

GATHERED INSPIRED SENT



The General Chapter is the highest expression of governance in the Servite Order. The Chapter meets every six years with representation from around the world, to chart the course of the Order's life and ministry for the next six years. The Chapter met in October and was fortunate to have a private audience with Pope Francis on October 25. Here are the Pope's remarks:

The Order of the Servants of Mary had its origins and its first development in thirteenth-century Florence, a city as lively as it was bellicose. It was born of a group of men: the Seven Holy Founders, dedicated to trade and volunteering. However, your religious family places the germinal core of its charism in its special consecration to the Virgin Mary, recognized as the true "foundress". You live your personal consecration to Mary as a daily commitment to assimilate her style, as it is handed down by the Sacred Scripture. The theological-pastoral study of the figure of Mary of Nazareth also becomes for you an integral part of a vocation, which you transmit in particular through teaching in the "Marianum" Pontifical Theological Faculty.

Another area in which you bear witness to the Gospel, inspired by the Blessed Virgin, is that of the apostolate and mission. Here you strive to imitate Mary, inspired in particular by four of her

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ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY

Vocation Newsletter

attitudes. When after the Annunciation she goes to help Elizabeth; when at Cana in Galilee she obtains from Jesus the sign of water changed into wine for the joy of the newlyweds; when she remains full of faith and pain at the foot of Jesus' cross; and finally when she prays in the Upper Room with the Apostles awaiting the Holy Spirit. Starting from these four Marian "moments", you are always called to deepen your understanding of the founding charism in order to make it present, so that it may respond with hope to the challenges that the contemporary world is launching for the Church and also

for your Order. The theme that guided your General Chapter, "Servants of Hope in a Changing World", expresses precisely this intention, which becomes a roadmap and a mission for the coming years.

From this perspective, I would like to recall an important aspect of your history, which can be paradigmatic. The Seven Holy Founders knew how to live the mountain and the city. Indeed, from Florence they climbed Mount Senario, where they had the profound experience of the encounter with the One who is Hope, Jesus Christ. They then descended





again from the mountain, establishing their home in Cafaggio, immediately outside the walls of Florence, on the outskirts of the city, to commit themselves in their daily life, in witness and in service to society and the Church.

It may be good to re-read, in the light of the Gospel account of the Transfiguration (cf. Lk 9:28-36), this journey of your Founders. Strengthened by the experience of God, they descend more deeply into history, renewed inwardly. In this way they can live the Gospel, responding to the needs of the people, of brothers and sisters who ask to be welcomed, supported, accompanied and helped throughout their lives. Going back to their unique human and vocational experience, you too increasingly become men of hope, capable of dispelling the fears

challenges. I think, for example, of that of using in a responsible way the means of communication, which convey positive news, but which can also destroy the dignity of people, weaken spiritual momentum, and harm fraternal life. It is a matter of educating oneself in an evangelical use of these instruments. Another challenge to be taken on and managed is that of multiculturalism, which in fact you have addressed in this Chapter. There is no doubt that Catholic religious communities have become “laboratories” in this sense, certainly not without problems and yet offering to all a clear sign of the Kingdom of God, to which all peoples are invited, through the one Gospel of salvation. It is not easy to experience human differences in harmony, but it is possible, and a reason for joy if we make room for the Holy

Reflection Questions:

1. The Holy Father states that Servites are called to respond with hope to the challenges of the contemporary world. As I discern, how do I encounter hope? How do I bring hope to the situations around me?
2. Servites witness Christ in our apostolates and in the mission of lives. How do I witness Christ to those around me? How am I being called the witness Christ in the future?

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follow



that sometimes torment the heart, even in a religious community. I am thinking, for example, of the scarcity of vocations in certain parts of the world; as well as of the difficulty of being faithful to Jesus and to the Gospel in certain community or social contexts. The Lord, He alone, allows you to take everywhere, through the holiness of life, a presence of hope and an outlook of trust, identifying and valuing the many emerging buds of positivity. Let us think of vocations in the new territories where you are present. I urge you to enjoy the beauty and cultural and spiritual novelty of the many peoples to whom you have been sent to proclaim the Gospel.

To be men of hope means to cultivate dialogue, communion and fraternity, which are the profiles of holiness. Indeed, sanctification “is a journey in community, side by side with others. We see this in some holy communities” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate*, 141).

Being men of hope means finding the courage to face some everyday

Spirit, who in this, as they say, “goes to the wedding”.

May your communities also be a sign of universal brotherhood, schools of welcome and integration, places of openness and relationality. With this witness you will help to keep away divisions and foreclosures, prejudices of superiority or inferiority, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, walls of separation. And your communities will be so to the extent that you are men of communion, fraternity and unity, as were your Founders.

May the Virgin Mary always safeguard in you the joy of the Gospel. I cordially bless you and all the brothers of the Order, as well as the communities entrusted to you. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.

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