

Notes from the Chapter Planning Committee...

The General Chapter Planning Committee (GCPC) has been meeting since February 2021 and to date has had seven two or three-day meetings—over eight time zones and three continents—all via Zoom. What an experience! What an accomplishment! Members include: Sister Danat Marie Brysch and Siostra Maria Franciszka Stępniewska, Chairperson and Chapter Coordinator, Siostra Maria Błażeja Kowal (PZ), Sister Mary Jolene Jasinski (NA), Sister Margaret Mary Njoki Mbogo (KY), Siostra Maria Maristella Helmecka (KR), Sister Mary Rosita Brennan (NA), and Siostra Maria Wirginia Nowak (WA). Siostra Maria Anita Ruguła serves as the Translator (RO) and Sister Felicity Marie Madigan (NA), as the Recording Secretary. Irma Jusciêda Maria Araújo Menezes would be present to represent Brazil as she could. This article will present some highlights and important points from the seven meetings.

February 8-9, 2021

The inaugural meeting was an organizing time—to understand the role before us and to set a pathway to travel towards the 25th General Chapter (GC) in May of 2024. Items of business included the role of the committee, a review of the evaluations of the 24th (GC) of 2018 and the role of a Chapter as defined in *Response to Love*, a method of facilitation and the use of a canonist for the revisions to the Constitutions. A timeline* toward the Chapter was presented, developed by Sister Danat and the General Council, which laid out the various milestones that needed to be reached—a Chapter theme, logo, theological reflections and rituals, local and provincial chapters, selection of delegates, to name but a few. A good portion of the second day's meeting was spent on discussions of the GC Subcommittees: Handbook, Liturgy and Ritual, Theological Reflection, Election Process and Communications. Lastly, the GCPC spent time reflecting and discussing what might be envisioned for Chapter. Hoped-for outcomes included a deeper living and understanding of our identity as Felician Sisters, a renewal of our spirit, a deeper understanding of the world in which we live and how we might revive our apostolic mission to bring the Gospel message to it, a new identification of the needs of the Church and the world, especially the marginalized and how we might address these needs in a new and fresh way. Since a GC is a sign of the unity and love among the sisters, a better understanding of diversity needs to be considered. Sister Danat Marie in her opening comments to the GCPC noted that *we need to view our internationality in a positive way and that leaders of many international Congregations (USIG) state that if communities do not embrace internationality, there will be no future for their Congregations*. The first order of business for the GCPC was the invitation to the Sisters of the Congregation to develop a scriptural theme for the 25th GC—a directive from the 24th Chapter.

May 26-27, 2021

Following up on the discussion from the previous meeting, the GCPC reviewed the goals for the 25th GC. Sister Danat stated that she hoped the Chapter would be able to develop a *Mandatum* to guide the Congregation for the next six years based on the following outcomes: a closer look at our identity, a renewed spirit, a deepened understanding of the Church, the world and their needs, an apostolic response to the needs of the Church and world, and to reflect and pray over the proposed changes to the Constitution. Items of business included: reports from the organizing meetings of the GC Subcommittees, GC Facilitator and Chapter theme. Rev. Timothy Norton, SDV from Sydney, Australia was chosen by the Minister General and Council to be the facilitator for the Chapter. The GCPC spent time in discussing what some of the expectations and functions of the facilitator might be before and during the Chapter. Time on the second day of meeting was spent in the development of the theme for the Chapter. Many suggestions had been received from the Provinces as a result of the invitation from Sister Danat to the sisters for a suggestion. After a lengthy discussion the following theme was chosen:

The love of Christ impels us... Conversion, Reconciliation, Mission (2 Cor 5:14). The next order of business would be the development of an explanation for the theme* as well as an invitation to the Sister artists of the Congregation for a Chapter Logo that captures the spirit of the theme.

September 15-17, 2021

In addition to the reports from the various GC Subcommittees, the process for the Local and Provincial Chapters, the development of Theological Reflections (TRs), an explanation of the theme and the choice of a GC logo were the main items of business for this third, three-day meeting of the GCPC. The first day of meetings was expended on the reports from the various GC Subcommittees principally due to the need to provide updates but also to gain more clarity of expectations and outcomes for the subcommittees.

Day two began with discussions of the TRs needed before and during the Chapter. It was agreed that four TRs would be developed based on the Chapter theme. One TR would be for use by the Local Chapters, two for during the Chapter and one for the election process to be used by the Congregation prior to the Chapter. The dates of the 25th General Chapter were established for May 18 to June 12 in order to address the extra time needed for the revisions to the Constitutions. Sister Danat noted that Reverend Krzysztof Gierat, CMF has been engaged to be the canonist for the GC. Father Gierat currently works at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL). He will also work as a consultant to the *Constitutions Revision Task Force* so that proposed changes to the Constitutions will be in the form that will be acceptable to the Vatican Dicastery (CICLSAL) responsible for approving any changes.

Eleven Sisters submitted over 15 sketches of possible logos for the GC. After much reflection and discussion the sketch from Siostra Maria Monika Fugiel from Krakow was chosen on day three of the meeting. Sister Monika would be asked to provide a written commentary* on her logo to be shared with the sisters. All the logos submitted will be displayed during the General Chapter.

January 11-13, 2022

One of the first news items of the *Meeting V* was that Father Timothy Norton, the GC Facilitator had been appointed a Bishop in Australia and would not be available. Ms. Frances Heery, an Irish Catholic Laywoman, had been appointed by Sister Danat Marie and the General Council. In addition to the GC Subcommittee updates, agenda items included: refinements to the logo, the Handbook of Procedures and the Election Process; the novena, prayers and rituals needed from the Liturgy Subcommittee; the roles, functions and duties of various staff persons during the Chapter, i.e., the facilitator and the secretaries; and the technology needs and their availability at the Christian Brothers Generalate where the Chapter will take place. A good deal of discussion was held on the languages to be used during the liturgies and rituals for the Chapter, i.e., Polish, English, Portuguese and Swahili. Emphasis was placed on the need to be inclusive and sensitive to all our Congregational cultures and yet not to restrain the flow of the liturgy. Work also continued on refining the Process for the Local and Provincial Chapters.

March 21-23, 2022

Frances Heery, the new GC Facilitator, was able to join us for this and subsequent meetings. Following the usual GC Subcommittee reports, updates and clarifications, time was given to a careful study of the Elections Process to be used towards the end of the GC to elect the Minister General and Council. The roles and functions of the Chapter facilitator were again reviewed and updated. Work was begun on crafting the daily schedule for the GC. A large portion of the meeting was given to preparation of materials to be used at the Local Level and Provincial Chapters.

As this was her first meeting with the GCPC, Frances Heery invited the members to reflect and share with her on several questions. Her first set of questions were: *What kind of Chapter do you want and what kind of Chapter do you need?* After hearing the responses from all present, Frances reflected back to the group that *there was a strong emphasis of going into the future together with a revitalization of new life.* She also heard an *energy coming from the heart.* Frances then asked about what have been good experiences from previous chapters and what should not happen at the Chapter? The members wholeheartedly shared with her the good and the challenging. Frances again reflected back that she heard a *desire to listen to one another and to respect diversity.* Frances then asked about how we might move forward around Mission? From this discussion, Frances was able to make comparisons of our thinking with the synodal process to which Pope Francis is inviting the Church.

August 29-30, 2022

A segment of this two day Zoom meeting was the preparation for the Biennial Assembly to be held in Krakow, Poland, in person, in September. Day one used a good portion of the meeting to carefully review the *Handbook of Rules and Procedures.* Work also continued on the refinement of the Elections Process. The Chapter Booklet for the Local Level Chapters was given one more review as it was to be a major presentation at the Biennial Assembly. The Provinces will begin to use it throughout the Fall in preparation for the Provincial Chapters to be held in the late Spring and Summer. Consideration was given to the pros and cons of using electronic devices for voting. In addition to saving reams of paper, an electronic device allows for streamlining the voting procedures and results are immediately known. Our Lady of Hope Province in North America has used tablets for its last Provincial Chapter and its Chapter of Elections very successfully. One concern raised was the question of voting anonymity, which an electronic device and the voting platform used assures. This issue would also be presented and discussed at the Biennial Assembly. The use of an electronic device would also be a means of storing and disseminating the documents used and generated throughout the Chapter, e.g., the Handbook of Rules and Procedures, CVs of delegates and nominees for elected positions, and the daily Chapter minutes.

January 17-19, 2023

While the work of the GC Subcommittees has been ongoing and has been the subject of reporting for each of the GCPC meetings, the fruit of these committees is beginning to be finalized and come to closure. The members were able to review and make final comments on the *Handbook of Rules and Procedures, The Discernment Process for the Elections of the Minister General and Council*, and two of the Theological Reflections. The materials which had been presented to the Provincial and Vice Provincial Ministers, Vicars and Chapter coordinators at the Biennial Assembly and recommendations from them for revisions were considered. Several important guidelines and criteria for the General Chapter were presented and discussed. These included*: the *Provincial/Vice Provincial Chapter Planning Process, Qualities Needed in a GC Delegate, The Guiding Principles of Communal Discernment, Guidelines for Respectful Conversations* and the *Responsibilities of a General Chapter Delegate.*

Frances Heery, the Facilitator, was able to share her thoughts on the Chapter and had prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the members' reflection. Work continued on the schedule for each day of the Chapter. As the work of the *Revisions to the Constitutions Task Force* continues, more will become known and available to consider in terms of days necessary for addressing changes to the Constitutions.

more to come.....