



World Day for Consecrated Life
2 February 2020

Jubilee Letter – 2020

Deepening Communion

Called and sent to deepen communion... (YAS, C 9)

Dear Sister Jubilarians of 2020,

With profound gratitude and great joy, I congratulate each of you on the anniversary of your first profession of vows, some 25, 40, 50, 60, 70, 75, or 80 years ago! As you celebrate this moment in your life, may you experience anew the fidelity and intimate love of our God and the invitation to ever-deepening communion.

Your jubilee is a great source of hope and joy for us your sisters and for our world, as your life gives testimony to God's love and desire for abundant life for all. We thank you for the gift of your faithfulness, and we thank God for all that God has accomplished in and through you.

The World Day of Consecrated Life is an occasion for us to thank God for the gift of this vocation. As Pope Francis has reminded us, consecrated life is both praise and prophetic vision. It is praise that gives joy to God's people; it is prophetic vision that reveals what is truly important in life. Consecrated life is about new life, a living encounter with God in God's people (cf. Pope Francis, Homily on February 2, 2019), and a commitment to deepen communion.

Praying for each of you by name as I wrote this letter, I wondered about your life experience of the call to deepen communion as a School Sister of Notre Dame. I invite you, during your jubilee year, to reflect on your journey of being called and sent to deepen communion. What brought you to first hear this call? What has supported your response in life? How are you now being called and sent?

Love's call to communion

God desires us to be in constant communion (YAS, GD 45).

God calls us to communion. A call to consecrated life always begins with an encounter with the God of life, with Love itself. God is "the Love who is able to fill the heart of each person" (Pope John Paul II, Message for the 1st World Day for Consecrated Life, 1997). The call is first a gift, an initiative of God, who draws each one with an intimate love and for a special mission. Our Constitution *You Are Sent* speaks of this dynamic relationship. "Because God first loved us, we respond in love... Caught up in Christ's unconditional love, we joyfully commit the totality of our person" (YAS, C 10, 13).

The call to communion arises from this intimate, personal love of God. Coming from Love, it continues in God, moving toward an ever more inclusive Love. God, who is Love, incarnates love as the universe itself, in which we are “joined in a splendid universal communion” (*Laudato Si'*, 220). Called and drawn into the divine embrace, we find ourselves impelled to extend the gift of this holy embrace of love outward into ever-widening circles.

“By virtue of our being created in the image and likeness of God who is communion . . . , we carry forever in our hearts the longing for living in communion...” (Pope Francis, Message for the 53rd World Communications Day, 2019). As we come to realize our true identity and God’s desire for us to be in constant communion, we perceive the mystery of the Trinity in our very lives.

Each of us, without exception, live inside a Trinitarian and cosmic identity that guides, shapes, and moves us toward ever greater oneness. This is God’s design for the whole of humanity and all of creation. God’s love creates communion. It is this “love which calls us together into a universal communion” (*Laudato Si'*, 76). Again, and yet again, Love calls us into communion.

▲ How have you experienced Love’s call to communion?

Sent to deepen communion

... in every place, in every time, in every situation (YAS, C 9).

God seeks communion. For this, Jesus was sent, prayed, lived, and gave his life. We come to realize this more profoundly as we reflect on the experience of Love’s call to communion in our lives in mission as School Sisters of Notre Dame. As Christ was sent, we too have been and are being sent to bring all to oneness, all to a deepening communion.

Aware of the realities of our world, we recognize the urgent need for the charism embodied in Blessed Theresa and entrusted to us in our times. Her longing for oneness of all in God and her struggle for unity stir within us, challenge and inspire us for mission—to deepen communion wherever we are, in every place, time, situation (cf. YAS, C 9). Jubilee is a time for us to consider how we have incarnated the charism and lived this mission in our lives and to discern how we are being called and sent now, in these times.

Pope Francis often reminds us that mission is about going to the margins—to the peripheries and responding to what God’s world needs. This involves living a culture of encounter and embracing “the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale” (*Laudato Si'*, 9). As understanding of our ever-expanding universe grows, our consciousness of who we are in relation to God, one another, and all creation must expand, and the scope of our concern and lived response must broaden and deepen.

Echoing within us is the call to be “experts in communion” and witnesses of communion in our wounded world. Painfully aware of those who suffer and strengthened by God’s grace, we are called to “have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. Jn 17:21)” (Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People* 21 November 2014, I.2). Fidelity to God’s mission demands that we foster universal communion in all that we are and do.

▲ In what ways are you being sent to deepen communion?

Path to deepening communion

... to lay down our lives so that deeper communion ... be realized (YAS, C 34).

God's love creates communion. The way God comes to us is our way to God and one another, the way of reconciling love and of communion. Everyday life encounters with God and with others are the spaces, moments, and opportunities to deepen communion in our lives and in our world. In every dimension of our lives, "we are enabled to grow in communion with God and with one another and in acceptance of responsibility for the earth and its people" (YAS, C 25).

The path toward deepening communion requires a daily, deliberate choice of love and of being instruments of healing and reconciliation in the concreteness of life. The transformation required of us to live this authentically is not a one-time occurrence. Our "yes" to follow Christ radically must be repeated, deepened, and made new time and again; otherwise, we will have only nice memories of the past.

Through prayer, particularly through contemplative prayer, we become ever more sensitive to the movement of the Spirit. Our hearts open to communion as we gradually come to see and experience reality with the eyes and heart of God. Through the power of the Spirit, we can transcend ourselves and are freed to enter into deeper communion with the Triune God, with all humanity, and with the whole of creation.

A deepening of communion is not automatic. Realities of our world today suggest that true communion will demand everything of us: total self-surrender with a readiness to suffer and to risk and relinquish all. "The path to our deepest communion with one another, with God and with the wider world is the deep, unrelenting grief and heartbreak that marks our lives and the lives of our communities" (Mary Pellegrino, CSJ, "The Future Enters Us Long Before It Happens: Opening Space for an Emerging Narrative of Communion," LCWR, August 10, 2017).

In carrying out Christ's mission to bring all to oneness with God, we will experience and must embrace the paschal mystery in our lives. Daily we are drawn anew into Christ's self-emptying and urged to lay down our lives so that deeper communion be realized (cf. YAS, C 5, 33, 34).

This is our call as School Sisters of Notre Dame: to live in such a way that God's reign of love, of a splendid universal communion, becomes more clearly visible, more real in our world (cf. YAS, C 12). Consecrated by the Triune God, who is communion, we are impelled into the heart of the world to deepen communion by our very lives.

▲ What path leads you to deepening communion?

My dear Sister Jubilarians, with God loving you into ever-deepening communion, may you celebrate with joy, be renewed in your commitment, and be encouraged to respond with a life of love that gives everything.

In communion,

Sister Roxanne Schares

Sister Roxanne Schares, SSND
General Superior