

18 January 2014

## ***ASSUMPTION TOGETHER***

### **A CHARISM FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR THE WORLD**

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Assumption Together (AT) was born of the desire and of the **decision** to go forward together, sisters and laity, in the charism and spirituality of the Assumption.

- For the sisters this is one of the decisions of a General Chapter of the Congregation,
- For the laity who are drawn to the Assumption, it is the result of a personal choice.

For both, sisters and laity, the way of living AT can be very different depending on the Province and depending on the different people within the same Province. It is not a question of a rigid structure, but of a **great desire**, essential at the beginning, of sharing, mutual support, of advancing towards Christ.

#### **1. BE ASSUMPTION TOGETHER**

Since its foundation, the Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption, has had links with the laity. Over time these ties have taken multiple forms.

Laity and sisters, we all believe that the charism of the Assumption is a gift of God to the Church for the world. Lived both by the sisters and by the laity, it can enrich each in their specific vocation (a conviction that was strengthened by the canonisation of Marie Eugenie on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2007).

Starting from our Baptismal consecration, and in our respective states of life, we desire the rich experience of being Assumption Together.

This is why Assumption Together is made up of religious and laity who want to be part of the “Assumption spiritual family” by drinking at the same Source of the charism given to Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus.

Having *“our gaze fixed completely on Jesus Christ and the extension of his Kingdom”*, we wish to manifest and to transmit the passion within us, by together transforming today’s society according to the Gospel. Listening to the signs of the times, we make our way:

- By seeking and cultivating an Assumption identity and a sense of belonging
- By going into the spirituality and the manner of prayer of Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus
- By developing the community dimension, which enables us to share life, prayer and mission
- By forming ourselves and collaborating in the transformation of the world through education.

All this starting from the pursuit of justice, peace, the integrity of creation and solidarity, and being particularly attentive to the world of young people.

So that this desire may become reality, we are grouped for the most part in small “Assumption Together” communities/fraternities, seeking to live the spirituality and mission of the Assumption and being enriched by our differences.

Within this family, certain lay people feel the call to commit themselves publicly to the life and mission of the Assumption. This commitment is formulated in the text of the “*Path of Life*”.

2. **A CHARISM:** a charism is a gift of the Spirit for the Church and for the world.

**In the Assumption, the originality of the founding intuition of Marie Eugenie opened up a religious life based on three broad orientations:**

- **A deep contemplative life:**

*“My gaze is fixed completely on Jesus Christ and on the extension of his Kingdom”.*

This is not uniquely a question of times of prayer but of a life of prayer from which the way of being and of acting flows; it is Christ who will colour both the activities and the relationships.

Contemplation: a life of love in Christ to which are attached ardour of will and joy of heart. It is at one and the same time a desire, a labour and an experience.

- **A warm community life:**

The community *“is for all the sisters, until the end of their life, the privileged place of their growth in understanding gospel values”*<sup>1</sup>

Community is the place where each is both a brother/sister, and a witness and strength for the other. From the foundation Marie Eugenie spoke about the quality of relationships, the attitudes to cultivate: welcome, a positive approach, simplicity, discretion, gentleness, humility, tenderness and compassion.

Community is lived as a mission and for the mission,<sup>2</sup> that is to say at once both means and end.

- **An apostolic life full of zeal:**

*“To have a decisive and positive action, even in a little sphere”.*

An apostolic life which has no other ambition than to transform society according to the Gospel so as “to bring all things together in Christ” through education.

This presumes:

Asking questions starting from observation (be realistic, have a critical spirit).

Verifying, weighing things up. Judging according to gospel criteria (Understanding of the faith)

Acting with passion.

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<sup>1</sup> Rule of Life No. 56

<sup>2</sup> Fraternal life in Community 2009

Our action in the world and for the world is not separated from our own personal life. Marie Eugenie was always concerned about unity of life: once converted to Christ, she wanted her whole being to be Christian; she wanted her decisions, her actions, her feelings and her ideas to be coherent with Christ and his way of seeing, judging and acting, of entering into a relationship with the Father and with humanity *“Seek to let Jesus Christ reign in me and in the world”*.

### **3. A SPIRITUALITY:** A concrete way of living our relationship with God.

**In the Assumption it is a spirituality centred on Christ incarnate, very close to humanity.**

In the Prologue of the Rule of Life of the Religious of the Assumption, it says: *“The Incarnation, the mystery in which humanity is divinised and all things are reconciled in Christ, is the foundation of their personal spirituality and educational activity”*.

The Incarnation is the movement through which God definitively approaches humanity, making common destiny with them. In Christ he takes a human face, dons a human existence, suffers the same constraints and the same sufferings as the men and women of his time. God does not sanctify us from the exterior, he transforms our lives, he divinises us. It is in us that Christ continues his Incarnation. For Marie Eugenie, the Incarnation opens three great perspectives in our relationship with God.

- Humanity given back its dignity, receives a promise of life in its fullness.
- Humanity is invited to a displacement. God is not only in the Holy of Holies of the Temple, he has come to tread every human land. To find God in the dynamic of the Mystery of the Incarnation, is to go out to meet with humanity; it is for our way of looking at the person, the world and our action in the world to be transformed.
- To act in his way, is henceforth to be close to the human in all its dimensions, to be close to every person without exclusion: to be called to come close like Christ, is to be called to be watchers, couriers who bring life to the other, revealing beauty, talents, wealth; it is also to humanise, renew, transform and regenerate.

**We are offered preferred means to live this relationship with Christ who leads us to the Father:**

- Personal prayer, in which we accept the action of God to transform us.
- The Liturgy of the Hours, prayer of the whole Church, the prayer of the psalms which Christ recited to his Father, a prayer which enables us to escape from our personal changeability by stretching us to the dimensions of the joys and sufferings of the whole of humanity.

- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which places the Eucharist – love the total gift of Christ to the Father and to humanity – at the centre of our life and enables us offer the world to God.

**And a very specific attitude of the Assumption: “joyful detachment”, a way to learn to love:**

- It is a radical disposition which enables us to live any circumstance rooted in the trust and certainty of being in the hand of God.
- It is the certainty that God wants to give and humanity can receive from Him all that they need to develop and attain their true identity.
- It is to cultivate the ability to bounce back despite everything: not by physical force, but by relying on the promise of life which God has made us.

This joyful detachment is neither a blind optimism, nor some kind of voluntarism, but simply the response to the reception of so much love. It flows from love.

From the beginning of the foundation, Marie Eugenie offered this spirituality to lay people who wanted to live by it.

### **3. “MAKE ASSUMPTION TOGETHER”: SOME POINTS OF ORGANISATION**

#### **A little history**

Above we have looked at the foundational elements of Assumption spirituality. What comes out very clearly is that Assumption Together has its roots deep in the charism of the Assumption and is becoming more and more “our way of being Church today”.

The Chapter of 1994 fixed the **general characteristics of the organisation** necessary for Assumption Together:

- To create structures which enable us to deepen shared prayer and projects of all kinds: pastoral, educational, of JPIC, spiritual animation, welcome etc.
- To create structures - of places and rhythms which enable the support and development of different forms of belonging.
- To move forward together in a process of formation and of growth through meetings and retreats.
- To open us to a dialogue with different cultures and spiritualities through the organisation of continental and international Assumption congresses.
- To improve the communication within the Congregation, by all the means available in the different Provinces.

Since this Chapter, the sense of journeying with the laity that has become a connecting thread, has guided the Congregation in the orientation of the successive General Chapters.

In the course of the General Chapter of 2000, in which 18 lay people took part, an awareness emerged: “In our Provinces as in the General Chapter, we have already had the enriching experience of being Assumption Together, of sharing friendship, prayer, spirituality and projects”.

Since then, Assumption Together has become a concrete reality, supported by a light structure.

## **5. ASSUMPTION TOGETHER IN THE LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL CONTEXT**

The identity and mission of Assumption Together is reflected in the relationships which laity and sisters live in their ordinary environment, there where the Lord calls us to work in his vineyard. The “gateways” to the Assumption characterize the different types of relationship between the laity and the religious:

- Ties of friendship, neighbourliness, past students,
- Participation in prayer groups or courses of Assumption spirituality;
- Collaboration in the mission of education: teachers, parents; collaboration in other apostolic projects.

The desire to live the three dimensions of the charism (friendship-communion, spirituality and service) with the sisters, can lead some lay people to choose a “Way of Life”<sup>3</sup> through a formal public commitment for a determined length of time.

### **5.1 Groups/Community/Fraternity**

The formation of a group is a widespread mode of being “Assumption Together” and of living the dimensions of the charism. The group can be the occasion of personal formation and the discovery of a personal mission as M. Marie Eugenie teaches: “Each one of us has a mission on earth”.

The frequency with which groups/community/fraternity meet and the way in which they conduct their meetings are decided locally. Their animation is entrusted to a lay person chosen by the group and by a sister from the contact community<sup>4</sup>. The groups have their own rhythm according to the type of AT path they are following. Shared experiences are based on strong values such as friendship, prayer, service, reflection, formation etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Text of the Way of Life 2014

<sup>4</sup> All the groups/ communities/fraternities have an RA community as their ‘contact community’. This is particularly important for groups who do not have an RA community nearby.

The formation activities of the year are generally set out in a programme springing from the needs of the group/community/fraternity, keeping in mind the orientations suggested by the provincial AT animation team.

There are other ways of living the experience of Assumption Together: among them personal ties with a community and the sharing of the mission.

## **5.2 The Provincial Assumption Together Team**

For the animation and co-ordination of Assumption Together activity, the Provinces/Regions set up a provincial AT team made up of lay people and religious:

- A sister named by the Provincial Council
- A lay provincial/regional representative. The profile of the provincial representative is set out in a later chapter.
- Other members, lay and /or sisters.

The Team works with the Provincial Council for:

- The transmission to the Province of the orientations of the General Chapter;
- Determining the animation programmes for the groups;
- The organisation of formation and of national congresses with a view to greater sharing of the AT way in the Province.

## **5.3 The Mission and skills of the Lay Representative of the Province/Region**

The life of “Assumption Together” is organised differently in different countries. Therefore, it is important that each Province should have a lay provincial or national representative (RP), capable, with the sister delegate of AT, of animating the life of “Assumption Together” in their own Province.

Each Province will choose the most appropriate process for the nomination of the provincial representative. The nomination will be confirmed by the Provincial Superior. The Representative will be named for three years, renewable at maximum twice, but a second renewal would be exceptional. In carrying out their charge, the RP will be helped by the provincial team.

### **Mission of the Representative**

The mission of the provincial representative, working with their team, includes:

- Learning to know the reality of the life of the Congregation, of “Assumption Together” and the fraternities/ communities or groups of the Province;
- Thinking of and proposing activities, meetings, formation sessions, retreats etc., which will nourish the identity and sense of belonging to the Assumption Family.

- Close collaboration with the Provincial Superior and her Council, with the co-ordinators of the local groups and the CPAE, and living the partnership with the sisters
- Co-ordinating the different groups, visiting them where possible and getting to know their way;
- Promoting the creation of new groups in the Province;
- Being available to undertake the training necessary to carry out their mission.

## **Skills**

It is desirable that the Lay Representative should:

- Be a person of faith and prayer, aware of their Christian vocation as a member of the Church;
- Have assimilated the spirituality of the Assumption and desire to deepen and communicate it;
- Be capable of animation to direct, propose, organise, animate activities and to be able to look for persons capable of carrying them out..., be able to promote strategies with a view to involving other lay people;
- Know how to listen, understand situations, take account of different rhythms, encourage, strengthen, consolidate etc.
- Be a good communicator: to make the life of the groups in the Province known, to link them together with each other and at the international level;
- To have the necessary availability for meetings, reflection, travel;
- To be able to work in a team.

## **6. THE INTERNATIONALITY OF ASSUMPTION TOGETHER**

When the same charism spreads over four continents and numerous countries it is immediately evident that concepts of identity and mission develop a dimension of international communion which enriches each country. The Assumption lives this “catholicity”, animated by the Spirit.

In the same way that the international values of Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation and Solidarity challenge us in every corner of the earth, and demand international sharing and co-operation, friendship between peoples and family spirit are values which give substance to the identity and mission of “Assumption Together”.

To develop this international dimension, the Congregation has set up a Permanent Council of Assumption Together (CPAE).

## **The Permanent Council of Assumption Together**

The structure and functions of CPAE were defined at the International Congress of AT at Leon in 2010 and approved by the CGP of 2011. The task of CPAE is to animate and co-ordinate the life of “Assumption Together” at the international level. It is composed of the members of the General Council and by lay people nominated by the Superior General and her Council, using the procedure approved by the CGP.

The Superior General presides over plenary sessions of the CPAE. The co-ordination of its activities is entrusted to a lay person and a General Councillor.

The essential functions of this team are:

- To transmit the international dimension of the Congregation to the Provinces
- To collaborate with the Provinces in the development of formation plans and make available to the Provinces the shared formation materials.
- To facilitate information and communication
- To maintain links
  - Between the Provinces
  - Between the different international commissions
- To be a place of reflection, listening and animation
- To gather together the directives of the Congregation
- To manage the international funds of Assumption Together.

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**Assumption Together** to live the fullness of our Baptism and give life to the world.

*« Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope! » Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium §86*

**Assumption Ensemble** to cultivate interior space with the « breath of prayer ».

*« Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel! » Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium §97*

**Assumption Ensemble** to live an experience of community and a life of authentic relationships.

*« Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community! » Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium §92*

**Assumption Ensemble** to live our mission, renewed, in the promotion of justice and peace.

*« Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love! »*

*Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium §101*