

Society of the Sacred Heart

see, I am doing something new



Special Chapter 2021

ENGLISH VERSION
OPENING TALK
for Special Chapter 2021

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Presented by
Barbara Dawson

Welcome to everyone as we begin the celebration of this sacred ecclesial event, the Special Chapter of 2021. What a thrilling moment to be together across so many frontiers.

Today we begin by celebrating the Eucharist. We make ourselves consciously present to Jesus Christ and to each other as we open a new chapter in our life as a congregation with two questions that guide us forward – who is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do?

For the sake of our mission, the women who are here together as capitulants have a commitment and a responsibility to discern the next steps we need to take as a congregation in the way we organize ourselves and in the ways we share all of our resources in common.

Let us pause for a moment to call on the Spirit to help us truly enter into the dispositions of the Heart of Jesus, to experience ourselves as Religious of the Sacred Heart, women of the gospel, who live among our people and, at the same time, are gathered together as a global community. Let us feel our spiritual presence with each other, connected in a heart way, united with Mary, whose Heart was both joy-filled and pierced, courageous and questioning. Mary who helps us enter the space of love in the pierced Heart of her Son, who invites us to be women who live love deeply and daily. It is only with this attitude of love that we will be able to let go of our personal preferences and things we hold very dear to our hearts, to enter into a mutual dialogue and discern what God is asking of the Society of the Sacred Heart now.

(pause)

As always when we begin a gathering, we recognize our place in the midst of our world which continues to set our agenda. When we convoked this special chapter three years ago, we had no idea about world in which we are living today and the consequences of this multi-layered crisis on people we love and serve and on the mission to which we are committed. Life has been disrupted in ways we never imagined – from the death of so many loved ones, our sisters and family members, co-workers and friends, the political polarity and destabilization we are experiencing in so many countries, the impact of environmental-abuse on people and the planet, to a church that wants to be more responsive to the needs of God's people today and yet often is thwarted by internal power struggles and a lack of understanding or experience of real synodality.

At the same time that we are living through a sad and painful epoch moment, we also experience the joy of the Gospel. We experience people being more kind and thoughtful towards each other, young and old being more consciousness of the impact of climate change, with a deeper understanding of what it means to be vulnerable and need community, a greater sense that it is essential to reach beyond our individual needs and



respond to the common good. Despite the challenges of this moment in history we see the signs that the Word of God incarnated among us is working to overcome the darkness.

So why are we here at this Special Chapter? We as a Congregation are in a critical moment of transformation. 54 years ago this month another group of women RSCJ were gathered here in Rome at a Special Chapter asked by the Church to return to the founding vision of our congregation, to renew our mission and charism in the light of the second Vatican Council and the needs of the world at that time. It's not by chance that the two major topics of that chapter were governance and the use of our resources. If you have not done so, I would urge you to reread the 1967 Chapter Document, especially the courageous and insightful words of Mother de Valon, many of which could be spoken today with the same conviction and urgency.

Today, we are called again to create something new, not because our demographics are changing which they are, but because the world needs our charism and mission more than ever – to discover and make known the love of God in the midst of this blessed and broken world. And while the ways we have organized ourselves to live our lives in mission and the ways we have shared our resources for the sake of mission have served us well for the past 50+ years, the time has come for us to re-imagine ourselves in response to the needs of the world of the 21st century and beyond.

We left the Chapter of 2016 with these two compelling questions as well as three images – We are called to be One Body in the Heart of Jesus Christ, We are called to be Bread that is kneaded, fired, broken and shared, and we are called to board a boat that is setting sail journeying together to new shores for the sake of life. These images are accompanied by four calls – to reach new frontiers, to live more humanly in the radical style of Jesus, to create the silence, to be and act as one body

The Spirit was active and alive in the Chapter of 2016, as though God in his wisdom and tender mercy was getting us ready for the next chapter of our lives, giving us the tools and the insights to address a reality that has not yet fully unfolded.

We are having a Special Chapter because in order to go forward together to live our mission with vitality, each one of us needs to take the responsibility that the Constitutions gives to us as Religious of the Sacred Heart, “to live in the truth of our hearts, the charism of St. Madeleine Sophie”. We too have a responsibility for the common good. During the last four years, each one of us has been preparing for this moment, invited to share her dreams, her concerns, her joys and sorrows, her convictions and deep commitments. All of us have had the opportunity to speak our truth, to share our dreams and visions for the future. Each one of us has participated in the way that she was able – through prayer, through reading and conversations, through difficult moments and convergences, through the preparation for our provincial chapters, through zoom conversations with old friends and new acquaintances.



We have connected among ourselves and with our co-workers and colleagues in ways that we never imagined possible.

In a few minutes, we will celebrate Eucharist and enter into the mystery of the open side of Jesus. We will remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, the reality which lies at the heart of the sufferings and hopes of the human family. Through this Eucharist we are drawn into the gift of Jesus to his Father for the life of the world, making us more truly the Body of Christ, broken to give birth to a new humanity.

My hope and my prayer is that God will give us the courage and the wisdom we need to enter into this moment of discernment, that we have the freedom to let go of anything that will block the Spirit, that we will humbly acknowledge our need of each other and live this Special Chapter with a sense of sisterly love and fidelity to the Heart of Jesus.

I would like to end by calling to mind words at the end of the Constitutions of 1982:

In all the circumstances of our life,
wherever our mission leads us
our sole purpose in living is to glorify the Heart of Jesus,
to discover and make known His Love.
These Constitutions point out the way.
They are for us
an authentic expression of our charism.

Trusting in the action of the Spirit
whose law is written in our hearts,
each one of us pledges herself to cherish
these Constitutions,
to deepen her knowledge of them, to observe them,
and to make them live
through a fidelity which is constantly renewed.
We take to heart our responsibility
to intensify our inner life,
to live discernment and obedience, to animate
our apostolic courage so that we may build
a more just world,
and, above all, to strengthen that spirit of union and charity
which should characterize our Society.



In the richness of our varying cultures
and the diversity of our commitments,
these Constitutions will be a bond of love and unity
placing upon the whole Body
the seal of God's work.

We shall form but one heart and one mind,
thus giving reality to the words:
"Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesus".

Then, in and through our Society,
the prayer of Jesus may be fulfilled:
"The glory which you have given me I have given to them,
that they may be one even as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may become perfectly one" (Jn. 17:22-23).

And now I welcome Father Douglas Marcouiller to celebrate with us this banquet of thanksgiving which unites us as One Body.

