



Society of the
Sacred Heart
of Jesus

OPENING
CONFERENCE
PROBATION 2022

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Barbara Dawson
Superior General

“Do whatever he tells you”



We are so happy to finally welcome you to the beginning of your probation here in Rome. All of us on the Central Team and the Motherhouse community welcome you – Ji Hyun, Mary, Ji Young, Annette, Albertine, Ghandi, Noëlle, María Luisa and Henni as you begin this journey together that we in the Society call probation. I welcome you on behalf of all of our sisters globally and the Sacred Heart family who are praying for you during these months. You are accompanied in a special way by the communities you have been part of during these last months in France and Italy – the BFN communities of Lowendal, Rue Boissac, Ste. Odile in Montpellier, the new community of La Courneuve in the north of Paris, and the Italian communities of Avigliana and Legnaro (near Padua) – and by your home provinces and district, as well as Napoli where Clara has been living and Joigny where Christine has joined the community and ministry.



You are a particularly unique probation. In this time of global uncertainty and universal suffering, I call you the “migrant probation”. While you have not suffered in the same way as migrants who have left their homelands and journeyed to new place with few resources and often under treacherous conditions, you have lived with significant uncertainty during this last year. You were asked to go to a new place, to live with people you did not know, with an unknown language and a foreign environment. I am sure that this experience has called you to a deeper level of trust. You have been asked to believe that probation would really happen, that visas would be secured, that when the time arrived you would be able to enter Italy. I am sure that on some days you said to yourself, “after all these years of preparation for final profession in the Society, why is this happening to me?” I think that this is a very good question. What is God calling you to be, what is God calling you to learn, through this experience? I hope over time you will discover the answer to these questions.

It is important for you to remember that it has taken “a village” to get you here to Rome during this time of pandemic. I would like to thank in a special way the finance and secretarial staff at the Motherhouse, the General Council, your probation team, your provincials, the provinces of Italy and BFN, and each one of you who helped make this day possible. This is a life lesson for all of us – we need each other to go forward more than we often realize, especially in times of uncertainty.

This time is both an individual and a communal journey. We are happy to welcome Clara Malo (Mexico) and Christine Mukoko (Congo-Chad) as the probation team we as a General Council have chosen to accompany you during these months. We can assure you that they have worked hard, especially during these last six months, to prepare themselves and the program for your probation. Both of them are experienced RSCJ, who have both lived our life deeply and accompanied others in learning how



to become Religious of the Sacred Heart. We and you are blessed to have them with you.

You have also accompanied each other as a probation community. You have another unique experience in having already formed a virtual probation community during these last months with Clara and Christine. It is important to remember that you are an intentional international community, whose primary purpose is to help each other ready yourselves both as individuals and as part of a community for your life commitment to our congregation. I urge you as an intentional RSCJ international community to take advantage of the wisdom and experience within this community to discover what these times are telling us, to discover new and life-giving ways to build our “becoming One Body” for the sake of our world, our mission and our life.

Since Sophie’s time, probation has been a significant moment. You are here in Rome for probation and you will also have the wonderful opportunity of having your long retreat in Sophie’s home in Joigny. Those of us on the General Council hope to get to know you better during these months and have the opportunity to welcome you from time to time in our community. While the probation cannot be at the Villa Lante because of construction, I know you will have time to walk in the garden of this holy ground where Sophie walked and prayed and God will speak to your heart during these months. This time is a gift from God and the Society, in which each of you will have the time and space to hear God in a new way, to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ in immediate preparation for making your life commitment as an RSCJ.

Probation is a key moment and experience in each RSCJ’s life. It is also central to the unity and vitality of the Society. We know that Sophie was passionate about creating, sustaining and growing the Cor Unum of the Society. It is not by chance that you nine women are here together in



Rome at this moment in history. The whole Society is in process of giving birth to something new. We have just completed the Special Chapter and have begun to create a new way of being the One Body of the Society for the sake of our mission. While this experience of probation is especially for you, it is also a time for you to make a contribution to the whole of the Society, to actively participate in the creation of the One Body. You will have the opportunity to reflect on the different aspects of the Society – our mission of education, our commitment to poor and marginalized people, our way of integrating a commitment to justice in all that we do, our prayer, our diverse and intercultural way of living community, among many other aspects that you will study and contemplate. We look forward to sharing your experience, your insights, your hopes and your commitment as part of this “birthing process”.

We count on you to make this contribution.

I would like to end by saying something about the icon the probation team has chosen for you – the first miracle of Jesus at the Marriage Feast at Cana, accompanied by the phrase “Do whatever he tells you”. I am sure you will explore and unpack the meaning of this icon during the next months both individually and as a probation community. I would like to share just three things that strike me when I pray with this gospel event in the light of your time of probation.

The first is about paying attention. The second is about trust. And the third is about Mary.

Probation is a new experience for each one of you. It’s a privileged time to deepen your relationship with God. Many things will happen both around you and in you during these months. I’ve been learning a lot lately about **the need to pay attention**, to recognize my need for God, to learn from the people and the circumstances in which I find myself, both difficult ones and easier ones. In order to do this we need to be humble.



Mary called Jesus to pay attention to his situation, to go beyond himself to address the needs of the moment. Perhaps Mary even called Jesus to be humble, to go beyond his comfort zone, to recognize his strengths and his challenges and to begin his public ministry. I urge you to take this time to pay particular attention to what is happening around and within you and to humbly learn what God is saying in the midst of this experience.

Second, Mary **trusted Jesus**. She paid attention to the situation at the feast and she confidently told the servers “Do whatever he tells you.” Mary had simple confidence in her Son. During these months of probation, you will have the time and space to sit with Jesus, to share your inner reality, to trust that Jesus understands the depth of who you are and loves you deeply just as you are. You may have times when you feel like an empty jug or see what is or has been lacking in your life. Trust Jesus, especially in these moments, that He wants to fill your jug with new wine, that you are fine wine that is ready to be shared totally and forever with God’s people. In other times you will be bursting with new energy and a new experience of God in your life. Trust in these moments also, savor them and rejoice in a God who loves us and is ever present.

Lastly, **about Mary**. As one who pondered many things in her heart, perhaps Mary remembered the prophecy of Simeon when she was at the Wedding Feast. “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted; and you yourself a sword will pierce, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35). I hope during probation you will have time to ponder your own relationships to family, friends, community, to the Society as a whole. Turn to Mary to accompany you as you deepen your relationship to Jesus within this context. And when you have a chance, I urge you to visit the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere. Above the altar is a mosaic of Jesus and Mary which speaks of the deep affection and connection between Mary and her Son. To me, it speaks of Jesus’s love and connection with



his Mother and in some ways, his dependence on Mary as mother. Remember that we, too, can depend on Mary as our Constitutions remind us:

Mary, woman of faith among the People of God, lives close to us, as she does to everything that radiates the life of her Son.

Our Society entrusts itself in a special way to her whose heart is united and conformed to that of Jesus, so that she may lead us to Him. (Constitutions §9).

I am sure this time will be rich for each one of you. Your experience and commitment will be a lifelong gift to you and will certainly strengthen the One Body of the Society. And so we bless you as you and we begin this journey together...

