



Congrégation Notre Dame de l'Immaculée Conception de Castres  
Via Vincenzo Viara de Ricci, 24 / 00 168 ROMA - ITALIA

Tel. 06 30 518 63

## **Contribution of the sisters of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Castres to the first phase of the synod on synodality**

### **1. How is this "journey together" unfolding in our congregation today?**

*Synodality as a way of life is a strong prophetic sign in these times of so many proposals and projects that divide, isolate and exclude, since it considers the participation of all, in a principle of belonging and co-responsibility of the charism.*

The main inspiration is that which leads us to recognise ourselves and to situate ourselves always in the synodal ecclesial community as equal disciples, as inhabitants of the "common house" with all humanity and the great community of life of our planet and the cosmos.

#### **a) Experiences of synodality**

Recognising ourselves as a synodal community implies revaluing even more that our belonging comes from a common vocation: "this irresistible attraction for the loving designs that God has for the people" as St. Emilie de Villeneuve, our Foundress, experienced, beyond work, pastoral circumstances, states of life, etc. ....

As a congregation, we are in this dynamic, with **the intense desire to walk together around a charism that makes us a "body" and to be open to the Spirit who blows where he wills, as he wills and to whom he wills. It is a "giving and receiving" in the congregation and also in the charismatic family.** It is this gift and commitment that allows each member to participate in the common mission.

We walk together when we live community life and its daily activities as a learning process, through communication, congregational, provincial, inter-community and

inter-generational meetings; sharing experiences and human, intellectual, material, financial, spiritual resources .... In concrete terms, all the communities underlined the important stages of this "journey together". We have retained 4 axes:

- **Community reflection/discernment**

The general chapters, provincials and councils of congregations and all the meetings set up for a good administrative and spiritual functioning are open spaces for reflection and participation of all (sisters, laity). In recent years, for example, "around the fire" with the "Inspirational Horizons" (chapter document), we have been elaborating our vision-mission. Each member was able to give his or her ideas, point of view and orientations for mutual enlightenment. These forums allow for awareness and strengthen the links. The projects of the congregation, of the province and various orientations drawn up jointly are put in place and accompany the progress of the congregation in a creative way to respond to the new demands of life and mission.

This reflection, which is meant to be a discernment of all that we should be and do, does not stop at the level of the chapters and others, but goes down to the grassroots, to the community and to the missions according to the reality of each country.

- **Listening to each other**

From the beginning we have had a tradition of circularity. Already, the formula of vows invites us to be "co-responsible for the charism and to live it in a fraternal community. Let us note the resignation of our foundress on September 6, 1853 at the age of 43 as Superior General. It was an experience of "walking together" to review the style of animation of the congregation. In the dynamic of the Second Vatican Council, 1989 marked a decisive turning point in the Congregation and a favourable moment to listen to the Holy Spirit whispering to our hearts about the changes needed for our world today. Let us note that with the New Constitutions since 2004, elaborated in a participative way, the discernment for the election of the General Animation Team of the Congregation is done on the basis of a prior consultation of all the members of the institute.

- **Integral formation**

Formation is lived in the congregation and often takes the form of synodality (participation of sisters and laypeople in a spirit of co-responsibility based on the

charism) as was the case in the elaboration, *"implementation and revision of the basic document of formation, the educational project of the congregation and the project of formation in mission"* in some provinces. Our family is concerned with helping people to grow, to give them tools for LIFE, to help them to make free choices, to develop a critical sense. This journey together is made concrete in the communities, in the provinces, in the inter-provincial novitiates, in the continents and at the general level by the SIPT (International Seminar for Temporary Professed) and the retraining. Personalised formation in all the dimensions of life is a path that we follow together towards more humanity, more openness. It gives us spiritual attitudes to be ready to listen and to dialogue in all aspects of our consecration/mission. We have set up continental consultation bodies such as REPA (Meeting of the Provincial Teams of Africa and Latin America) and RAED and ELADE (African Meeting of Education and Latin America). We also have the formation of animation teams in all the mission sectors. We also point out the circulars of the Major Superiors and the various forums (WhatsApp and Zoom communication groups) of the congregation where life and information circulate. The provincial inter-commuunity and age-group retreats and formations, not forgetting,



To build humanising relationships, based on the communication that emphasizes openness, welcoming, listening, dialogue in mutual respect, real forgiveness, respect

for the other's culture and different points of view without fear of fraternal correction in order to improve and grow.

At the ecclesial level,

- Break the paradigms to institute deaconesses or women's ordination, as many communities are left out due to lack of priests. As consecrated life, we women need to occupy more decision-making spaces in the Church.
- A Church that gives priests who have left the celibate life and wish to remain consistent in their call to serve the Kingdom the opportunity to work in the Church through the exercise of their priestly ministry.

## **Conclusion**

Sharing these reflections as a Congregation has been fundamental for us and has helped us a lot. We feel co-responsible with this Synod for synodality, starting from the invitation walk together, which helps us to understand that this is the ecclesial method for reflection and confrontation based on discernment in the light of the Spirit.

We feel strong invitation to live another way of being Church, with synodal signs that encourage us to recover prophecy through participation, provoking in us a greater ecclesial awareness in communion with diversity. Today, more than ever, we are ready to continue to walk resolutely towards the configuration of a Religious Life with an intercongregational, intercultural and itinerant face, guided by an ever new love, which transforms us daily into missionary disciples on the way out.