



LETTER TO PROVINCES

16 October 2018

Dear Sisters and Friends,

Thank you for your prayers and support for the International JPIC meeting, which commences in the Philippines on November 14. A very fine group of RSCJ and lay colleagues will gather for ten days to represent the Society in this meeting and we will keep you well informed throughout. The Central Team will be with us for much of the meeting and we are well supported by interpreters, secretarial staff and logistical support teams. We are deeply grateful to the RSCJ of the Philippine District for their hospitality and care leading up to this important meeting.

This letter is to respond to your generous sharing from the JPIC Reflection Process. This has had a profound influence on our preparation for the JPIC meeting and the following is a synthesis of that process and contribution from the provinces.

During General Chapter 2016 JPIC was named as an emerging call in nearly all Provinces/Districts/ Areas of the Society and called for an international meeting to take place within two years. We engaged Imma De Stefanis RSCJ and Reyna González RSCJ to lead us through a process of preparation for the meeting; to assist us in the design of the meeting's agenda; and to facilitate our days together in the Philippines from November 14-24, 2018.

What have we done?

The preparation process followed a simple form of *See-Judge-Act*. It led you through three stages:

1. With experience as the starting point, we invited you to share your stories. What have been your “Rebecca moments” in your understanding, living or practice of JPIC? From this deeper consciousness, key insights emerged.
2. In stage two, you then explored the broader social, scientific, environmental, political, cultural and economic contexts within which you live and practice JPIC. From these discussions you offered insights and challenges about the causes and historical roots - structural, systemic, historic and cultural – that produced (and continued to perpetuate) the conditions of need and disparity in humanity as well as those of degradation in the earth.

3. The third stage led you to connect with our Tradition and Wisdom. Where have Scripture, Society documents and Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, generated energy and impelled you to action for JPIC. Within this was the question of the inter-relationship of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In May you sent us the results of your conversations and reflections as part of the preparation process. We are extremely pleased to report that we heard from twenty five of our Provinces/ Districts/ Areas. The responses were filled with the experiences and accounts that affirm anew our commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. At the same time, they carried questions and critiques that challenge us to refine our JPIC commitments as Provinces *and* across Provinces, as an international Society.

The responses were translated and we *all* read *all* of the responses. It was extremely important to us that we each had the opportunity to hear and touch your experiences, insights and challenges. During the month of June, we read and met several times via Zoom to analyze the responses. What was each area of the Society telling us? Imma and Reyna joined us for the next step during CoCo's in-person meeting in July in New York. We examined the responses more closely - the consistencies and inconsistencies *across* Province. In other words, what is our collective voice telling us about the current state and future calls of JPIC for us as Religious of the Sacred Heart in the world today. Our involvement in this stage as an entire CoCo team was important to us because the agenda for November is not a predetermined one. Your experiences, insights and challenges have been key in determining the content and methodology of the November meeting.

What have we learned?

Confronted with enormous and complex issues we consistently spoke of the *importance of small, creative consistent action* in response to concrete realities. On the other hand, our responses or our ability to respond in the way that we desire is challenged, often limited, by our political and social environments. We live in countries and local communities that are wrought with political corruption or extremism, and historical-cultural roots of hatred that lead to division on the basis of race, class, ethnicity and gender. Nonetheless, we respond as we are able to the local realities with care and compassion, through concrete actions that remind us of the importance of these small steps. We ourselves feel deeply touched – even personally transformed - by coming into contact with a suffering humanity and a groaning earth. On the other hand, we have not been able to articulate quite as clearly the transformation we see in these realities or in others based on our actions or interventions, whether undertaken alone or in collaboration with others. We see the value of small, creative action steps, but do not seem able to recognize the evidence of small change; the small victories.

Collectively, as an international Society, we expressed ambivalence and ambiguity about working together with others. There is considerable inconsistency in our concepts and practices around *collaboration*. In some cases, the lines are porous and lay collaborators are invited to engagement at many levels of our life and mission. For example, we received a few responses from groups of lay collaborators and partners in mission who had been invited into the reflection process. On the other hand, there are areas of the Society where this is not yet possible. In some instances, we expressed that where we live, fuller collaboration with lay people is not a concept that the wider culture of religious life reinforces. There was sporadic mention of our work with networks, among ourselves and with others; however, we also pointed to our tendency to see ourselves as the “senior” partner. There are other instances, however, where we expressed that it is our *own* culture in the Society that makes this difficult. We spoke of a need for: increased awareness and acceptance of others; a disposition of reciprocity and mutuality; and the development of criteria for collaboration that addresses who, what, how, when and why. We were quite honest in naming power and fear as inhibiting factors. In sharing power and through the very empowerment models we espouse and

practice, there is also the fear of losing power or control and of change itself. In this, we began to name the paradox we are living in relation to justice. We want to work toward increased equality, equity and access and yet, at the same time, may be inadvertently reinforcing the unjust systems we want to eradicate.

In connecting with our tradition and wisdom as Catholics and as Religious of the Sacred Heart, we recognize that our commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation is a long-standing one. Our commitment to justice and peace, in particular, is evident long before it became more formally known as “JPIC.” We are affirmed by the strength of our commitment and the many efforts we have made over the years to live it out in consistent, relevant ways. We want to respond effectively to evolving realities. We saw many references to *Laudato Si’* and your acknowledgment of its impact on our understanding of ‘Our Common Home’ and of JPIC. As Pope Francis says in this same document: “Peace, justice and preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism.” We heard the further call to what many described as integral and integrated ecology. While we are clear about specific projects and initiatives, we are less clear in our overall concept and comprehension of the integration of the three together, of justice and peace and creation. There was expressed desire *to know* what one another is doing; *to share* resources and training materials; and *to develop* a more integral and integrating view of the relationship of JPIC with our educative mission and Sacred Heart spirituality.

What are the opportunities/invitations/challenges for moving forward with JPIC?

We are affirmed in the belief that living and doing JPIC is fundamentally centered on compassion, relationship and transformation. Through this preparation process we know that our commitment to JPIC is, at a minimum, three-fold.

1. We are rooted in and draw strength from the well of a very long tradition of working for justice and peace. This tradition binds us to one another as well as to others in our common efforts to act out of compassion to relieve suffering and effect change in our wounded world.
2. This tradition ties us to the wisdom of our past yet frees us to respond in creative, relevant ways to rapidly changing (at times diminishing) conditions in humanity and in all of creation. The power of small steps taken by previous generations encourages and empowers us to remain steady in our own concrete actions today. We are reminded that relationship is the cornerstone of JPIC: Relationship with God, the past, one another, others, the earth *and* with the future.
3. The future is what we are specifically called to examine at this time. In light of all of the above what are the *future directions and orientations of JPIC* that we feel called to as an international Society? We have heard certain consistent, recurring themes in this regard:
 - There is a yearning for *an integrated approach to and more integral vision for JPIC*. A more integrated approach leads us to learn what one another is doing; to examine our relationship with collaborators; and to develop a more explicit link with our Sacred Heart spirituality and educative mission, particularly (though not exclusively) in the areas of international volunteers and the NGO office at the United Nations.
 - We want to become better informed and educated about the inter-relationship of the local, regional, national and international levels in order to work more effectively toward *structural and systemic change*. We want to deepen our commitment locally and broaden our understanding of the larger root causes of injustice and inequity. In other words, we want our JPIC commitment to have what is called a more “glocal” quality – one that is characterized by both local *and* global considerations.

- We heard two powerful new elements across all Provinces. The first is the call we feel to move forward with JPIC as beacons and ambassadors of *hope*. In so many places, our people are filled with a sense of hopelessness and despair. They feel betrayed by institutions which have lost credibility – political, educational and religious. As Religious of the Sacred Heart we feel called to be examples of what is called *radical hope*. Radical hope is not blind optimism. Radical hope is directed toward a future goodness that depends not on what we have, but rather on what we *practice*. It demands flexibility, openness and imagination. We want to make a difference in the world, but we also want to have an impact on the human spirit that is, for so many, crushed at the hands of poverty, racism, migration, hunger, homelessness, violence, corruption and overall betrayal of our human call as stewards of the earth and all living beings. Inherent in this is how we *live* JPIC as a lifestyle and not just how we *do* JPIC through our various activities.

The second new element is the call to live more fully as global citizens recognizing that by doing so we expose ourselves to the risk and possibility of change within our own structures, systems and selves. Even before we were called to religious life, we were citizens of our world. Sometimes, however, we experience a tension between living as responsible citizens and living out our JPIC commitments. We articulated a need to be better educated and informed in order to live as fully engaged global citizens.

The international JPIC meeting will lead us to delve into what surfaced during the preparation process. It will culminate with concrete proposals about how we might begin to move forward with courage and confidence in the areas we have named. At the same time, the schedule will allow for spaces of silence and meditation and for dialogue as regions. The spaces we create will hopefully lead us to listen ever more deeply to one another and to what the Spirit calls forth from us, perhaps in new ways we have not yet been able to recognize or articulate. In the spirit of radical hope we are working to foster an experience that renders us open, flexible and imaginative.

The preparation process took place between the Feast of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne and the Feast of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat. Our meeting coincides with the closing of the bicentennial year of Philippine – the woman who prayed always and crossed frontiers in all forms. JPIC is a vital expression of the Society's charism and we entrust, as always, our work to the intercession of these holy women, and especially ask for Philippine's guiding spirit to accompany us as we gather.

With love,

Anne Corry RSCJ

(On behalf of the Facilitators of the International JPIC Meeting, **Reyna González RSCJ** and **Imma De Stefanis RSCJ**, and the International JPIC Coordination Committee, **Joy Luz, Rosario Sánchez, Solome Najukka, Sheila Smith and Miren Lumbreras**)