

Discernment, Communion, Peripheries Calls, Promises and Challenges A Journey Forward

*“It is folly not to be what one is [RA]
as fully as possible” MME*



CGP Document 2020

Document of CGP 2020

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Concluding Message of Sister Rekha

Very dear Sisters,

We have come to the end of our Plenary General Council. As we asked in our prayer at the opening liturgy, God has granted us eyes to see the best and ears to listen attentively and hearts to forgive and trust one another. As daughters of Saint Marie Eugenie, we want our Charism to come alive as “a source of healing and integration in a wounded, broken, and divided world.”¹ We have expressed again and again our great desire “to return to the sources in order to help us discern creative and meaningful expressions of the **Assumption Way** for today.”²

First of all, I thank God for journeying with us, evidenced by the many **blessings** that we have received during this CGP. My heart is filled with **joy and gratitude** to each one of you. I thank God for my council who worked hard to make this CGP a different experience for all. We are grateful to our resource persons, translators, listening group, drafting committee, secretaries, communication team, celebration team, and liturgy group – as well as to the communities of the Provinces of France and Europe which welcomed our Sisters for the immersion experience and the community of the motherhouse. I am deeply touched by the many messages that I have received from the Sisters after having listened to or read the opening message. Thank you, Sisters, for your personal sharing which was a source of inspiration for me. I greatly appreciate this communication of deep union and want us to grow more in this spirit of synodality – our journey together as sisters and covenant partners in God’s mission. I am also grateful to the members of the Assumption Together and our friends for their messages from the four corners of the world, assuring us of their prayers for CGP 2020. Yes, together we have come on a long journey, in the presence of God and in communion with one another.

As our beloved Pope Francis often reminds us, our CGP 2020 should not become an “unproductive meeting” with “empty talks.” Let us make it a source of new energy and dynamism for new expressions of our RA way of life, implementing the calls and challenges of CG 2018 – discernment, communion and peripheries, for the next 18 months.

Interpreting the parable of the **fig tree** from the Gospels of Luke (13) and Mark (11) from the perspective of the contemporary experiences of consecrated women, Sister Inigo Joachim invited us to challenge ourselves to become high-quality fig trees which produce fruits in season and out of season: “there is no season for religious to smile, to be gentle and compassionate, to be honest, and humble, and to be sensitive and serviceable. We retire from our profession but not from the religious mission and not from living the values of religious life.”³

The fraternal exchanges we had with both Monseigneur Michel Aupetit, the Archbishop of Paris, and Monseigneur Pascal Delannoy, the bishop of Saint-Denis, touched on the ever-growing multicultural

¹ CGP 2020, Opening Message, # 4.

² CGP 2020, Opening Message, # 8.

³ Sr Inigo Joachim, “Consecrated Life as a Gift and a Challenge for our times,” p. 3.

reality in many of our societies. Monseigneur Aupetit invited us to identify the real challenges behind the realities in which we find ourselves and accomplish the mission of Christ, which, according to him is unity and authentic witness as consecrated persons. He also shared with us his priority for the Church in Paris as creating spaces for fraternity, where people who are very different can meet and realize they are sisters and brothers.⁴ Similarly, in the context of the multi-cultural and ethnic community in his diocese, Monseigneur Delannoy made the prophetic statement: “There are NO foreigners in the Church; there are only members of the family in the Church.”⁵

Our experiences tell us that living interculturality is not merely an intra-community call but an ad-extra reality within which we find ourselves today. Father Antonio Pernia presented the multiculturalism as an integral part of the Project of God for humanity, something that has to be embraced gracefully as an opportunity. He challenged us to seek the face of GOD in the other, or to see the “other face of God” in the stranger, unfamiliar situations and uncertain realities.⁶ He also reminded us to protect our unity while we promote diversity. In this context, let us keep in mind what I talked about in my opening message on the principles of balance and integration.

The CGP community worked hard and recognized the innumerable blessings that we have received from God, from one another and from the people whom we serve. We have also identified many challenges to respond to the urgent calls that we have received from within and without. The themes that we reflected together include: (i) Assumption culture, way of life, new forms of presence in the church based on the values of the Gospel and Assumption heritage; (ii) restructuring and new structures of animation at all levels (community, province/region, general community), (iii) our collaboration and partnership with laity; (iv) Intercultural living; (v) pastoral ministry and vocation promotion ; (vi) formation at all levels (initial and ongoing); (vii) finance and self-sufficiency, (viii) accompaniment of the elderly sisters, and (ix) continental journey and accompaniment. Among these nine topics, we have worked on the first four in the assembly and the other five themes in our respective continents.

As the fruit of the work of the CGP community for the past 20 days, we are happy to present to the congregation **the CGP 2020 Document** consists of the following:

1. Blessings gathered from messages, reports and experiences
2. Calls received during the CGP interactions
3. Proposals made by the CGP
4. Decisions of the CGP
5. Reflections on the Continental Journey and Accompaniment

As a follow up of the work of the CGP 2020, I would encourage you to take up the following three themes in your respective provinces/region. At the next CGP, in light of your deliberations and experiences, I hope that we can explore new ways as a body congregation.

1. The Assumption Way/ the Assumption Culture and New Forms of Presence
2. Restructuring and New Structures of Animation
3. Our Collaboration with Laity

⁴ Monseigneur Aupetit, Reflections shared on the 5th of February 2020.

⁵ Monseigneur Delannoy, Reflections shared on the 14th of February 2020.

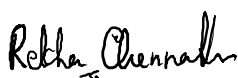
⁶ Fr Antonio Pernia, “Interculturality and Leadership,” p. 3.

I am sure you would agree with me that this CGP has been a **wake-up call** for each one of us to become more **authentic witnesses of our charism** for our times. Similarly, the experience of **“multicultural societies/communities”** occupied an important space in our reflections. Although we are sometimes discouraged by our frailties and those of others in our communities, I am convinced that a Gospel-value based, intercultural, international, and inter-generational RA community is possible. It is not a utopian dream for me, but a promise of hope as our fragilities lean on God’s fidelity. When we become communities manifesting Kingdom values, we will truly become a **prophetic sign of hope** for our troubled multicultural world. In this context, two inspirational quotes from Mahatma Gandhi can be of great help in our journey forward: (i) “Be the change you want to see in the world” and (ii) “You cannot change how people treat you or what they say about you. All you can do is change how you react to it.” The awareness of this on our part, living humbly and with trust in God’s grace will make a big difference to our intercultural living in our respective communities.

As consecrated women of God, we have NO reason for worries about the future, because God has a project for us. Our dreams and projects for ourselves may sometimes lead to an unsuccessful end, but God’s ways will always lead us to greater life and endless hope. We are driven by the Spirit more than ever before to set out to encounter the other (cultures, languages, races, philosophies, religions) and embrace international communities and intercultural living as an integral aspect of God’s project for our congregation. Let us explore new paradigms of leadership which will help us in the work of restructuring and spiritual renewal. As we continue to make **discernment, communion** and going to the **peripheries** a way of life, let **radical inclusion** and **holiness** become RA identity marks.

Sisters, as joyful and zealous women of God, let us “run together and run with God”⁷ and fly our kites higher remaining deeply rooted in our Assumption heritage and discerning new forms of RA presence in the Church for the extension of God’s Kingdom.

United with each Sister in love and in mission,



Rekha M. Chennattu, RA
Superior General

Auteuil, 20 February 2020

⁷ General Chapter 2018, Promulgation Letter, p. 7.

Blessings

1. We were happy to be at the Mother House after 6 years of CGPs away from Auteuil. Our meeting was an experience of sisterhood and of listening to each voice, allowing us to know one another better in a very renewed CGP (10 new provincials; 8 countries now gathered in the vast Provinces of Europe and Asia-Pacific). The CGP also allowed us to reread the experiences of our Provinces / region in the light of the General Chapter document. We have experienced that the diversity of our realities, our expressions and our responses can bring us together and unify us - without uniformity - in the body-Congregation.
2. The beautiful liturgy lived during our CGP manifested the joyful, contemplative and international aspects of our life.
3. The creativity and daring with which the charism of the Assumption is incarnated in different contexts -- with our strengths and our weaknesses -- give us hope. The love for our times and the apostolic zeal for "risking oneself at the frontiers at the service of life" are alive and well in the congregation. Bearing witness to this is the opening of four new communities in 2018: Niamey in Niger, Muisne in Ecuador, Bluefields in Nicaragua and Béré in Chad.
4. The presentation of the work done by the general services, the commissions and the secretariats was one of the highlights of the CGP. We saw the concrete implementation of the calls of the General Chapter of 2018 (formation, education, young people and vocation, JPICS, BGSD, Communication, CPAE, Finances, Archives). The work accomplished gives a new impetus to keep life flowing between the center and the periphery.
5. The immersions allowed us to experience the unconditional welcome of the sisters and to note with joy that our elder sisters, by their fidelity and their prayer, are the "driving force of the congregation". Their presence is a blessing for the whole congregation, and we give thanks for all that they transmit to us from a living tradition. What we were able to see and experience is that the sisters are recognized as "a group of joyful and committed women, known for their simple hospitality, their fraternal relationships and their mission of transformative education" in a multicultural world.

Calls

1. We desire to renew ourselves in our commitment and vocation to the Assumption. We feel called, more and more, to live a closeness to people which gives a taste of the Gospel, to grow in fraternal life among ourselves, to deepen our experience of God, and to put ourselves at the service of the poorest. In other words, we are challenged to strengthen both the mystical and prophetic dimensions in our personal lives and in community.

2. The reports from the Provinces showed us the challenge of aging and the lack of new members in certain Provinces. We feel that we must be creative in accompanying our older sisters so that we may live our religious vocation "as fully as possible" until the end.
3. Another great challenge is that of the integral and contextualized formation of our young sisters. Developing the capacity for reflection and analysis as an element of our "Assumption culture" among all our sisters is very important. We not only want to love our time, but also to be able to engage in the transformation of society with lucidity and a spirit of faith.
4. The diversity of the realities of our Provinces challenges us to rethink our structures of government and our forms of organization and animation so that they are at the service of life without "exhausting the soil." We will have to dig and maybe prune our tree to bear fruit!
5. Synodality and collegiality, through which we share responsibility, energize our efforts at building up communion. They remain calls to be lived at all levels.
6. The growing phenomenon of migration is another great challenge with which our globalized world confronts us. In this context, living in an international and intercultural community is, in itself, a strong witness and sign, a source of hope for the world. What exchanges are we going to take to be able to concretely live among our Provinces, revitalizing our missionary spirit, in a renewed sense of the body-congregation? How do we live the dimension of interculturality in our communities? How do we combine unity and diversity, attachment to the center and local autonomy?

Proposals

The CGP, from the rereading of the orientations of the general chapter 2018, has discerned three themes on which we must reflect as a body-congregation during the next 18 months. Each sister, each community, each Province / region is invited to make this reflection, according to its context.

1. Our "Assumption culture"

The opening message of Sr. Rekha challenges and invites us to a greater coherence of life and an even more authentic witness according to the values of the Gospel and the project of Saint Marie Eugenie for us. In our present context, we must once again seek to live our RA identity with as much fullness as possible. Let's explore and renew this identity today from our diverse cultures:

- What are the elements that form the core of our RA identity?
- What form of presence can the Assumption offer the world today?
- What obstacles do we face, and what conversions are we called to undergo?

2. Restructuring, organization and forms of animation of our Provinces / region.

The different reports of the Province made us aware of the diverse realities in the congregation: Provinces of one country and multiple countries, small and large numbers of sisters, many sisters in formation and, on the other hand, a good number of older sisters -- so many contrasting realities that require attention. We hear a strong call to "think congregation" and to live interculturality with a renewed missionary spirit. At the same time, we feel invited to continue our processes of restructuring and explore new forms of animation.

- By returning to our sources (Rule of life and tradition), what is the spirit underlying the style of government and animation of our congregation?
- What is the reality of our Province / region? How do we re-read our restructuring experience?
- How do we live the new form of international animation of the congregation (referent sisters / international commissions and secretariats)?
- How can we intensify the missionary spirit and mutual aid among Provinces and continents to further achieve internationality in our communities?

3. Sisters and lay people, living the complementarity of vocations.

Living the complementarity of religious and lay vocations is a gift and a challenge. Today we are called to go further in sharing our charism and responsibilities. Some Provinces are also beginning to explore new forms of belonging and shared life. We don't seek so much to make up for our lack in numbers as to enrich the charism, from our different vocations, and this is beneficial to all. Sharing mission and our spirituality can offer our world the face of an ever more inclusive and synodal Church: we walk together, in the grace of our baptism, to extend the Kingdom of God in us and around us.

- What responsibilities do we entrust and share with the laity, and how do we involve them in our discernments and decisions?
- What paths for a greater sharing of the charism and a closeness of life could we explore?
- What formation do we think is necessary for lay people and sisters, in order to experience complementarity?

Continental journeys

AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

Vision

The continent of Africa was enlarged by the fusion and presence of RA in Madagascar, hence the name "Africa and Madagascar". The Assumption in Africa has more than 60 years of history. In the diversity of the realities of the continent, the Provinces have an experience of collaboration that has focused, particularly since 1993, on the priority of formation through multiple encounters. It is essentially a question of thinking "Assumption continent" in a dynamic of the inculturation of our

charism and spirituality. In view of our reality which has a large number of young sisters and new vocations, initial, professional and ongoing formation remains our priority.

Action Plan

- 1. Take an active part in the accompaniment of the Province of Madagascar**
 - Receive sisters from Madagascar for formation and immersions so as to learn by osmosis (transformative education, houses of formation...)
 - Send sisters to various places for formation in specific areas (retreat, transformative education...)
- 2. Consolidate collaboration in formation from an “inter” perspective**
 - Implementation of the content of the harmonized formation programs (2019-2023)
 - Evaluation of the experience by the young and the formators in 2023
 - Continue sending young sisters out of their home Provinces
 - Reinforcement of the formation teams through receiving and sending out members
- 3. Consolidating Assumption Africa's Identity**
 - More effective communication among the Provinces
 - Sending of missionaries to the continent
 - Intensification of language learning
 - Meeting of young sisters from 2 to 4 years of temporary vows in 2023 (place to be determined)
 - Meeting of sisters from 5 to 10 years of perpetual vows
- 4. Think Body Congregation**
 - Missionary sending out of the continent: supporting particular missions

AMERICA

We are a continent with a very large geographical area, with immense distances between our 5 Provinces and 9 countries. We are aware of our diversity and we see the importance of continuing our continental journey through mutual support.

Our continent is marked by deep social wounds: inequality, injustice, corruption, drug trafficking and violence. We are experiencing the phenomenon of migration in a dramatic way that affects the living conditions of all our societies: it fragments families, affects identity and the meaning of life.

The Future of the Assumption in America:

- 1. Mutual support and collaboration**
 - Support the Mother House: translation services, participation in international commissions, sending sisters.
 - Promote the exchange of sisters within and outside the continent.
 - Communication and sharing of resources: sisters, pastoral experiences, materials, workshops, retreats, sessions, volunteering, etc.
- 2. Formation :**
 - Initial formation: Novitiate, possibility of stage and theological studies in other Provinces.
 - Ongoing Formation: Immersions for learning another language, professional studies (scholarships to Assumption College, Worcester, free of charge for the sisters), personal resources - sabbaticals.

- Continental Sessions: Assumption Together
- 3. Elderly sisters:**
 - Formation in the animation and accompaniment of older sisters: information, internal and external resources, experiences, etc.
- 4. Youth and Vocations :**
 - Participation and involvement in summer camps.
 - Opening of spaces to host AMAs: Chaparral, USA; Muisne, Ecuador; Puerto Iguazú, Argentina.
 - Scholarships for alumni of our schools at Assumption College, Worcester.
- 5. Animation :**
 - Meeting of Provincials in 2021

ASIA

Asia is home to many ancient and spiritual traditions that form a diverse and varied heritage, a source of enrichment for all. Having been the beneficiary of missionary commitment, Asia today flourishes in terms of religious vocations and provides leadership for many congregations and the universal Church. The values that the Religious of the Assumption defend - search for God, simplicity, depth, joyful detachment, family spirit - are enriched by the values of non-violence, awareness, hospitality, holistic approach and harmony. The journey of the Religious of the Assumption in Asia is marked by their closeness to the young, the poor and the people on the periphery.

Vision: A common search for our Asian RA identity embodied in the diverse realities of the respective countries and local insertions, risking ourselves to borders in the service of life. We want to continue our continental journey through:

- Collaboration and mutual accompaniment for more life
 - a) Meeting of the 2 Provincial Superiors, plus 1 Councillor/Province, plus the formator responsible for the group 0-10 years of perpetual vows to prepare a session for these sisters.
 - b) Meetings of the 2 Provincial Councils (2022)
 - (c) Meeting of formators at all levels
- Common training at certain levels
 - a) Formation Program 0-10 (2020) - This formation program is for sisters who have made perpetual vows. Sisters from Asia Pacific, India and the United States will participate. It will be held in India. The session is also open to other continents who would like to join.
 - (b) Gathering of Temporary Professed sisters (October 2022) - Philippines
- Other opportunities for exchange and mutual help for sisters and lay partners
 - (a) Immersion and exchanges, i.e. education, social centers
 - (b) Theological/professional studies
 - (c) JPICS issues
 - d) Vocation ministry
 - e) Sharing the Congregation's resource persons in terms of Asian spirituality
- Sending/hosting sisters from/to other continents to build up the Congregational Body.
 - (a) missionaries

b) student sisters

EUROPE

Our Continental Journey

We have been journeying together for a long time, we know one another well and the desire of all of us is to work together. Several continental projects have existed for many years: European novitiate, youth ministry, annual meeting of provincial councils. Ease of transportation and financial resources facilitate meetings and solidarity.

Challenges

- 6 countries, 5 languages, no common language
- Few vocations and a longer life span
- To become meaningful Christian and religious communities in a continent that is increasingly de-Christianized and secularized.
- To promote vocations and to constitute the initial formation teams.
- Continue to journey towards unity, while putting our forces into the necessary restructuring of each Province.

Actions

- Regular meetings of the provincials
- Annual meeting of the Councils of Europe to evaluate the progress made, to plan common projects, to reflect on our future.
- A meeting between the PPCs
- Joint research for initial training
- Youth and Vocations Ministry: activities organized together (For 2020: Easter Triduum in Auteuil, Assisi-Rome pilgrimage)
- Education: Meetings of the sisters in schools (prepared by an inter-Province ad-hoc team); activities with the Tutelle de France (training, meetings for students).
- Reciprocal invitations: retreats, holidays, stays, training courses, "helping hands" ...
- Communication: sharing of circulars, newsletters, project of a possible European website...
- Reflection and mutual help for the accompaniment of the elderly sisters
- Missionary exchanges inside and outside the continent

Accompaniment of the Continents by the General Community

As was decided at the General Chapter of 2018, we wish for accompaniment according to the specific needs of the continents, according to the competence of the general councillors and at the times necessary for each one.

Decisions

1. Ratification of the unification of the Province of France Notre Dame with the Province of France
2. Meeting of persons in charge of AMA November 2-9, 2020 in Auteuil
3. Participation of the JPICS referent persons in the meeting of the Assumption Family on migrations in July 2021.
4. Session Assumption Together in November 2022 in Auteuil
5. Education Secretariat : Have a meeting of the referent sisters in 2022
6. BGSD: revision of the criteria for the approbation of projects
7. Communication :
 - ✚ Edition of a magazine "#Assumpta", 3 times a year in 3 languages
 - ✚ Edition of a revue "Assumpta", once a year in 3 languages



The CGP Community

Virginie, Judite, Lerma, Astrid, Smitha, Irene, Isabelle, Illuminata, Cecilia,
Odessa, Sandra, Maria Dolores, H el ene, Rekha, Honoratha, Catherine, Marthe,
Fran oise, Jeanne, C ecile, Mary Ann, Angeles, Marie-Sophie



*Drawing by Sr. Maria Theresia,
of the community of Tournai (Europe - Belgium)*