

WELCOME BY SR. EDITH

Good morning, reverend bishop and Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo and Mrs. Gabriella Marino,

Good morning Dear Sisters from around the world,

In the name of all the members of the Generalate, I want to welcome each one of you very warmly here to our motherhouse for this important meeting about “Salvatorian Advocacy for Victims of Exploitation” with a special emphasis on Anti-Human-Trafficking.

This is a historical moment in our Congregation. Sisters from the entire Salvatorian World, from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe are coming together to study, to reflect, to pray and to make decisions about this special and urgent issue regarding the dignity and sacredness of life. It is very appropriate and, in fact, essential to do this now during these years since our last General Chapter because the key priority for these 6 years – the heart of our mission - was set in 2012, as you know, to say this:

“We Salvatorian Women strive
to be in solidarity with the suffering world so that
all may experience the fullness of life.”

Many of you have much experience and surely each one of you has studied deeply in preparation for this meeting about the very sad reality of all kinds of exploitation of people in our world. Maybe, you have felt the same as we throughout your reflections – that among many evils, Human trafficking is a unique assault on human dignity and an affront to God’s dream of “Abundance of life for all” or the ‘fullness of life,’ which is expressed so beautifully in John 10:10, “*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.*”

Human trafficking is also an affront to God’s creation of people according to his loving desire for us, as we read in the book of Genesis: “*God said, 'Let us make human beings in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves.... God created a person in the image of himself, in the image of God he created people, male and female God created them.*”

We could actually stop explaining more reasons and motivations for working against human trafficking and to remain only with these two powerful “Words of God.”

But as Salvatorian Sisters who are called to “Salvatorian Advocacy” for those who are suffering from lack of respect for their human dignity because of the crime of Human-Trafficking and other forms of exploitation, it is also good to get motivation and support from our founders Francis Mary of the Cross Jordan and Mary of the Apostles.

Fr. Jordan’s own life history in itself made him especially sensitive to the struggles of the needy. The young man whose family lived on the edge of social acceptance became the man who wrote in his *Spiritual Diary* (I/133) “... be very loving, understanding, and compassionate to the poor, the sick, the despised, the abandoned ... never look down upon any person.” In early Salvatorian literature, we can find repeated references to universal love and a special concern for God’s “little ones” like when we read in Father Jordan’s record, in his *Spiritual Diary* (I/105): “I suspect that we cannot have devout lives in the world without some active tending of the poor.”

And we see traces of Mother Mary's concern for the poor, for example, in her poem "*Song of a Sister of Charity*" in which she speaks of her compassion for the suffering, the poor ... all who are afflicted. "... From now on, I will suffer everything for my God and for others ... the mass of poor and suffering ..."¹

This spirit of our Founders inspires us also today

- to announce the Savior and salvation, having in mind among others the millions of women, men and children who suffer every day from modern day slavery,
- it invites us to let ourselves be inspired by "*the charity of Christ*" and to
- allow ourselves to be infected by the love that saves.

In this respect, we understand why Fr. Jordan insists so much on love as a fundamental element in our spirituality. Thus, inspired by the love of Christ who saves, we seek to include all persons, without distinction of race, color, class, nationality or apostolic activity. Just as we cannot exclude any person, we need to be flexible in our apostolic activities. As a result, we welcome any activity, especially that which corresponds to the real needs of the church and the people, in our case working against Human Trafficking. In doing this, we are attentive to the concrete circumstances of time and place, opting always for "the little ones," the poor. Our apostolic life is always guided by the goodness and love of God for all, revealed in the person of the Savior. Therefore, we are called to work for the liberation and salvation of all people without distinction² and consequently we are called to work for the liberation of millions of children, women and men who are sold like commercial goods and slaves without any respect for God-given dignity and preciousness of human beings.

This aspect of our Salvatorian Charism and Spirituality has inspired the Congregation for many years. We need only to look at recent decisions of our General Chapters. While listening to the signs of the times and the gift of our Charism, the Holy Spirit had already led the congregation in 2001 to a concern for the new form of slavery that damages the dignity and freedom of hundreds of thousands of women and minors, primarily those coming from the world's poorest countries.

The members of the General Chapter in 2001 declared that "*We, Salvatorian Sisters, attentive to the needs of the world like our founders, hear the cry of women throughout the ages – centuries of violence, discrimination and oppression. We reclaim the design proclaimed in Genesis – man and woman created in partnership, both equal in realizing the plan of God. To do this we take up the "re-establishing" of our God-given dignity and enter into a process of salvation for women as stated by the International Union of Superiors General Declaration (May, 2001).*

United with a million religious Sisters from all over the world, we publicly declare our determination to address insistently at every level the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children with particular attention to the trafficking of women that has become a lucrative multi-national business."

During the process of implementing this priority, many sisters became aware of this worldwide crime and several units began great efforts to work against human trafficking. Because it is an ever-

¹ S. Carol Leah Thresher SDS, *Universality as Inclusive Love*, in: *Contributions on Salvatorian History, Charism and Spirituality Volume Four*, pp. 57-70

² Arno Boesing, SDS, *Salvatorian Spirituality*, in: *Contributions on Salvatorian History, Charism and Spirituality Volume Five*, pp. 33-52

growing issue that touches every part of the globe even until today, it demands a worldwide response. We, as a Congregation, decided in our recent General Chapter in 2012, the following:

As Salvatorian women in solidarity with the suffering world, we are called to manifest the goodness and kindness of the Savior. Immersed by our mission in that world, we commit ourselves to social justice and to defend the fullness of life in a prophetic way.....

4. *Each sister and unit will take concrete steps to respond to the globalization of human trafficking by using our human and financial resources to:*
 - *Raise our own awareness of the reality of human trafficking;*
 - *Prevent the trafficking of the vulnerable, through raising awareness and by providing education for them;*
 - *And, where possible, to work directly with victims of trafficking in collaboration with others.*

I have much hope and I trust that during this meeting we will continue to even more greatly accomplish this mandate of our last General Chapter for the good of the people who are exploited and made to be objects by unscrupulous people with commercial interests in our world. In this way we join the many initiatives already being done by persons committed to the Gospel mandates of right relationships, reconciliation, justice and peace in order to loosen the chains of human trafficking in our world.

I want to close with asking Jesus, our Savior, to guide and strengthen us so that we can follow him and participate in his mission
 to bring the good news to the afflicted,
 to proclaim liberty to captives,
 to let the oppressed go free and
 to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. (Lk 4:18-19).