



Ref. No. 19/87

Feast of the Sacred Heart 2019

Dear Sisters and Family of the Sacred Heart,

Happy Feast! The letter for the feast of the Sacred Heart this year includes a gift and a challenge as you receive the enclosed document, *Being Artisans of Hope in our Blessed and Broken World*. I hope that wherever we are and however we expend our time and energy for mission and life that we take the calls of this document “to heart” – to our own hearts and to God’s Heart.

The reflections of the JPIC document are rooted in the life of our family and the experiences that many of you shared in preparation for the JPIC gathering held in the Philippines in November 2018. We thank each province and person who shared his or her own joys and struggles and those of their people, as well as those who participated in this gathering on behalf of all of us. Living justice, peace and integrity of creation is integral to our charism and mission; it is our way of *entering into the pierced Heart of Jesus that opens our being to the depths of God and the anguish of humanity (Constitutions #8)*.

The gospel for the Feast of the Sacred Heart this year reminds us through the image of the Good Shepherd, of God’s faithful and compassionate love for each one of us. Knowing the faithfulness of God who is with us and loves us deeply and forever, no matter what, is the essence of hope. Even when we are lost, and maybe especially when we are vulnerable, God rejoices in “finding us”, in making a home for us and setting us free. The security of God’s love gives us the courage to act likewise, to be shepherds, to be artisans of hope.

What does it mean to be Artisans of Hope? Rather than start our reflection on what calls us to hope, perhaps we can ask ourselves what stops us from hoping. Certainly, the chaos and uncertainty of our world is a huge challenge, globally, nationally and even in our neighborhoods. The state of our world can be paralyzing. When I am overwhelmed either by the state of the world or sometimes by the challenges of how to go forward as the Society, I have learned that it helps to stop, to ponder and pray, and to analyze what is real and what is not, then to look for small, sometimes radical steps that lead me or us

forward. For me, the most important way into hope is to remember that this is God's project. Each one of us is called to walk the path forward offered by the JPIC document. We need to do this, remembering God's promise in the first reading for Feast of the Sacred Heart this year, "I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice". (Ezekiel 34: 16)

I am also very conscious that what is happening in the external world is often also happening inside of us, as a community or as individuals. The chaos and uncertainty of the world and the challenges in our church can enter into our being, somewhat like a spiritual virus, eating away at our capacity to hope, making us tired, frustrated or angry. Even this time of transition within the Society can impact us as we search for ways to build the body, to strengthen our life and mission. We need to ask ourselves about the things that get in the way of hope, that stop us from believing that things can change – fear of the unknown, unhealed wounds, failure to stop and ponder, lack of trust. In many ways these very things that block world or national peace can also hinder our own conversion, our own capacity to be artisans of hope. As we have been travelling around the Society, I am coming to believe that each of us and maybe each of our countries or cultures may have a particular "original sin", some obstacle that we need to recognize and to overcome in order to proclaim the hope of resurrection. I invite you to think about what that might be in your life, in your province, your country, your family.

What type of conversion needs to happen inside of us to be able to say honestly the words of Elizabeth to Mary, "Blessed is she who believed that the Lord's promise would be fulfilled"? It is not too strong to say that we need to be women of hope to live our vocation as Religious of the Sacred Heart.

I would like to share three images that haunt me as we challenge ourselves to be artisans of radical hope and celebrate this Feast of the Heart. Perhaps these images or those that haunt you can help us reflect on the challenges in our life through the lens of the JPIC document – power and right relationships, structural transformation, a world of people on the move, and care for our common home.

The first image is the celebration of Holy Saturday in Egypt – entering the church through a barricade with men armed with machine guns and walking through a metal detector in order to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was followed by listening to the reading that describes the destruction of the Egyptians by God (Exodus) while sitting next to one



of my Egyptian sisters. In so many countries, our churches and mosques and temples and synagogues are no longer safe havens in which people can gather to praise and thank God. I am haunted by the fear under which many people live, by the increase of militarism and the use of guns, the unjust use and manipulation of power, the dishonesty of the media and the thoughtless continuation of promoting division rather than communion among people. How do I counteract this environment in my life, in the place where I live? All of us have power in big ways or small ways. Does my power bring security to people around me or is it a threat? Does it foster life or control life? How can I make conscious efforts to create places where hope and life can flourish?



The second image is the gathering of the descendants of enslaved people and RSCJ at Grand Coteau, Louisiana, at a ceremony of repentance and reparation for the actions of our sisters during the period of slavery and beyond in the United States. Although only a beginning, the public acknowledgment of our complicity in the sin of

slavery opens the door to healing. I am haunted by the racism that exists in my own country and the unacknowledged racism we live with throughout the world, the ways we unconsciously participate in discrimination based on skin color, ethnic or national origin, tribal membership, immigration status or class. This is a world issue as well as one of our shadows. How do we speak the truth and acknowledge our participation in the sin of the world? How is our building of communion an act of reparation? Can each of us enter into herself, asking how this system functions in my life? Can I enter into dialogue with the other and allow healing to happen?

The third image is the children in the small school in Bongor, Chad. Like children everywhere, these children live happily in the present moment, not really being aware or thinking about themselves beyond their family and their local environment. They love their teachers, they love their school and they welcome people like us who come from outside their world. While these



children are obviously happy, they, like millions of other children, are also obviously hungry, lacking in the basic tools of education – books, paper and pencils, a classroom, even a regular teacher. This is “our school” and the faces of our children haunt me. How can we connect among ourselves to address the educational needs of all of our children? How do we deal with this inequity? What structural transformation do we need to engage in, both internal to the Society as well as within the world in which we live?

As we celebrate this Feast of the Heart of Jesus, I invite all of us who are part of our Sacred Heart family to pay attention to God’s call **to live hope deeply in our lives, to strengthen our commitment in our journey forward as a community, to speak the truth with love as we work together to fulfill the dream of God for all God’s people.** As we celebrate this Feast of the Sacred Heart, let us ask to see the world with God’s compassion and love and seek new ways for *Being Artisans of Hope in our blessed and broken world.*

With much love and prayer,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Barbara Dawson" with a small flourish at the end.

Barbara Dawson RSCJ