



PLENARY GENERAL COUNCIL
AUTEUIL: 1-20 February 2026

OPENING MESSAGE



Towards a more Synodal Congregation/Provinces: Our Journey Forward

“We are all foundation stones.” Saint Marie Eugenie
“All the Sisters are responsible for creating in the community the climate of Discernment.”
(Rule of Life, 32)

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Very dear Sisters,

I extend a warm welcome to everyone as we gather for the Plenary General Council 2026. We are blessed to begin our journey on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, when the Scriptures remind us that God’s power is often revealed in our weaknesses. The first and second readings speak of God’s choice of the poor and the humble (Zeph 2:3; 3:12–13; 1 Cor 1:26–31), while the Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor in spirit (5:3). Together, these readings encourage us to experience **God’s power in our poverty and vulnerability**, providing a biblical perspective for our reflection and discernment at PGC 2026.

This is our first PGC following the 2024 General Chapter, and it gives me immense joy to address you this morning. The theme chosen for the PGC 2026 suggests a journey forward in becoming a more **Synodal Congregation**. Even this vision is not a destination. It is a crossing: unsettling, challenging and quietly transformative. I feel a sense of in-between-ness: certainty giving way to adaptability, authority shifting from centralised to distributed, movement from the peripheries to the centre and vice versa. As we all agree, the skills needed today are not mastery of a secure, safe, and smooth pattern of life, but the aptitude to learn, unlearn, and relearn new ways of being religious sisters.

We are encouraged in this journey by our rich **spirituality and traditions**. The vision of St. Marie Eugénie (e.g., “we are all foundation stones”), our Rule of Life (e.g., “All the sisters are responsible for creating in the community the climate of Discernment”), the lived wisdom of our Congregational history, and the daily gift of community life all provide a solid, life-giving foundation. These resources continue to gently form us in humility, discernment, openness of heart, and shared responsibility, inviting us to trust the Spirit at work among us.

The insights gathered from a brief survey of PGC 2026 members, together with the experience of listening to sisters across the provinces (especially during the canonical visits), reveal a sincere and deep **desire for growth and renewal**. Many sisters express a heartfelt longing to walk more closely together—to listen with care, to share responsibility, and to make room for every voice, especially those that have too often remained unheard or unseen.

We are also aware that, if we want to make this dream come true, we need to address the following **challenges**: (i) Personal resistance, experienced while moving away from hierarchical to participatory and discernment-based leadership that confronts deeply ingrained habits and practices. (ii) Wrong presuppositions, as we misunderstand synodality as a purely democratic process in which decisions are made by majority vote. (iii) Impatience with the lengthy process, as synodality requires deep listening and integration of multiple perspectives. This can be uncomfortable for those seeking immediate results. (iv) Balancing freedom and responsibility is an imperative as leaders and members walk alongside in a spirit of mutual accompaniment. We are invited to guide without imposing our own ideas and perspectives. We want everyone to assume personal responsibility while honouring personal space and freedom.

We look forward to the Session with Fr. David McCallum, SJ, on **Discerning Leadership** for Synodal Communities, Provinces, and the Congregation. We hope to learn the process (theory and practice of a discerning leadership) and enter into a process of becoming more synodal, which will serve as a source of inspiration as we journey together — rereading our experiences, addressing our concerns, and planning together for the future.

One of the priorities of GC 2024 was “to keep alive the flame for a **joyful consecrated life** in fullness.” Yet this flame is seriously threatened when abuses of power, spiritual, sexual, and financial in nature, continue to surface among us. In this context, I feel compelled to raise urgent questions about the growing number of such cases. Listening to the sisters and recognising the reality of these abuses within our own communities is, at times, deeply disturbing and painful.

I am deeply grateful that the congregation has taken the vital and commendable step of developing and ratifying a **Safeguarding Policy**. This reflects a genuine commitment to care, responsibility, and renewal. At the same time, a policy truly comes to life through how it is embodied in our daily practices and organisational structures. The ongoing invitation is to clarify, courageously implement, and consistently apply this policy across our communities and provinces. Through sustained accountability and transparent practice, the policy can become not just a statement of intent, but a living instrument of personal conversion and lasting structural change.

The Council of Assumption Together: Another concern that deserves our special attention is our shared dream of collaborating with our lay mission partners in a qualitatively different way. While each province is on its own journey—shaped by distinct needs and experiences—we have collectively affirmed the importance of this collaboration at the Congregation level and established a 19-member Council for Assumption Together to implement the GC 2024 decision. Yet, sometimes, our practice risks falling short of our vision. The frequent changes in the Council’s membership and the lack of regular participation in meetings undermine continuity, shared discernment, and accountability. These challenges are further intensified by language barriers and by differences in interests, formation, and experience among members.

The General Council: The past eighteen months have been a period of difficulties and various challenges. I am very grateful to my council members for being so generous in assuming responsibilities and giving of their best as we reorganised the life and mission of the General Council. What the seven sisters previously handled is now managed by the five sisters, as we assumed the roles of both General Bursar and General Secretary. We are still exploring the best and most balanced way of life for us.

In his address concluding the first session of the Extraordinary Consistory held at the Vatican in January 2026, **Pope Leo XIV** challenged the participants with two penetrating questions: “Is there space for something new to be born? Do we love and proclaim a God who sets us on a journey?” He then invited them to “live an experience of the **newness** of the Church.”¹ These words offer strong encouragement to continue discerning and exploring new paths for the General Council and the Congregation.

Until now, my focus has been on the Congregation’s inward journey and the opportunities and responsibilities that shape our consecrated life. From there, we are now invited to widen our horizons and turn our hearts toward **today’s world** in which we live and serve. We do so with seriousness and humility—aware of the challenges before us yet sustained by a vigilant hope rooted in God’s transforming presence in our history. In this context, two pressing realities emerge that call for our careful discernment.

First, we are witnessing an alarming **escalation of war, armed conflict, violence, and human rights violations** across many regions. The latest being the US attack on Venezuela, and its ripples are already felt across the world (e.g., Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Iran and Greenland). President Trump has been using different strategies – military power, sanctions, tariffs, and the threat of annexation.² The normalisation of the suffering of innocent civilians, migrants and refugees cries out to us. Even the constant stream of news—threats of military action, retaliatory strikes, and political posturing—reveals a world increasingly shaped by fear and force rather than justice and peace. As religious and responsible citizens, we are called to be artisans of peace and justice, voices for the voiceless, and friends to those displaced, wounded, and traumatised by conflicts and abuses.

Second, we stand at the threshold of a profound technological transformation. The rapid expansion of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is reshaping how we work, communicate, decide, and even how we understand what it means to be human. These tools carry immense promises, but also grave risks of exclusion, manipulation, and the deepening of inequality. Technology is never neutral; it reflects the values of those who wield it. The question before us is not whether AI will shape our future, but whether it will do so in ways that honour human dignity and serve the common good.

¹ The themes chosen for the Consistory were Synodality and Mission, which indicate the direction for the Church in the coming years.

² I appreciate the prophetic stance and the courageous statements made by LCWR and CLAR, as well as the small yet significant steps taken by our sisters.

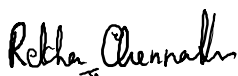
Let me end my reflections with the following six questions:

1. How do we live this in-between time or unsettling time more meaningfully? How can we, with wisdom and creativity, grow into a more truly synodal Congregation through both Spiritual renewal and structural reform?
2. How can we help build communities where sisters feel safe to speak the truth, to listen deeply to one another, and to take shared responsibility—so that the dignity and sacredness of everyone concerned is respected and protected in communities and places of ministry?
3. As working with lay mission partners is truly part of who we are and what we are called to do, how can we nurture this commitment? How can we provide formation, stability, and structures needed for this collaboration to be real and sustainable?
4. How can the General Council be restructured and reimagined to better serve its mission in ways that are sustainable, balanced, and life-giving?
5. How do we prepare ourselves, personally and communally, and respond with compassion, courage, and wisdom to the wounds caused by war and social conflicts?
6. And finally, how do we discern the responsible and creative use of Artificial Intelligence in our lives and mission? How can we harness these emerging technologies to advance our call to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation?

These concerns and questions are invitations to more profound conversion, prophetic witness, and renewed trust that the Spirit continues to guide the Congregation in a fragile and rapidly changing world. May the vision of Saint Marie Eugenie enlighten us on our journey!

With deep sentiments of joy and hope, immense gratitude to my council and to each one of you, and in communion with every sister in the Congregation, I open the Plenary General Council 2026. May our deliberations and reflections draw us forward with renewed passion and a deeper communion, as we serve God's mission in the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

May God bless our journey forward!



Rekha M. Chennattu, RA
Sister General³

Auteuil, 1 February 2025

³ Inspired by the inner voice, I changed the title from Superior to Sister. I hope and pray that this change of language helps us become more synodal in our attitudes and perspectives.