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## LET'S TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER JUST AS OUR SAVING GOD CARES FOR US

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Dear sisters and brothers,

Following the meeting of the UISG and USG Executive Councils held on 25 May 2020, we felt the need to share with you our concerns and experiences amidst these uncertainties, to manifest our communion, and to offer insights for discernment in this time of great suffering for the whole of humanity.

*And he said to them: What are you discussing with each other while you walk along? (Luke 24:17)*

When our peace and serenity is disturbed, and there are no ready-made solutions at hand, we need discernment. Our programs, our moments of encounter, and even the ordinary rhythms of our life and work have been distorted. But, in all this, we have heard the voice of the Lord telling us: “Have courage! I send you again to walk the paths of this world that I love!”



At this moment, we are inspired by Jesus' encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, disappointed and despairing, unable to come to terms with what happened in Jerusalem (Luke 24:13-33; John 19:25).

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*Jesus himself approached and walked with them (Luke 24:15)*

Jesus, today as then, comes to meet us and walks beside us, even when we cannot recognize Him. The Crucified-Resurrected One exercises his ministry of consolation (2 Cor 1:3-7) and cares for his brothers and sisters.

We say with the psalmist: *Blessed be the Lord, always; our Saving God cares for us (Ps 68:20).*

Jesus listens patiently to us as he did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He listens to our conversations when we ask ourselves about the meaning of what is happening, and about the changes we are invited to make from our lived experience, both individually and collectively.

We are aware, in fact, that the crisis caused by the pandemic does not cause the various crises of religious life, of political, economics, or Church life. It exerts, however, a catalyzing force on the crises already underway and which now seem to be accelerating with renewed vigor.

We express our fraternal closeness to all those who have been directly affected and have lost members of their Institutes, families, and collaborators during this pandemic. We are close to the communities who are struggling to cope with the mourning, convalescence, and economic challenges that the pandemic has generated. Jesus' paschal journey with us is the source of our hope.

Pope Francis has often urged us in these weeks to walk together, because, as he frequently says, only together can we face the difficulties of this situation and take advantage of this historical moment to give a new meaning to the turning point that the path of humanity is taking.

Jesus enters into dialogue with us to shed light on the meaning of what is happening and, by warming our hearts, he helps us in our discernment with his Word and Spirit.

How can we turn this dark time into a bright opportunity for renovation and animation in our Institutes? How can we not waste the most beautiful insights, which have arisen during this time of trial, for our change, our mission? We are certain that the way forward is joint discernment, in which the Spirit finds the space to guide us.

It is a time that invites us, therefore, to **take care of listening**, and to create spaces of contemplative silence. We must have space for the exchange of both reflections and concrete data, so that we avoid hasty discernment and hurried conclusions.

Listening to all generations: remembering the past, paying attention to the

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present, and looking towards the future. To offer a special space to young people so that they can express and share their dreams and desires. Special spaces also for the elderly so that they can keep their testimony in the continuity of history.

Listen carefully and read the signs of the times, what is really happening. The sustainability of our mission, of our structures, must be fully taken care of, but the most precious asset to take care of is our charismatic identity and people. What listening spaces can we create for this to happen?

We must thank the many authors who, from various corners of the planet, have offered their contributions from spiritual, theological, social, economic, ethical, and critical points of view on what we are going through. We do not feel alone as we draw on the richness of this material, but at the same time we believe that we still need to listen and to research. All this because the Holy Spirit continues to speak in the midst of difficulties.

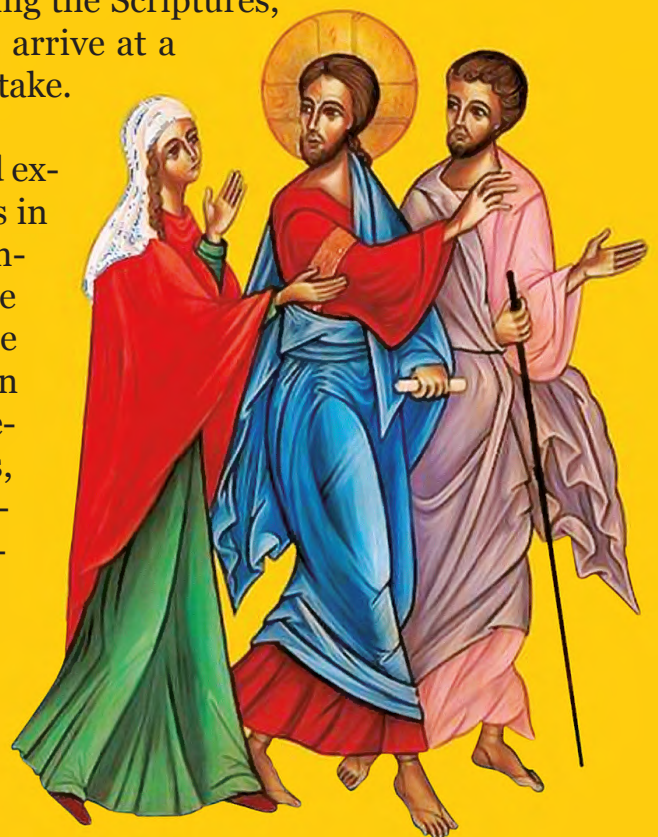
As in the story of Genesis: In the beginning everything was chaos, but the Spirit hovering over the waters began a new order. This time brings us back to the very origins, because the Spirit who is in us, as in so many of our brothers and sisters of humanity, arouses a great desire for renewal, for recovery, for rebirth. Can a new world be born today?

*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,  
Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures  
(Luke 24:27)*

Listening to the words of Jesus, scrutinizing the Scriptures, attentive to the motions of the Holy Spirit, we arrive at a crossroads where we must choose which road to take.

Confinement has led us to concentrate and express our solidarity at the local level, sometimes in a small circle. We have rediscovered our neighbour. How beautiful is this path of recovering the significance of our “near” presence, of a visible proximity not so much in the big structures but in the concrete gestures of mutual help! As at the beginning of the history of our religious families, where everything was born from a small community and from immediate and personal relationships, as also happened to Jesus in Nazareth.

This manifests the tension between creativity for global solidarity, because we are aware of the humanitarian consequences of



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the pandemic (lack of means and health facilities to cope with the disease, to ensure hygiene, to take care of communication, to ensure protection...) and local creativity towards those who, because of this pandemic, will lose not only work or goods, but perhaps also the desire to rebuild.

It is a time of “holy concern”. We have been deprived of projects, of goods, and of the power to manage our own lives, works, and missions. We have felt powerless. This poverty and uncertainty lead us to entrust ourselves with more confidence to God, to accept that insecurity leads us to an intense search for God, to anchor our hearts in Him. This renews in us the surprising experience of the beginning: our vocation and mission are constantly born of Him. This is why we live a fruitful time.

As we discern the way forward, we realize how much we need Jesus.

The image of St. Peter’s Square sticks in our head as an icon of the Good Shepherd, standing alone yet ready to embrace the whole world. This image has helped us in our mission of animation, in which we experience the powerlessness and at the same time the great strength of the Risen Christ in whom we place all our trust.

*But they urged him strongly, saying, stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over. So he went in to stay with them (Luke 24:29)*

We have rediscovered the need for mutual accompaniment, far beyond our congregational community: a communion that only grows and bears fruit when it opens up to ecclesial communion and human brotherhood. We have also discovered it can be direct and in person, or virtual.

We recognize the presence of the Lord in the breaking of bread, in the fraternal community gathered around the word and the table of the Lord. We lived a moment of ‘universal Cenacle’, we stopped before Christ with his Mother, and this being and praying together became the womb in which the Holy Spirit incarnates Jesus, the Word of Life who overcomes death, so that Christ may be present in his Body, and so that his Body may become a new People, capable of a communion that embraces all humanity. It is always Pentecost that renews the Church and the world!



We gathered around the bread of the Word of the Lord, but we were not always able to share in the body and blood of Jesus. This experience has made us understand even more the preciousness of the source of our Christian and religious life and has awakened in us a deep desire to adore him in Spirit and Truth.

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*That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together (Luke 24:33)*

It is a time of communion, of an ever greater awareness of the interconnection that exists between us.

Finally, like the disciples, we recover the profound meaning of our consecrated life: to go on mission, to proclaim with our lives and our work the Lord Jesus, who opened for us the ways of justice and reconciliation.

We are called to revisit the priorities of the congregation's mission from a holistic and integrated vision. All health care services, aimed at caring for the elderly and the most vulnerable, have been at the forefront of this struggle in recent months. Some of our reception facilities have made themselves available for hospitals or to receive homeless people, migrants, and workers trapped by the quarantine or confinement. Education and training platforms have used different forms of communication and teaching. But what is the future of our mission? What options should we choose knowing that many of them will be in a serious crisis of sustainability because they have no recognition from the State or lack means?

With the pandemic, new and old forms of poverty are expanding, while social illnesses are coming to light that make rebirth difficult. Many people remain excluded not only from the Internet, but from social consideration, with enormous losses, and thousands of victims of exploitation, of marginalization. We ask ourselves: how can we bear witness to the living presence of a God who moves and bends over them to care for them? We are asked for a renewed "creative charity".

*The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon! (Luke 24:34)*

The Lord Jesus promised to be with us every day until the end of history and He gave us His Spirit, which reminds us of everything He learned from the Father and transmitted to us as His followers.

In Religious Life we are called to bear witness to the tender love of God who, in Jesus, takes care of all human beings. We are called to take care of the lives of the discarded, which this pandemic has multiplied exponentially, a consequence of the unjust structures of our world, unable to put human beings and the Common Good at the centre of local, national or world political decisions.

We are called to take care of the present and future of humanity, in its relationship with the environment, accompanying young people and learning from them, to renew the meaning of our life and mission as consecrated persons.

In the face of so much neglect, highlighted by the pandemic, we want, as religious and consecrated persons, to initiate processes that lead to a **culture of care**,

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through deep dialogue with our companions in the mission. With the greatest respect for the conscience and vocation of each one, an environment of discernment may be generated that can enlighten the apostolic programming and can contribute to the mission of reconciling all things in Christ. To care, and to allow oneself to be cared for in order to grow as religious in a universal dimension.

We feel we are on the way, like the disciples of Emmaus, open to what the Lord will show us in the coming months. In this journey of listening and discernment, a particular important moment would be the meeting, scheduled for May 2021, of the delegates of the constellations of the UISG with the members of the USG, during which we wish to gather and deepen the fruits of this time of listening and reflection.

May Our Lady, Mary of Nazareth, accompany us on this journey to follow her Son Jesus, the Christ, who always precedes us.



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