



SOCIETÀ DEL SACRO CUORE
CASA GENERALIZIA

Prot. N°: 17/113

Rome, 18 November 2017

Dear Sisters and family of the Sacred Heart,

2018 marks the bicentennial of the Society of the Sacred Heart's courageous decision to live its mission and charism beyond known frontiers. We celebrate this moment through our sister and saint, Philippine Duchesne who, with four companions, launched out on the now famous Rebecca, to carry out a vision and a conviction to move beyond the borders of France to the frontiers of America to bring the gospel to those on the margin of her day, the indigenous people of the Americas. This moment was rooted, like most things in Philippine's life, by persistent prayer and courageous action.

In honor the 200th anniversary of Philippine's act of courage and conviction, on November 18, 2017, the Society launches two important and inter-connected opportunities for RSCJ and the whole Sacred Heart family. The first is the international year of prayer initiated as part of the United States-Canada Province's bicentennial celebrations and created and shared by our global community. The second is a Society-wide engagement and conversation to help us integrate more deeply our commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in the life and mission of the Society. This second initiative was proposed and will be guided by the International JPIC commission in collaboration with the General Council.ⁱ

First, I invite each one to enter into this bicentennial year of prayer and to become part of an intentional prayer community of Sacred Heart men and women. This prayer community reaches 41+ countries where the love of the Heart of Jesus is lived and shared by RSCJ and the RSCJ family. Each Monday from November 18, 2017 to November 18, 2018, you are urged to join in a Sacred Heart family communal prayer prepared by RSCJ from throughout the world on topics that were the foundation of Philippine passionate love for God and God's people. This new global prayer community will happen mostly through email and Society web-sites. What a wonderful way for us, in a 21st century, technologically-based way, to be part of Sophie's vision of forming hundreds, thousands of "adorers" around the globe. Philippine's journey on the Rebecca was a giant step in realizing this vision in 1818. Forming a global prayer community among her descendants, who are us, has the potential for being another opportunity of significant grace and action.

In praying with and about Philippine these days, one word keeps coming back to me which is “persistent”. Philippine was a woman persistent in both prayer and action. We often hear the name given to her by the Potawatomi nation, “the woman who prays always”. The image that comes to mind is Philippine praying in silence and stillness throughout the night in a cabin in Sugar Creek, the small piece of corn never moving from the end of her veil. Coming to know Philippine a little better I’m beginning to shape a second image of her as the persistent woman who prays always, not just silently at night before the Eucharist, but also every day in “her struggles, and challenges, her failures, her passionate love for God’s people”ⁱⁱⁱ somewhat like the persistent widow or the persistent friend we meet in the gospel of Luke. I hope that this year of prayer among the Sacred Heart family will strengthen our relationship with God individually and communally, in silence and in action, and will be the Spirit’s way of enkindling our passion and fire for mission.

Which leads me to a second invitation to a conversation that begins on November 18, 2017. The Society of the Sacred Heart worldwide is invited to participate in a global conversation on our commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC), as a preparatory process for the international JPIC meeting in the Philippines in November 2018. The international JPIC meeting is a direct outcome of the 2016 General Chapter where provinces identified JPIC as one of their most significant emerging calls. Our Chapter, and Pope Francis, call us to the peripheries. We know that our educative mission connects us deeply to the needs of our world and we believe that JPIC is pivotal for how we live out our mission in whatever educative form and in whatever place we live. This call draws deeply from our spirituality: “...the Pierced Heart of Jesus opens us to the depths of God and to the anguish of humankind.” Constitutions (#8). And now we must add ‘the anguish of our wounded earth’.

How like Philippine that these two dimensions of our spirituality and mission, prayer and justice, call us forward and deeper on the same day. Philippine’s unceasing prayer can only be matched by her persistent vision and conviction to incarnate the gospel. From the time she was a child, Philippine heard the cry of the poor on the streets of Grenoble.

Philippine broke rank with her social circle by her early attraction to serve the poor. It was not so revolutionary since engaging in charitable works was an acceptable activity for Catholic women of good breeding. But Philippine took this much farther than most women would. Her entrance into religious life as a Visitation nun was interrupted by the French Revolution and during that time Philippine struck out from her family’s country home to care, principally, for priests in prison or in hiding. In keeping with her time, religious work and the salvation of souls was always Philippine’s main concern. But, at some risk to herself, she also helped the sick and the dying. When her alarmed relatives tried to stop her, she said: “Let me alone; it is my happiness and glory to serve my divine Saviour in the person of the unfortunate and the poor.” In other words, assisting the poor for Philippine was not a means for her to win the reward of heaven – no, she saw Christ incarnate in the poor; serving them was an end in itself.ⁱⁱ

Similarly, she had a vision about going beyond the borders of France and Europe to spread the gospel among the indigenous peoples of the Americas with the same passion with which she served the poor in Grenoble. Her vision was courageous and bold. She was a pioneer missionary educator whose only goal was to spread the Word of God in a new land. Now we know that she was not only holy but also human, sometimes perplexed by the ways of the people on the frontier, sometimes overwhelmed by a feeling of failure, sometimes reluctantly following the norms of the day rather than standing up to power. Always she was a woman who centered her life on God, who lived the mission to the end.

May this year of prayer with Philippine strengthen our capacity to contemplate and listen to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and in our world. May we, like Sophie and Philippine, be compelled by the love of the Heart of God, Jesus Christ. May we believe in a gospel vision beyond what we can see or imagine that “all may be One” and act with courage, confidence and persistence to make this vision a reality.

With love and prayer in One Heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Dawson" with a small flourish at the end.

Barbara Dawson RSCJ

**TO ACCESS THE MONDAY PRAYER IN FRENCH, ENGLISH OR SPANISH, PLEASE GO TO
WWW.RSCJINTERNATIONAL.ORG OR WWW.RSCJ.ORG,
AVAILABLE BEGINNING ON NOVEMBER 18, 2017**

ⁱ You will find more detailed information on each of these events as well as many other bicentennial opportunities on the Society's websites : www.rscjinternational.org, www.rscj.org, as well as on provincial websites.

ⁱⁱ Excerpt from the talk *Lives That Matter: Philippine Duchesne and Solidarity Across Frontiers* Catherine M. Mooney, Sacred Heart Forum - St. Louis University - July 13, 2017