Hospitaller Family** have come into existence.

3.2.1. ‘Starting Afresh’

I believe that it is true to say that the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God has been re-founded, re-born, and reinvented with *‘a new face’*. This would not have been the intention of the members but it is what has actually happened because of an unending search by the members down the centuries to know and to do God’s will. Therefore, it is also true to say that the process is not over; it is an evolving, maturing, never-ending process. The danger or temptation at any given time might be to seek a formula that would try to ‘fix’ it definitively – to hold back the tide of change, as it were. This would be to presume that one knew what the Order should look like. That would be presumptuous. Who knows what the Order should look like in the future? The future, like the present, is in God’s hands. The call is to be in a constant state of conversion, listening to God in our hearts and as He speaks to us through the Church, and through our fellow Brothers and Co-workers. We need to listen to God’s people, especially those who are suffering. They will be our university.³⁴ We need to be constantly trying to read and interpret the signs of the times in order to ascertain what God is asking of us at any given time in history. What unfolds will be the work of the Holy Spirit, with our help, poor and very limited though we are, but God in his wisdom has decided that our co-operation is essential in order to bring his plan to fruition. This is what motivates us to cooperate with Him serenely and calmly. It is this conviction that fills us with the sense of privilege, excitement and joy that releases fresh energy. Every day is an opportunity to ‘start afresh’ in the sense that each day brings new opportunities for doing good, *and we should never cease to do good when we can.* (St. John of God.)

3.2.2. Where are we now in terms of renewal?

As you know, the General Government has made the renewal of the Order a priority in this term. When we speak about renewal, we have to keep in mind that there are five distinct groups within the Order to be considered. Among the Brothers, there are two groups: those who participated in the renewal process immediately after the Second Vatican Council, and those who joined the Order after the process was no longer referred to as people got used to the idea “that the world is changing and we must change with it” (President Obama). They are more comfortable with the idea of having to adapt and update. Whether we are aware of it or not, renewal, like conversion, is something that needs to be ongoing. In addition to this wherever we have a presence

³⁴ Cf. Bro. Pierluigi Marchesi, *Humanisation*.

the demands are great, the response is proportionate to the resources available, the quality of services being provided remains high and the commitment steadfast.

Among the Co-workers there are also two groups. One group is composed of those who could be considered *the fruit of the renewal process* and who are now having major responsibilities in the Order for aspects of its mission of Hospitality. The second group of Co-workers in the continents of Europe, North America and Oceania are joining the Order at a time when the Brothers are few and are seen as iconic figures. At the same time in the other continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia there is still a sizable number of Brothers. Then there are the Co-workers who are in much the same or similar situation to that of their predecessors before the renewal process began after Vatican II. The fifth and final group are our guests and their families, and those who are recipients of help at a time of need, and our volunteers, supporters and benefactors.

This shows a very wide assortment of people embraced by the Order in a true expression of hospitality. As hospitality is at the heart of the Family of St. John of God, it is destined to continue to grow and expand in this direction. Not to do so would be to cut off the life source, so to speak, namely, people – people in need and people who have the gift of reaching out to them in a spirit of service. Because of this understanding of itself and its reason for its existence which has opened it up to the world, the Order has changed, and grown dramatically in the past half century or so. The big question, the great challenge of our times is how to keep the spirit alive, to keep our focus on the mission and remain true to the original inspiration that is St. John of God.

If we look at the Church as the People of God then all, including the Co-workers, have responsibility, or as the Council states, the *exalted duty*³⁵ of working for the mission of the Church. This puts Religious in the role of providing a living prophetic witness of what is at the core of the Gospel. By their life choice, style of living and acting Religious demonstrate what is at the heart of the call to follow Christ, the vocation of everyone who identifies himself or herself as Christian i.e., a follower of Jesus, to holiness.

The future role of Religious in the Family of God or People of God can be best compared to yeast in the bread. Only a small amount of yeast is required to effect the desired result. In the same way in order to have a positive influence, a great number of Religious are not required. What is required is that Religious give 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. The **Hospitality in the way of St. John of God** for example, is a gift from God to his Church, in order to enable it to fulfill its mission of evangelisation at the service of humanity. The role of the Brothers is to be companions

³⁵ Lumen Gentium, II, no 13.

with the Co-workers, providing a critical conscience, moral guidance, and a prophetic presence that is open and flexible.

A welcome development, but at the same time a challenge in terms of renewal, is the international character that the Order has taken on. When the renewal process began after the Second Vatican Council responsibility for the centres and services of the Order in ‘mission territories’ was in the hands of the Brothers – most of whom were Europeans. The missionary initiatives in the 1950s promoted by Prior General Mosé Bonardi, for the most part, had not yet borne fruit in terms of indigenous vocations.

As indicated earlier, today we have a much more diversified group within the Order to consider when it comes to planning or embarking on a renewal process. The Family of St. John of God was never more like the pomegranate, which it has as its symbol, than it is at this present time. By this I mean the great variety of ministries or services that the Order provides, more now than ever before in its history and with a level of professionalism that was inconceivable at the conclusion of Vatican II. This is something to rejoice in, to celebrate and to give thanks for, because it shows life, growth and with new forms and new ways of expressing hospitality. This, more than anything else, is the fruit of the renewal process as it demonstrates a willingness, flexibility and capacity to respond to the needs of people in a determined and organised fashion.

Another reality that we need to take into consideration is the variety of people, Brothers and Co-workers, who make up the Family of St. John of God. Each one brings with them their own particular gifts and talents and this enriches Hospitality. The Order is present in many parts of the world that are highly developed but where secularisation and relativism prevail – hampering and obstructing renewal.

Some of the major changes that have emerged from engagement in the process of renewal are:

- A dramatic change in the way in which the Order exercises its mission of Hospitality;
- A change in the way we see ourselves as an Order of Brothers in the Church;
- Changes in the way we pray, the lifestyle of the Brothers and the way we relate to each other and live in community;
- Recognition that the *gift of hospitality* is not the sole possession of the Brothers, but that others, the Co-workers, also receive this great gift;
- An understanding of the role of the laity in the Church that has led to concerted effort at the integration of both Co-workers and Brothers into the mission of the Order;
- Brothers and Co-workers united in mission,

- The Family of St. John of God taking on real meaning.

When Jesus wished to communicate to his audience complex matters, he used the parable. Jesus' parables are quite simple, memorable stories, often with humble imagery, each with a single message. At the same time the parables of Jesus' are not just simple *stories*, but have contained within them a very real challenge for the listener, that calls for deep reflection. I wish to use the parable of the prodigal son³⁶ to explain in summary fashion where we are at in terms of the renewal process. In the parable scene of the Prodigal Son as described by Jesus there are a number of characters. There are the onlookers, the servants, the father and his two sons.

In terms of renewal, there are some who might well be described as 'onlookers'.³⁷ They don't impede the process of renewal, but neither do they willingly become involved. It would seem that they are waiting for the return of the old days when, once again, we will have full noviciates and things can return to 'normal'. Then there are the 'eldest son' type individuals. These have worked hard but feel certain resentment or jealousy when they see the Co-workers taking over leadership roles once held by the Brothers.

Then there are 'the servants': these are the men and women, the silent majority, who day in and day out faithfully continue the work of St. John of God in a wide variety of ways. The 'prodigal son' type individuals want to do their own thing, be free, accept little responsibility and minimum accountability.

Then there is the 'father' what a beautiful image of our Heavenly Father, arms wide open in a grand gesture of welcome, forgiveness and hospitality. He beckons all of us to come with him to tend to the needs of our suffering brothers and sisters who are waiting, waiting, waiting. Who are the 'father' type individuals? If we are honest with ourselves, I think each of us can see ourselves at one time or another in all of these positions that I have described.

I believe *the time is now*, for all of us to work together to renew ourselves, to renew our communities and to renew our centres so that we can truly be instruments of healing and hope for present and future generations of suffering brothers and sisters.

3.2.3. John of God re-discovered!

The renewal process that the Order entered into after the close of the Second Vatican Council took us back to the beginning, and in the beginning there was John! Journeying

³⁶ Luke 15:11-32.

³⁷ In Rembrandt's depiction of the return of the prodigal son, he has a group of onlookers, in addition to the three main figures in the story. While not mentioned in the parable itself, one can surmise that the local people having heard that the prodigal son was returning home, they would be watching carefully to see how the father received him. This would give them the cue as to how they would receive him back into their community.

with John of God the Order gained a most important insight: **Hospitality is what gives the Order its identity.** Hospitality is at the heart of our Religious Family. Another insight that was gained at the time was that as Religious we are at the heart of the Church and at the same time at the frontier of its mission of evangelisation. “*Charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her (the Church) nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.*”³⁸

The ‘re-discovery’ of St. John of God was what shaped the way our Order evolved more than anything else in the post Vatican II years. This was the most exciting event of all, and it changed everything. It was no accident therefore that the title of a document published by the General Curia during this intense renewal phase was entitled “*John of God Lives On*” (1992).

The parable of the Good Samaritan³⁹ told by Jesus stands out as the most enduring image of what is at the core of the Gospel of Mercy, which St. John of God incarnated in himself. However, no responsible Jew would ever use the word ‘good’ and ‘Samaritan’ in the same sentence. For Jews the word ‘Samaritan’ conjured up in their minds everything that they considered distasteful and despicable about the Samaritans.

It is easy to see why the parable of the Good Samaritan provided material for meditation and a rich sources of spiritual and vocational nourishment for generations of Brothers - the words used by Jesus were – *stooped down, cleansed, applied medicine, (oil and wine), bandage, lifted up, carried and cared for*, all of which are characteristics of hospitality as we understand it. Jesus himself, as the Son of God, was the epitome of the hospitable action of God.

However, when the newcomer, Juan Ciudad, began his work with the poor of Granada he was treated in the way that the Samaritans of Jesus’ time were treated by the Jews. He was marginalised and despised. Gradually as the people of Granada observed John doing his daily rounds caring for the outcasts of the city, they began to change their perception of him. Eventually, because he was such a *Samaritan* like figure, in the sense that we understand the term today, they would not only call him ‘GOOD’, but they went even further and called him ‘OF GOD’ – John OF GOD.

3.3. The importance of the religious community.

A number of things are happening at the same time that affects the way Brothers live in community. Many of the centres or services of the Order, have the presence of only a small number of Brothers; some have only one or two Brothers, while in others there is no Brother presence at all. It is not uncommon therefore for a Brother to find that he is the only Brother working in the centre or service. The reality is many of our

³⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 25a.

³⁹ Lk. 10; 29 - 37

communities are made up of an average of 5-7 members, some of whom may be elderly or sick, many communities have even less than 5 Brothers. For this reason the community building, which may have been built for a very large community, would need to be restructured in order to make it more comfortable, homely and welcoming for the Brothers. The community house is the home of the Brothers, therefore, it should be comfortable with an environment that is welcoming, lends itself to prayer and relaxation.

The religious community as such has a very important role to play in the mission of the Order for a number of reasons. I would like to draw attention to just a few of these -

a) The mission of the community. If our communities are to be life-giving and dynamic, we need to promote an open type of community, but one that also respects the privacy of its members and the residence of the Brothers. Visitors, family members and Co-workers could be invited to certain celebrations. It would be a good idea for the Co-workers who have a leadership role in the service or centre attached to a community, such as the Director and others, to meet with the Brothers in the community on a regular basis. The occasion could be arranged around a meal together, specially prepared prayer service, information sharing by the Co-worker followed by open discussion of matters pertaining to the life and work of the Centre.

As well as receiving up-to-date information on matters pertaining to the Centre, the Brothers would also have the opportunity to share their concerns, insights and vision for the future. This would inspire and encourage our Co-workers to be faithful to the mission of the Centre and bear authentic witness to what lies at the heart of our mission of hospitality. This type of meeting would also demonstrate that, while the religious community may not have administrative responsibility for the centre, the Brothers do share the responsibility with the Co-workers for the Charism of Hospitality. It would also demonstrate that the Brothers are interested in – and concerned about – what happens in the Centre, the welfare of all those being treated or cared for there. It is also a tangible way for the community to show their support for and appreciation to the Co-workers, who daily continue the work of St. John of God.

b) The Religious community as point of reference. This is a role which our communities are being called upon to exercise today more than ever before. With the expansion of services, the numbers of Co-workers joining our services is also increasing. Completely distinct from the numbers of men applying to join our Brotherhood, this trend will continue as the Order endeavours to respond to new and unmet needs. The Religious Community therefore, is like leaven, though small, it is called upon to live and bear witness to the true nature of the Order's mission. Furthermore, the religious community is a 'spiritual powerhouse' that radiates Gospel values, especially mercy, compassion and of course hospitality. The presence of the Brothers, their lifestyle, their attitude towards the Co-workers and suffering humanity, which are concretely demonstrated by action, is a constant reminder to our Co-workers

that the service they provide with us is not merely a social service but also a spiritual service, a ministry of the Church.⁴⁰ The Co-workers, united with the Brothers in mission, even in centres where there are no Brothers present, are continuing the work of St. John of God. This work is “*essentially the responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbour*” .⁴¹ As Holy Father also states in the same Encyclical, “*Charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her (the Church’s) nature and an indispensable expression of her being.*”⁴²

c) *The Brother of St. John of God relates to people by maintaining the same approach that John of God adopted to them, seeing them all as his brothers and sisters. A particular gift that the Brothers have received is to brother. To brother each other and to brother all whom they relate to and meet in the centre or service. The iconic presence of the Hospitaller Brother keeps alive that special relationship which John of God established with those who were served in his House of Hospitality, with the people who worked with him, and with his benefactors. He considered himself the brother of all, and considered others to be his brothers and his neighbours. When he went to the Court at Valladolid to be received by the Prince and was ushered into his presence, John addressed him saying, "My Lord, I normally call everyone my brother in Jesus Christ. You are my king and my Lord, and I must obey you. What do you wish me to call you?"*⁴³.

When John did the rounds in the streets begging for alms he called all the people he met '*brother or sister*'. *Brotherhood is a fundamental value and an essential ingredient in the style of St. John of God. All those who work in our Centres are therefore required to create a family atmosphere in our facilities in which everyone feels that they are being cared for, loved and respected, regardless of whether they are Brothers working in the centre/service or not.*

3.4. Co-Workers/The Mission

3.4.1. Brothers and Co-workers have both received the gift of Hospitality

The Co-worker, irrespective of her/his background or religious beliefs, brings to the practice of hospitality their gifts and professional competence which enhance its expression. The Brothers and Co-workers have both received the gift of Hospitality and are united in mission to form a *huge river*, as it were, the river of Hospitality, that cleanses, heals and brings hope for a better quality of life for those we serve in the spirit and the manner of St. John of God.

A river is not just one mass of water but is made up of individual minuscule drops of

⁴⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI, DCE, 21.

⁴² Benedict XVI, DCE, 25a.

⁴³ F. de Castro, *op. cit.*, ch. 16.

water. In the same way, Hospitality is enhanced by the personal investment of the individual Brother and Co-worker in exercising it. When Hospitality is practised the individual becomes hospitality for the person being served, in the same way that John of God became hospitality for the people he served in Granada.

3.4.2. Formation of Co-workers and clarity around the mission

Along these same lines, I stated in my address at the opening of the Provincial Chapters that:

- a) All the Co-workers must be clear that the Church promotes our Institutions, both from the beginning of its links with the Order and throughout its history. One of our main objectives is therefore to bear witness to Jesus Christ, to present a face of Church that is loving, compassionate, caring and to transmit the message of salvation by our words, and above all through our deeds.
- b) In the communion that defines us as Church, we have a pluralistic concept of life, we understand that our centres are health centres, we respect all those who frequent our services, we love them and we serve them in all and for all.
- c) The same professional circumstances will involve persons that share similar values to ours for the project. We consider that those who are linked to the Order must respect it, adhere to what is good and promote the principles that define it, always respecting freedom of conscience. The Order has arrived at a definition of principles out of which it operates, enlightened by the teachings of the Church, taking into account the legislation of individual countries where it has a presence. The Brothers and Co-workers, as representatives of the Order, need to be participants in the practice of these principles.
- d) As an Institution, we must be concerned about encouraging a sense of belonging to, and identifying with, the spirit of St. John of God. In this regard the Order throughout the world promotes a great number of initiatives and, in a special way, has promoted a series of reflections to enlighten us as an Order and as a family.
- e) We know that in order to ensure the sound management and administration of our centres, the type of administration we wish to achieve according to our values, the sort of administration we desire, must be charismatic. We are faced with the challenge posed by this reality, and we have to address it in a way that is consistent with the Gospel.
- f) The central focus of our charism is the person: no matter what illness or need they bring to us for assistance. On the other hand, there is the person of the Brother and the Co-worker, who must have the competence to facilitate this. In

everything, those of us who make up the Order must have strong commitment to finding a healthy way to live.

With this plan we create a dimension of Hospitality that not only relates to us professionally and to our mission, but also to our own specific reality.

3.5. The challenges

The theologian, Sandra M. Schneiders writes that *“Religious Life is ideally a primary prophetic witness in the Church to the kind of community Jesus intended. The family he founded was not only a group of friends but a mutually responsible community in mission and shared ministry. It included some people related by blood but most were not so related. It included both itinerants and householders. Some members lived together and others lived apart. But what they had in common was their faith in and love for Jesus, their commitment to his Reign, and their willingness to lay down their lives for those they loved as Jesus had loved them.”*⁴⁴

In the same way, the St. John of God Family contains within itself a great variety and richness that enable the Order to be true to its mission. Many Religious Institutions today are beginning to identify themselves as a Family. Understandably, for a variety of reasons, some individual religious find it difficult to put it into practice. However, I see this as a new beginning for religious life, not the end. Those formed in the old ways and those who would be operating out of a different model of Church, may have difficulty with seeing the future of the religious life *as Family*. However, in a spirit of dialogue, genuinely seeking God’s will by all, a variety of opinions and ideas need not be divisive but, instead, an instrument that calls all of us to a deeper reflection on who we are, our mission and the reality of the world in which live and exercise our mission.

3.5.1. Fidelity to our Hospitaller identity

This situation calls for renewal, study and dialogue in order to face the future with hope: *“Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God – God who has loved us and who continues to love us to the end, until all is accomplished.”*⁴⁵ *“Fidelity to our hospitaller identity, (therefore) requires that each Brother should have an overall, solid and ongoing formation in accordance with the aptitudes of the individual and varying circumstances of time and place, so that he can meet the requirements of his own vocation.”*⁴⁶ This may apply to Co-workers who wish to bond with the Hospitaller identity and be the custodians of the charism that animates the work of the Order.

⁴⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders a well known American theologian in her book on the Religious Life entitled, ‘*Selling Out*’.

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI *Spe Salvi*, 27.

⁴⁶ 1984 Constitutions, art. 55.

In a spirit of service to the Order we need to continue with sincere dialogue, listening to the voice of the Spirit, endeavouring to read and interpret the signs of the times. In this way, we can shape a future together with our Co-workers that will give greater emphasises to the concept of the Hospitaller Family. This should inspire us to demonstrate by action our commitment to work at bringing about the Reign of God through the practise of Hospitality in the way of St. John of God, working in partnership with the other members of the Hospitaller Family.

This is a new and exciting challenge that we Religious face today. When it is reflected upon in the light of the Gospel, it makes absolute sense. However, it will take courage to be prophetic, evangelical and hospitable. We need to pray as Pope Benedict states in *Spe Salvi*: “*It is not enough to step outside history and withdraw to our private corner of happiness.*”⁴⁷ Through prayer our heart is enlarged and cleansed; we become capable of great hope and able to welcome God and our Co-workers and together with them study the values of Our Family and live these values passionately, supporting each other in our different vocations within the one Family.

3.5.2. The international dimension

As stated earlier, at the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 most of the responsibility for the mission of the Order was in the hands of the Brothers. Most of these Brothers were Europeans and, in the case of the developing countries, the missionary initiatives of the 1950s had not yet borne fruit in terms of indigenous vocations to our Brotherhood.

At the beginning of the third millennium, however, all that has changed. We are now a truly international body. The Order has a presence in more than fifty counties throughout the world, more than thirty of which are developing countries. As part of the new visioning, renewing and future planning, therefore, we need to take this new reality into consideration. We are no longer a Europe-centred Order but we are truly international, with Brothers from as many as fifty-six different countries on all five continents. The more than 40,000 Co-workers represent not only all the countries where the Order is present, but many more due to immigration and other factors that encourage cross-border travel.

3.5.3. Interprovincial and international cooperation

Our future rests in our ability and willingness to work together with our Co-workers, to co-operate across Provincial boundaries and to network with other agencies and groups. It is in co-operating across Provincial borders and sharing resources that the future of the Order lies, for otherwise the presence of the Order will gradually cease to exist in many countries, not only developing countries, but in the industrialised countries, too.

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 33.

What I am thinking of is survival, not our survival; the Good Lord has taken care of that. I am not thinking about the survival of the Order for that too, is in God's hands, but the survival of the Charism.

If the Charism of Hospitality is to continue to survive, and not just survive, but to be expressed in ways that respond to the needs of people, two things are essential. First, that there be people who, because of their commitment to John of God and his work, wish to ensure that it continues into the future for the good of humanity and therefore dedicate themselves to this objective. Secondly, that the transmission of the values to the next generation be accomplished.

3.6. The future?

It would certainly take a prophet to predict the future of Religious Life. One thing is certain: the future will be as different from the present, as the Order of today is different from what it was like at the time of Vatican II. Is this a good thing? I believe this is the direction in which the Spirit is leading us. My Novice Master used to say to us, you need to work as if everything depended on yourself, and pray as if everything depended on God, which of course is in fact the case.

It is not important what shape Religious Life will take in the future, the critical question is: *how to continue to be a credible witness to the radical following of Jesus and secondly, how to be a compassionate and loving presence of Our Heavenly Father in the midst of his suffering children?*⁴⁸ This will come about by the power of the Holy Spirit and our willingness to joyfully co-operate with Him.

The Second Vatican Council did not give us a roadmap or blueprint, but just good advice, where it states: return to the Scriptures and the original inspiration of your Institute, your Founder! This advice is still valid, and to which we might add 'continue to read the signs of the times'.⁴⁹ We need also to take cognisance of, and learn from, the experiences of the past forty years and the theological reflection and insights gained during this period.

Some factors that will shape the way the Order evolves in the future, enabling it to continue to bear authentic witness to the compassionate love of the Father for his children, especially in their time of need, are:

- a) The urgency of the mission, to which we are committed, *impels us* to change, adapt and re-focus on the mission of the Order.
- b) The Lord has given His Church, through our Order, two special gifts: the first is that of Brotherhood. Implied in this gift is the command to love one another, and

⁴⁸ Cf. Mt 14: 4.

⁴⁹ Cf. Mt 16:3.

in particular, to love those we serve and those we work with and to relate to them as brothers and sisters. The gift *to brother* reminds us, and all of humanity, of the uniqueness of our call, a gift that shows the whole of humankind how the members of the same Family of God should live, as brothers and sisters, something to which all are called.⁵⁰

- c) A better understanding of the *second gift* that God gives to his Church and humanity through our Order, namely Hospitality, which may be defined as *welcoming in and caring for the stranger who has no claim on us for such kindness, except their need and the long tradition of hospitality by the membership of the Hospitaller Family*. The act of hospitality changes the relationship from that of a meeting of strangers, to one of neighbour in the biblical sense. A STRANGER NO MORE is the theme song of the DVD that accompanies this letter.
- d) Reaching a point at which, when referring to the membership of the Order, we no longer need to keep repeating *Brothers and Co-workers* but can use the inclusive terms *we* and *us*.
- e) One important element in the renewal process is the fact that everyone has to be kept informed of what is happening, feel involved and committed to the process. This makes good communication essential. Many good ideas and sound schemes come to nothing precisely because of a lack of communication. People have to know what is expected of them, and that their active cooperation is important and necessary if the renewal process is to succeed. However, *we must all be strong and of good courage*,⁵¹ because renewal is a process that takes time, requires the freely given commitment of individuals and perseverance. Real change will only come about when the hearts and minds of individual people are touched and they are internally transformed.

3.7. Tangible commitments

Quite obviously the demands for change must necessarily emerge by measuring the desire for renewal against the needs of the local communities. It would therefore be inappropriate, or indeed reckless, to lay down any specific instructions for this process to apply to all. But I nevertheless believe that I am duty-bound to suggest a number of guidelines to point the way we should be taking even though they are certainly not the only ones, and not all of them must necessarily be followed up. But they nevertheless provide a possible horizon towards which to strive.

- *A renewed understanding of the Charism*. In the light of the renewal of theology by Vatican II and the document “Vita Consecrata” we must understand that the

⁵⁰ Cf. *Vita Consecrata* 60.

⁵¹ Cf. Jos 1, 6-7.

Charism is not a privilege granted by God to a Founder, which the founder then hands on to his or her followers. A charism is a gift that God gives to the Church for the common good, through the specific vocation of a Founder, which is then handed down to the religious family that he or she has founded. This being so, the Charism possesses three fundamental traits:

- a) *Ecclesiality*. First of all, the Charism – which in our case means **Hospitality** – is a gift of God to the whole Church, entrusted to St. John of God, and transmitted by him to the Hospitaller Order. It is therefore impossible to practise, understand and perform Hospitality outside the ecclesial context of which it forms part. In other words, the Charism must also move ahead in time, keeping pace with the Church, and with the developments of different ecclesial sensitivities. It cannot be preserved as if it were as a museum item, seeking to preserve it in every respect in its original form for all time: that would be the best way of betraying it. As is clear from what is written throughout this letter the *Charism of Hospitality* has its own intrinsic dynamism, which refers to the path of progress which the Church also makes in history.
- b) *Embodiment*. By virtue of the “embodiment principle” which underlines all pastoral theology, from what we have already seen, the **Charism of Hospitality** must also be palpably embodied in different historical situations and contexts in which it has to be exercised. Whereas the previous paragraph referred to the “*ecclesiality*” aspect of the Charism, this aspect relates more to its “*sociality*”, if I may use that term. In other words, the demands of the world, of contemporary society, of the changed conditions of sick people today, new types of diseases etc. require Hospitality to be practised in different, in many respects radically different, ways from the way it was performed at the time of St. John of God. It is by this changed approach to Hospitality that we are able to remain faithful to the Charism and hence to the will of God who has granted the gift for the common good.
- c) *Expansiveness*. The Charism is, as the Latin expression has it, *expansivus sui*, in other words it tends to expand, and to resonate with others, who in one way or another participate in it. For although it is the *Hospitaller Order* which is its “*steward*” everyone who works with the Order in any way also partakes in it. This is something that we have understood for many years now but the most recent General Chapter (2006) highlighted that fact once again. There are obviously various degrees of collaboration, from more remote and peripheral forms e.g., benefactors and friends who give support to more direct and participatory forms. The sharing of the Charism therefore admits the various degrees of closeness, and on many occasions we have advocated having some kind of canonical recognition of this more direct form of participation. What is important in my view, is to note that in charismatic terms (above and beyond any canonical recognition) there already exists a

wide range of different forms of participation in the Charism, which in some cases is extremely close to that of the Brothers themselves.

- *Relations with our Co-workers.* Although it now dates back several decades, at least back to the time of Br. Pierluigi Marchesi, there has been a progressive growth in the relationship between the Brothers and Co-workers, with the latter increasingly being given more and more responsibility in the mission of the Order. In a constantly increasing number of Provinces the Co-workers are not only involved in direct care of the sick but have administrative and managerial responsibilities. Furthermore, in matters pertaining to the mission the Co-workers are involved in the formation of policy and future planning. As I pointed out earlier, however, there are those who are ‘observers’ of this process, who would still hold back and view the prospect with suspicion and uncalled-for aloofness. In this situation, it is still difficult for the Co-workers to be given an active role in decision-taking. In essence, their opinions and their role still remain at the level of a ‘staff member’, rather than a person playing a full part in the life of the Order, taking full responsibility for its life and progress in history.

- *An exemplary life.* As stated elsewhere in this document, all of us fall short and all of us have our weaknesses. These are inevitable aspects connected with our condition as human beings. But, where we should be making an effort, particularly in the case of the Brothers, is to provide an exemplary testimony of Christian living. Our public Consecration in Hospitality requires us to do so. Unfortunately, on occasion not only do we not give good example but by our attitude, lifestyle and behaviour we give counter-witness to what is at the heart of the Gospel message and the following of Christ.

- *Vocations.* What has just been said has important repercussions in terms of vocations. We must always be able to tell any young man who comes along to us and asks what it means to be a Brother of St. John of God, “*come and see*”.⁵² The best vocations’ strategy must be based on witness of life. A welcoming community to the prospective candidate is an important factor in helping a person in the process of determining his vocation, depending on what the individual experienced when visiting the community he can be encouraged or deterred. “*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.*”⁵³ So let us try in every situation to give clear witness to what is at the heart of who we are as Brothers, i.e. **hospitality**.

We have had the debate from time to time of possible various types of temporary commitment, considered temporary from the very outset. This could be debated in appropriate fora, together with other ways of sharing the Consecrated Life for a limited period of time. As I stated earlier we should not view declining vocations

⁵² Jn 1,46.

⁵³ Evangelii Nuntiandi 1V, 41

and increased commitment by the laity in negative terms. In my view there will be sufficient Brothers to provide a living witness of the radical following of Jesus, an iconic presence of fraternity, an example of what is at the core of the mission in terms of service joyfully given, relationships based on mutual respect, justice, harmony and hospitality.

I see it as ‘the age of the laity’ the *emergence* of the laity in the Church. The increase in the numbers of committed lay men and women, in our specific case our Co-workers, should be seen, not so much as a means of making up for a shortage of Brothers, but rather as a different “distribution” between the two vocations. It is all a part of God’s plan for his people. One of the great documents that emerged from the Council was a document that dealt with the very nature of the Church itself entitled *Lumen Gentium*. In Chapter IV, the specific Chapter on the Laity, the Council states, “*All the laity, then, have the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all men and women, of every epoch and all over the earth. Therefore, may the way be clear for them to share diligently in the salvific work of the Church according to their ability and the needs of the times.*”

This puts Religious in the role of providing a living prophetic witness of what is at the core of the Gospel. By their life choice, their style of living and their actions Religious demonstrate that the call to follow Christ – the common vocation of everyone who identifies himself or herself as Christian i.e., a follower of Jesus – is at the heart of the call to be a Religious.

- *Proximity*. Unfortunately fewer and fewer Brothers are actively engaged in direct service of the patient or client in our centres. The question might be asked where there are only a few Brothers, where should they serve so as to witness to what is at the heart of the Gospel message and our vocation as Brothers of St. John of God? Is it of greater witness value to serve in a managerial or book-keeping position? Of course this is also a service, and exemplifies the charismatic change that was mentioned above. But that cannot be the be-all and the end-all of their vocation. We have to find appropriate ways and means, which the individuals and communities will have to decide on their own, to enable the Brothers to have more direct contact with the sick and needy people, not necessarily in nursing terms but on the human, relational and pastoral level. I often have seen a most valuable service rendered to the sick, the lonely, the recently bereaved relative by elderly Brothers. In the accompanying DVD, “The Changing Face of the Order”, I give a list, which is no means exhaustive, of ways a Brother can have direct contact with people who are suffering. It can be as ‘simple’ as befriending, sitting with a very sick child or elderly person and keeping them company. This is a superb service of charity by a senior Brother, as well as being gratifying to them, it is an alternative to whiling away the time as sometimes happens, suffering from a sense of “emptiness” and lowliness.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT

Chapter 3 - The prospects of renewal

For the Brothers.

1. **What difficulties do you think might arise in considering the co-workers to be "family members"?**
2. **What effect do you think renewal can have in terms of our life in community, the mission of the community and on vocations?**
3. **What do you think should be changed in our way of life in order to be closer to the Gospel, the Charism of Hospitality and the new needs of humanity?**

For the Brothers and Co-Workers (Co-workers on their own in places where there are no Brothers.)

1. **Do you think this concept of the "Hospitaller Family" is relevant?**
2. **How would you tailor the prospects of renewal proposed in the document to your local situation?**
3. **What steps could be taken in practice to give the Order a broader international outreach?**

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. The richness of the Charism of Hospitality

What I have described in terms of our life and ministry is something very special. What is happening throughout the world where the Order has a presence, is obviously the work of the Holy Spirit, for it shows the beauty, expansiveness and richness of the Charism of Hospitality. How transforming, inclusive and all-embracing a gift it is, something no individual or institution can control or limit. *“The Spirit alone can keep alive the freshness and authenticity of the beginnings while at the same time instilling the courage of interdependence and inventiveness needed to respond to the signs of the times.”*⁵⁴

Looking at the Order is like looking through a prism; it has such a variety of colours and shapes in the expressions of hospitality – gifts, individuals and vocations. There is the vocation of the Hospitaller Brother and that of the lay Christian, both having their foundation in Christian Baptism and united in mission.⁵⁵ There are also the people of goodwill who identify with and endorse the fundamental values of the Order, not necessarily the Christian faith, but who contribute to its mission of mercy through their professional work and innate goodness, gifts, talents and other human qualities.⁵⁶

Using the analogy of the river, Hospitality can be understood as a great river that is formed by two streams that come together but issue from two different sources. One stream has its source in the call that the Brothers have received to leave all to follow Christ. The Brothers endeavour to live out their calling in the service of Hospitality and by so doing they bear witness to the compassionate love of the Father for his suffering children. The second stream, that of the Co-workers, has its source in Christian Baptism, for those Co-workers who are Christian, and the vocational choice they have made in life.

Like a river continually breaking its banks and spilling over, exploring new ground, sometimes on the surface, sometimes below ground, Hospitality is a powerful current ceaselessly pursuing its course down to the sea. Faithful to the spirit of John of God, our source must remain deep and mark out the current or influence that drives us on. Through study and research, Hospitality drives us on in every generation to use the very latest resources and scientific developments to more effectively serve suffering humanity, enlightened and guided by the Magisterium of the Church and of the Order.⁵⁷

The strong current that relentlessly drives is the power of the Spirit and the urgency of the mission. How could it be otherwise when we reflect on the life of our Holy

⁵⁴ *Starting Afresh from Christ*: 20

⁵⁵ *Christifideles Laici*: 33

⁵⁶ See *Vita Consecrata* no 54.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Charter of Hospitality*.

Founder, who sighed, “with so many poor people (who are my brothers neighbours) suffering not being able to help them all breaks my heart”.⁵⁸

The depth of spirituality that has been bequeathed to us is a new source of enlightenment from which to drink. “Today, the Order reveals a plural, intercultural and interracial face. It feels that it is being called to offer the spiritual path of John of God to men and women who do not belong to the Western cultures, as been the case hitherto..... It is no longer sufficient to accept the charism as a legacy we have received. We must re-shape it, give it a new face, interpret it in a more relevant way. We must ‘set hearts ablaze’ not only in the Order but also in our society, among ordinary people and the Church.”⁵⁹. And the strength that sustains us in this ministry stems from the needs of people which spur us into action and to into returning at all times to our source, St. John of God, for inspiration and guidance.

4.2. Win all for Christ

We must constantly remind ourselves of the importance of the mission of hospitality to which we have committed ourselves and under which we have been consecrated. As Brothers, we need to exemplify and be men of hope for all, in a world that is fast losing hope, especially among young people. We need to be living witnesses to a God who is love, by being a critical conscience, a prophetic witness, a moral guide and open to new needs in collaboration with all the members of the Order.⁶⁰

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Hospitality, our beloved Family of St. John of God has so much to offer the world and the Church of today and into the future. Let us encourage each other by word and, above all, by example not to squander the opportunities that are given to us daily. Let us grasp these, as a runner grasps the baton, with firmness, conviction, enthusiasm and with a deep, deep desire to win all for Christ.

Once again, I wish to emphasis the fact that, the future of the Order and the guarantee of the success of its mission lies in the Brothers receiving a solid formation, partnership with our Co-workers and their formation. It is this partnership with our Co-workers that will reinvigorate our Order and give new meaning to the word ‘Order’. Our Hospitaller Family is made up of a great number of men and women. There are those who have professed religious vows, and there are others, the vast majority, who follows their own vocation in life while being united with the professed members, in the service of the mission. By coming together, they form one great *river of hospitality*, that cleanses, heals, and gives life and hope to people in need. With this sprit of partnership, mutual trust, respect and friendship between the Brothers and the Co-workers, we shall find new life, fresh meaning and impetus for mission that will enliven our faith, strengthen our hope and inflame our charity. It is from this understanding of what *hospitality in*

⁵⁸ Cf. St. John of God, 2 GL, 8.

⁵⁹ *The Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St. John of God.*


⁶⁰ 2006 General Chapter.

the manner of John of God really means that we shall derive a real ‘Passion for the Hospitality of St. John of God in the world of today’ and the urgency, enthusiasm and commitment that flows from this.

Finally, hospitality is now interpreted and expressed in a manner that is ever ancient, yet ever new and modern, according to the needs of people who are suffering in any way. In the words of Pius IX “*ancient charity with the most modern of methods.*” This process is obviously never-ending, recreating, vibrant and active. I like to think that John of God takes great pride in what his followers today are doing, as teachers take pride when their students do even better than they have done. Jesus said “*you will do even greater works than these*”.⁶¹ Surely, St. John of God marvels at the way in which the tiny seed he sowed in Granada by the power of the Holy Spirit in 1539 has since become that beautiful flower in the garden of the Church to which Pope St. Pius V referred in 1572 when he gave canonical approval for the followers of John of God to be formed into a Religious Institute.⁶²

Let us place our individual, family and community needs in the sure hands of Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, on whose feast and in whose honour we publish this letter. We can be sure that She, as a mother, will not abandon her children but will help us do what her Divine Son wants us to do⁶³. As St. John of God lives on in each one of us he is with us each day, guiding and interceding for our many needs and the needs of the people we serve in his name. May the memory and example of so many members of the Hospitaller Family who have gone before us ‘marked with the sign of Hospitality’, some of whom have been given to us as *icons of hospitality* as canonised saints and blessed, continue to inspire and motivate us in our daily work of service.

United with you in the hope of a bright future for our
great Hospitaller Family of St. John of God.


Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General.

⁶¹ Jn 14, 12

⁶² Cf. Russotto, G., *op. cit.* vol. I, page 108.

⁶³ Jn 2, 1.

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A STRANGER NO MORE

Song of Hospitality

Marie Dunne CHF

Refrain

*May the seeds of hospitality take root in our hearts,
May the gift of hospitality be ours to impart,
As we welcome the stranger, who knocks at our door,
As we share with them at our table.
May we reach out our hand to the one who needs our care,
May we walk the road with them that their story may be heard,
May our hearts be ever open to the unexpected one,
That they may be a stranger no more.*

(1)

**There was One who came among us to share with us God's love,
He too walked a lonely road, seeking to belong,
He sought to make His home with us deep within our hearts,
And now He lives within us, and from us He'll never part.**

(2)

**This One who walks among us, lives in those who come our way,
We may not recognize Him, yet we will hear Him say:
'In giving to another, you also give to me,
In welcoming the stranger, you too welcome me.'**

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