

## The General Chapter has begun!



### The 2016 General Chapter of the Society of the Sacred Heart opened on the 7th of July at the Ad Gentes Center in Nemi, Italy.

Three moments marked this opening of the General Chapter: the opening conference, the ritual of calling each capitulant, and the opening liturgy of the Eucharist.

#### 1. The opening conference



Superior General Kathleen Conan welcomed the 78 capitulants plus two invited members, from 27 provinces, districts or areas, and various international services, who "in the next five weeks ... will be reflecting together on what we have discovered of the life that has been and is unfolding among us and around us – its richness, its variety, its places of vulnerability, challenge and energy [and] will discern how the Society is called to live our mission into the emerging future, a future which calls for creativity, courage and commitment so that God's immense, tender, strong and merciful love may shape that future."

After highlighting the responsibilities and the spirit of the chapter, as stated in our Constitutions, Sister Conan invited the capitulants to reflect on the attitudes that are asked of each one: that of

acting in a spirit of discernment and with inner freedom, and of going beyond the horizons of her own province, keeping in view the good of the whole Body.

She reminded us that we are not alone. We come from a journey which our sisters throughout the Society have been making during the past year; and we are surrounded by holy people who have journeyed before us and will be very present in our work here: Sophie, Philippine, and Jesus, who is offering to Mary and to us the bread and wine which will nourish us on this journey.

Trusting in the Spirit who calls and leads us, Sister Conan then declared the 2016 General Chapter open.

## **2. The ritual of calling each capitulant**



Each capitulant was called by name: "Each one comes as herself, sent by our sisters with her gifts and her experience of living our common vocation. We come with our sisters and with the peoples of our various cultures represented by the cloths carried from all parts of the world, cloths that will enfold, carry, brighten and shape our journey."

As each capitulant responded with "Here I am" in her own language and came through the door into the chapter room, she did so intentionally, committing herself to take up the responsibility that our sisters have confided to us of searching together as a chapter body for the way that Jesus is calling us now to love out the love of his pierced open heart. She then placed her lighted candle on the altar, and asked the Spirit for the grace that she needs as she takes up this responsibility.

In addition to the capitulants there are about thirty people helping the chapter -- rscj from various provinces, our collaborators from the generalate and elsewhere. They joined the capitulants at the altar, and together we prayed:

*May our desire to be women of our times, captivated by the love of Christ, in the context of our current realities and open to the calls of the world, sustain us as we live this journey together, strengthening one another in prayer.*

*May the Spirit that led Sophie to see the needs of her times accompany us as we discover and discern the directions and decisions to take so that we may continue to live the mission of God's love today and into the emerging future.*

(Letter of Convocation, 2 February 2015)

### **3. The opening liturgy of the Eucharist**



The Eucharistic liturgy, which began with an invocation of the Holy Spirit, was presided by Adolfo Nicolas SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

Drawing from the readings of the Mass, Fr. Nicolas shared his reflections and underlined further the work of the Spirit in a chapter. Some echoes:

*When we open to each other, we realize there is fire in our midst.*

*Like Mary, we are invited to be contemplative and to learn from what we hear from others.*

*The Spirit encourages us to open ourselves to something bigger than ourselves.*

*Clearly the work of the Spirit goes beyond our imagination and our experience.*

*We do not come to a General Chapter to make our culture known. We want to go beyond our culture. We want to go where the Spirit is waiting for us.*

*We want to go beyond, and this beyond we know is the gospel, and the gospel is going to take us where we cannot imagine, where we cannot even experience.*

He ended by saying that a chapter "requires a lot of prayer". If not done through prayer, a chapter would not have "the depth, the convincing power that we want our chapters to be like."



We end this summary with words from the Opening Conference:

*God welcomes us to this chapter with gratitude, gratitude that we come with openness and desire to see together how to be God's heart for the world of our emerging future.*

*Jesus is the door through whom we enter the chapter, the One who has called us to this vocation and whose path we want to follow ever more closely.*

*As we come to this chapter space, we do so with confidence that the Spirit precedes us and leads us. She dwells in our charism and mission, which will frame our work. She inhabits each one of the capitulants with whom we will share this journey.*