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We are filled with gratitude in celebrating the 169th Anniversary of the founding of our RSHM Institute. We thank God for our sisters who have entered fully into our mission throughout these years proclaiming Christ's joy filled message, "I have come that all may have life, life to the full" (Jn 10:10) and sharing Christ's love with others by the witness of their lives. Our sisters in the past and in the present continue to live in the spirit of what Pope Francis said at the UISG meeting in 2013: "It is Christ who called you to follow him in consecrated life and this means continuously making an 'exodus' from yourselves in order to center your life on Christ and on his Gospel, on the will of God, laying aside your own plans, in order to say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

Recently our newer members completed their Béziers Experience on January 5, 2018, in which the General Council participated. During that inspiring program, Sr. Kathleen Connell reminded us of three aspects of a charism: the faith vision of our Founder; the perception of real needs; and the charity and zeal to act meeting these needs. We recall that Gailhac's faith vision was "to instill the spirit of Jesus Christ in my daughters." This faith vision is a combination of his grasp of Scripture and his personal spiritual experience. It might be helpful for us to ponder and become more aware of our own faith vision inspired by Scripture.

Again, we know of how seriously Gailhac urges us to live in the spirit of Jesus Christ, as he often quoted from St. Paul, as cited above by Pope Francis. Christ is alive in us. Jesus is the One who makes God known and loved. We are to be transformed into Jesus Christ who is the center of our lives.

We are aware of many ways for us to facilitate our growth in transformation into Jesus Christ. We share with you three specific dimensions that enable us to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. These three dimensions are: listening deeply; surrendering to God's loving will for us as revealed in our everyday reality; and the importance of abiding in the Word of God. "Abide in me as I abide in you." (Jn 15:9)

We listen to the desires of our heart. We listen to become the person God is calling us to be, in Christ. We are to be other Christs. "We integrate our lives by centering them in Jesus Christ whose love in us is the source of our faith and zeal." (Constit. # 9) God is always listening to us and we in turn listen attentively to God through the Word.

Macrina Wiederkehr in her book *Abide* speaks of listening as an art. She points out how we can deepen this art of listening, learning from those who have listened well and she offers a brief litany as follows with the response, "Teach me the art of listening".
"Isaiah, age old prophet of hope - you turned your ear toward the voice that asked you to speak for God....R/

Mary of Nazareth - you listened to an angel inviting you to say yes to what you could not yet understand....R/
Joseph, foster father of Jesus - you listened to a dream that changed history....R/
Jesus, you withdrew to the desert hills - absorbed in God you listened....R/
Mary Magdalene - you listened to an intense love that set up its tent in your heart....R/
Oscar Romero and all the Central American martyrs - thank you for listening to the powerless and dispossessed....R/” (p. 140-141)

You are encouraged in your prayer, personal and as a community, to continue this litany naming others through history and also contemporary persons in our world who witness in their lives to the art of listening deeply in order to promote the kingdom of God. Let us be attentive to the many ways God speaks to us each day through others and calls us to loving service building the reign of God.

A second dimension important for our growth in freedom is an understanding of what it means to live in surrender to God. This surrender is linked to our willingness and openness to live in trust surrendering to God’s personal love and care for us in every moment of our lives. It can be said that the opposite of deep faith is anxiety. When we live with less trust, inevitably anxiety is heightened. The greater our trust in God’s loving presence, the deeper is our surrender and growth in true freedom. We may want to reflect upon the times we have been called to greater surrender to God’s will and the freedom we have experienced. This growth in surrender continues throughout our lives in various circumstances.

The third dimension that strengthens us in our discipleship is the importance that our lives are steeped in Scripture. We must continue to be women of the Word. We implore the Holy Spirit to fill us with a deeper understanding of the Word. We allow the Word to form and inform our lives. We ask the Holy Spirit everyday to guide, inspire and enlighten us. May we each day anticipate God speaking to us personally through the Word.

Of course, our vows as consecrated religious invite us to be women who listen deeply, live in surrender to God’s loving will, and we center our lives in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word.

On this anniversary of our founding, we congratulate Sr. Joyce Rushinga and are united with her in prayer as she prepares for Perpetual Profession on February 24, 2018, in Corpus Christi Cathedral, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe. Sr. Philippa is pleased to represent the General Council at Joyce’s Perpetual Profession. Joyce, in preparing for her vows, wrote an extensive research paper entitled “Jesus Christ as the Center and Model of the Institute as Envisaged by Father Jean Gailhac.” This thesis was well written and has helped Joyce deepen her appreciation for our Founder’s faith vision and our RSHM spirituality. It also has increased her knowledge of our RSHM sources.

Also on February 24th, we welcome six first year novices to our novitiate in Belo Horizonte: Rudo Chisvo, Previladge Gunjere, and Cecilia Kasirori all from the Zambezi Region; Aida Ganizane from Mozambique and Daniela Santos and Rhânella de Oliveira from Brazil. We remember these women in our prayers as they continue to discern their call to religious life within our Institute.

We also continue to pray for Rosita Eugénio from Mozambique and Perpetual Muzivani and Plynnet Tachekwa from the Zambezi Region, who enter their second year of novitiate. We promise continued prayer for Sr. Rosemary Mwangarezano, novice directress, and our professed sisters on the novitiate team: Sr. Kathleen Murphy, Zambezi Region, Sr. Jacinta Victorino Alberto, Mozambique and Sr. Amiris Vasques, Brazil. We express our gratitude to them for their generosity and service within the novitiate community, a very important and vital ministry within the Institute.

From June 12th through June 20th, there will be an Enlarged General Council meeting in Cormaria, Sag Harbor, New York. We thank the Eastern American Province for their gracious hospitality, and we look forward to greeting many sisters in Tarrytown prior to going to Sag Harbor. This EGC will afford us the opportunity to collaborate with our provincials / regionals in planning for the General Chapter, July 2019.

During this year, we also commemorate the 50th anniversary of a very significant General Chapter—1968-1969—that took place after Vatican Council II under the leadership of Sr. Margarida Maria Gonçalves of the Portuguese Province. It was a chapter of both great challenges and great graces. This year affords us the opportunity to reflect on the tremendous changes that we as religious have planned and experienced since the 1960's. We encourage each province/region to plan opportunities for reflection on our recent history and to ponder the insights we have gleaned from the experience of the past 50 years. We are on a graced journey as religious undergoing significant changes and challenges in apostolic religious life. Let us engage in further conversations regarding our journey as Institute and share our hopes for the future in light of our experiences and call in our present reality.

We thank God for the graces and blessings bestowed upon us during this past year and we join together in joy and hope as we celebrate the founding of the Institute. May we experience deep unity among us on February 24th and throughout the coming year.

Love,

Rosamond Blanchet Maria Emília Peliz Philippa O'Sullivan Mary Genino