



This international gathering of justice, peace and the integrity of creation has begun – listening to the heartbeat of God in our world, in each other and in the beauty of this place.

Thank you for taking the time and effort to get here. We as a central team are happy to have the opportunity to be with you to begin these days together, a gathering that must make a difference among us and for the people that we work with and the places in which God calls to live our commitment to God's people.

It is more than fitting to be here in the Philippines, a part of the Society that from its very beginnings built our mission and work in solidarity with those who are excluded.

It is important to remember that this JPIC meeting has come out of many years of efforts to coordinate JPIC internationally – in recent history through the International JPIC Commission 1997-2001, the creation of the UN office, the Sophia Commission 2002-2006, General Chapter 2008, ad hoc JPIC Commissions 2010-2012, General Chapter 2016). And even before, since the Chapter of 1970 when we were called to live in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, to plan with a world perspective and to take bold action to connect our work for justice and peace across national boundaries.

The participation of RSCJ and co-workers in preparation for this gathering has been extraordinary – you come with the voices of your co-workers and sisters. You come with the people and situations that have invaded your hearts – immigrants and refugees on each continent, trafficked women in every place where we live and work, girls and boys who do not have access to education, children who die because they lack clean water, the blockading of food and medicine as a weapon of war and so many other heart-wrenching realities. You come knowing not only your own reality but also the reality of your sisters and co-workers.

We are in a new moment, a critical moment for our congregation and a crisis moment in our world and in our church. As we listen to the stories of our people and our countries, I know our hearts will be filled to the point of breaking. The challenge for us is to have this piercing of our hearts become a source of compassion and hope, a place of transformation for ourselves and for our world.

I have several hopes for this gathering (and for myself):

- That we hold the lives of our people, especially the young and those who bear the future of the world, at the center of our hearts, at the center of this gathering and at the center of all our deliberations

- That we discover new ways to cross both physical and mental frontiers – between countries and provinces, among our various ways that we are serving God’s people, across generations, between and among the people who have invaded our hearts
- That we create new and deeper ways to integrate our commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation with our spirituality and our commitment as educators
- That we allow the suffering of God’s people to penetrate our hearts and impel us to act together

During this last year we have been inspired by Philippine Duchesne and her companions, who had the courage to cross frontiers, which in their day were extraordinary. Our frontiers of today are even more complex, perhaps not as clear, and certainly more challenged by a world that is moving rapidly away from the values that we hold as central to our call to the radical following of Jesus Christ.

I want you to know that you have the support of the whole Society who called you and sent you to be here for this important gathering. I’d like to end with a prayer and a blessing --

*Bless, now, our ever-new world and each one of you,  
with Philippine’s spirit of great-hearted courage.  
Fill us with her desire to cross frontiers,  
especially those furthest from the touch of hope.  
Renew the whole Church in its missionary spirit  
and give us Philippine’s zeal to spread your compassion  
and love to the ends of the earth.*

*We ask all this in your name, triune God,  
whose love knows no borders or boundaries,  
and who sends us to make known that love in the heart of the world  
now and forever. Amen.*

Barbara Dawson rscj