

REFLECTIONS
FOR THE 140th
ANNIVERSARY
OF FOUNDATION

2

June 16, 2023

1883
2023
SSM

Poverty and solidarity

Sr. Gudrun M. Schellner, SSM

I remember a discussion in a school class about poverty and renunciation. I realized then that these two terms had only negative connotations for almost everyone. This prompted me to emphasize even more clearly that it is not a matter of living poverty for poverty's sake, nor of doing without for its own sake. The absolute majority of the world's population cannot choose poverty and renunciation, but they find themselves in these situations without being asked.

When we as religious freely choose poverty, it is on the one hand a sign of solidarity with the involuntary poor and on the other hand it enables us to share more. Sharing the "tithe" of income with others is not only anchored in Christianity.

The **Holy Scripture** repeatedly admonishes us to be poor and presents Jesus Christ to us as a model.

He lived physically materially poor. Jesus said about Himself: "The foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." (Mt 8:20)



Ultimately, however, Jesus' whole life was nothing but self-giving: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: He who was rich became poor for your sake, that you through His poverty might be made rich." (2 Cor 8:9)

The example of the poor widow shows us how far solidarity with others can go: "He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box. But he also saw a poor widow who put two small coins there. Then he said, 'Truly, I say to you: This poor widow has put in more than all the others. For all of them have put in only a little of their abundance; but this woman, who lacks the most, has put in all her living.'" (Lk 21:1-4)

In **Mother Frances** we have a great example of living poverty and solidarity. Both her letters and testimonies testify to this.



Mother Frances writes to Fr. Jordan that poverty must occupy a very central place in the new foundation. Literally we read in her letter:

“As soon as the word “poverty” sounds in my ear, my whole being experiences holy joy. Therefore, I beg you to be strong wherever there is a question of safeguarding the cause of perfect poverty. Fear nothing in this regard. The great poor one of Assisi will intercede the more for your God willed foundation in the contradictions concerning the surest fundamental virtue for a new spiritual structure, the less you consent that the purity of this mistress of the great father be stained by robbing it somewhat of its original observance. Be anxiously concerned, Reverend Father, to guide truly poor members to Holy Mother Church, for thereby you will be giving her at the same time humble and obedient children, since one who is truly poor is also humble and obedient. I call poverty the mother of religious virtues”. (Letter 2 (2), February 18, 1883, #3)

“The Servant of God loved the example of poverty that St. Francis followed, thus she sought eagerly to live out his example. She was not happy with the institutes she entered, including Father Jordan’s, as she constantly sought to lead an even more detached, poorer, simpler, and more rigorous lifestyle. She encouraged her sisters to embrace this way of life, and used to say: ‘Love of poverty is the foundation of all virtues.’ Their external poverty in action was service to others, which implies the freedom and discipline of a simple lifestyle. Moreover, her inner poverty, which manifested as a ‘delicate humility’, gave rise to the testimony of her life and service, of which it could be said: ‘She never thought about herself.’ (Testimony)

“She loved poverty and lived it to the fullest. She lived it with regard to all material things, however, she took care of the needs of the sisters with great concern.” (Sr. M. Stanisla Schön)

“She loved God and her neighbors very much, with a special affection for the children and the poor. She encouraged us to be patient and kind with the sick and to do this service out of love for God. She took very good care of the sisters.” (Sr. M. Wendelina Bauer)

“She loved everyone equally, and yet expressed this love in a special way toward those who caused her trouble and displeasure. She prayed for those who had tried to damage her reputation by distorting the truth.” (Sr. M. Johanna Ankenbrand)

Our **Constitutions** remind us:

“[...] In vowing consecrated poverty, we follow Christ, who although he was rich, became poor for us. Through consecrated poverty we commit ourselves to be poor in fact and in spirit, dependent on the providence of God. We choose a life of labor and moderation, foreign to wealth, and detached from personal possessing through limiting the use and disposition of goods.” (OWL #15)

“[...]. If our consecrated poverty is the fruit of love, the same spirit of joy and thanksgiving will be manifested when we experience limitations, sufferings and the cross, as when we receive abundant gifts from God.” (OWL #23)

At our 23rd General Assembly in October 2022, we identified seven clear Calls and committed ourselves to implementing them with joy, faithfulness and hope, thereby enabling life in abundance for ourselves and others.

Precisely because we are interdependent, fraternal living that takes into account the needs of all is necessary. If we take the needs of all seriously, then renunciation, poverty and solidarity are called for in a very concrete way. This can show itself in letting go of one’s own independence or in putting aside one’s own ideas for the sake of the greater good. Living in solidarity requires an honest sharing of our abilities, experiences and goods. This is only possible in trust that the other person means well for me and that I do not fall short. This trust grows out of forgiveness and reconciliation with our brokenness.

Reflection

Personal questions:

- As I examine my lifestyle and apostolic ministry, how do I live out this vision of poverty, of “delicate humility”?
- Where do I advocate for the poor and vulnerable?
- Where do I speak up for the voiceless of my time?

Communal question:

As we reflect on the spirit of a life of poverty and the needs of God’s people in our local areas, what two steps can we take to serve those in need, following the example of Mother Frances?

Prayer

Gracious God,
we thank you that most of us are doing so well.
We often take it for granted
or imagine that we have earned it all.
This sometimes makes us unmerciful to those,
who are lacking,
who can’t get along in our society.
We often only blame them,
we ignore their problems lightly
or offer solutions that are far too easy.
God, free us from all arrogance and self-righteousness!
Open our eyes to the real reasons for poverty and social failure.
Let us treat those who are affected with respect
and awaken in us the willingness
to support them in everything they need,
to improve their situation.
God, hold within us your vision
of a humane and just world.
Give us patience and perseverance,
to stand up for it in word and deed wherever it is needed.
Amen.



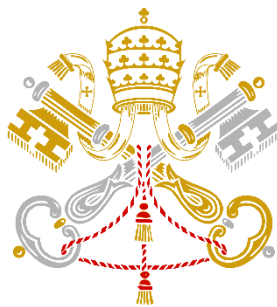
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INSIGHTS

DOCUMENTS AND MEMOIRS OF SSM'S

Peter's Pence

On December 13, 1938, the Secretariat of State of His Holiness Pius XI sent a thank you letter to the General Superior, Sr. M. Wendelina Bauer, for the traditional offering of the Peter's Pence as the Congregation's commitment to support the charitable initiatives promoted by the Holy See. The letter is signed by Cardinal Pacelli, who would become Pope Pius XII the following year.



Secretariat of State
of His Holiness

Vatican City, December 13, 1938

Rev.da madre Superiora,

Reverend Mother Superior,

the homage of your donation for Peter's Pence which you devoutly sent on behalf of the Sisters of Sorrowful Mother, directed by you, was for the Holy Father, an eloquent attestation of your fervent filial piety.

This admirable action was certainly suggested by your sensitivity to contribute to the great initiatives of good that the Holy See promotes or supports for religious and charitable purposes.

Yours was a noble gesture, which deserves the praise and gratitude of the Holy Father, and at the same time, without a doubt, will deserve wide divine blessings.

These are what His Holiness invokes for this Institute and cordially grants to all members his Apostolic Blessing, wishing decisive and luminous progress in the worship of virtues and in spiritual perfection.

I avail myself of this occasion to express my religious respects.
Most devout, in the Lord.

E. Cardinal Pacelli

«You have not only
a glorious history
to remember
and to recount,
but also a great history
still to be accomplished!»

General Directory

The directives for the distribution of the tithe and for the support of the Pontifical Charity, which had been the custom of the various General Administrations, became a Congregational commitment in the General Directory approved by the 17th General Assembly in 1992. These directives were updated and approved by the 21st General Assembly in 2012.

Chapter IX

9.5 The Congregation contributes annually to the Peter's Pence collection.

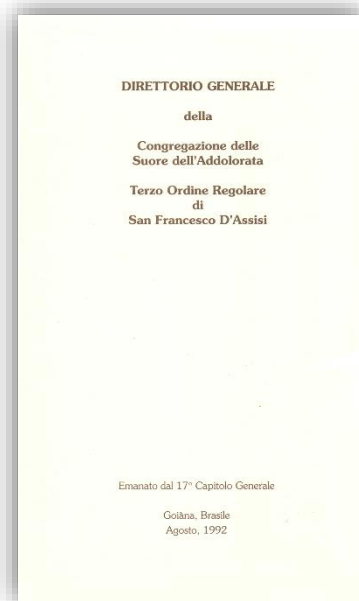
9.6 The congregation gives a tithe (10%) of its annual income to the poor.

The sources for the tithe will be determined each year by the SSM International Finance, Inc. Board. The tithe is divided into four categories. They are:

- charitable donations for the poor
- contributions to projects which empower the poor and enable them to live in dignity
- subsidy to SSM ministries or services
- Peter's Pence

The general council in collaboration with the provincial/regional councils determines the apportionment.

9.7 In addition to the tithe, province/regions/delegation seek ways to assist the economically disadvantaged and develop the criteria and the manner for distribution.



Letter from the General Superior, Sr. M. Helen Malolepsy

Excerpts from a letter from Sr. M. Helen Malolepsy, then General Superior, to all the Sisters of the Congregation, dated October 4, 1999. On the threshold of the Jubilee Year 2000, she reports that the Congregation is responding to Pope John Paul II's appeal for forgiveness of debts to the nations.

In fact, through a program prepared by the Board of Directors of SSM International Finance and approved by the General Council, the Congregation supported many religious communities in need in various parts of the world that year, as well as many activities in favor of populations disadvantaged by war and poverty.

Roma, October 4, 1999

Dear Sisters,

We are quickly approaching the beginning of the new millennium. In the last few years we have heard many times of Pope John Paul II's call for debt forgiveness for those nations who can no longer bear their burden of debt. This is in the spirit of the original meaning of jubilee year from the Old Testament Book of Leviticus. I know that many of you have signed the petition that asks lending nations to forgive debts of the most needy nations. When we hear the stories of the people in some of the near destitute nations of our world, we realize the importance of such an expression of solidarity.

We as a congregation have been blessed with pioneer sisters who were very saving, with sisters who have labored hard and long in ministry to others and for whose service the congregation received recompense. We, for the most part, have been careful with our spending in keeping with the vow of poverty and our congregation's special call to solidarity with the poor. We have had excellent finance persons within the community and outside who have helped us invest our funds wisely.

[...]

Sisters, let us give thanks to God for the abundance of God's gifts available to us, not only the financial blessings, but the abundance of love showered upon us. Let us ask for the grace to share wholeheartedly what we have with those in need. Let us ask forgiveness for the times we have not been willing to share.

United in prayer,
Sister M. Helen Malolepsy
General Superior

Certificate of Appreciation and Gratitude (Custody of the Holy Land)

The parchment sent by the Custody of the Holy Land to Sr. Catherine Marie Hanegan, then General Superior, on January 11, 2021 is a certificate of appreciation and gratitude to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother for supporting the activities of the Custody of the Holy Land.

