

8th GENERAL CHAPTER
PRESENTATION OF THE THEME

TO CARE FOR THE LIFE IN CHRIST:
a journey of compassion and pastoral conversion
in communion

Biblical texts of reference

“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.”
(Mk 6:34).

“Rather, we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us.” (1Ts 2:7b-8).

“..... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.” (Eph 4:23-24).

The *first part* of the theme expresses the fundamental objective of pastoral care:

To care: it is the essence of our pastoral ministry.

for the life in Christ, we desire to care for life, for all the aspects of life, knowing that this human life has been taken by the Son of God and united indissolubly to the divine life in His Incarnation. It is not any life but the *Christian life* of which to care whether in ourselves or in the baptized and in those who have not yet encountered Christ. As a Congregation we want to be a *vessel* that welcomes the Trinitarian Life and when it is full of it, pours it in overabundance on the people of God.

“In Christ”, typically pauline expression which synthesizes the Apostle Paul’s theology, anthropology, ecclesiology and underlines the typical demand of the pastoral mission of the entire Pauline Family: to live and give Christ Way, Truth, Life to the world.

The *second part* of the theme tells the more significant aspects of our manner to taking care:

A journey... it is the reception of the dynamism of the Spirit that pushes us forward and asks us to overcome our immobility and rigidities, our schemes to allow ourselves to be guided by Him on the roads of today’s world.

of compassion... in following Jesus, the Teacher with the heart of a Shepherd who stoops on the wounds of this humanity and heals them. A care full of the Father’s compassion for all his children, believers and non believers and of maternal tenderness that is until giving his own life for the flock. It expresses for us, in this moment, also the demand to invoke the gift of spiritual maternity in accompanying in the journey of holiness those whom Jesus Good Shepherd entrusts to us.

and pastoral conversion¹... faithful to the charismatic inspiration *“live in continuous conversion”* we feel that personally and as community we have the urgent necessity of conversion. A conversion

¹ Cf Document of Aparecida, conclusive of the V General Episcopal Assembly of Latin America and the Carabians, 2007, from number 365 to 372, which carries the title *“Pastoral conversion and missionary renewal of the community”*.

that renews the heart; transfigures our life and mission attuning the pastoral action on the thoughts and sentiments of Christ and acknowledging that all starts from the initiative of love of the Father and to Him is led. The Holy Spirit, who makes all things new, desires to make us creative in the pastoral mission, attentive to the signs of the times and suggests us the attitudes and choices suitable to the necessities of the people of God.

in communion. We want to underline the necessity to live and act in communion among us, in fraternal life and in the sense of belonging to the entire Congregation who is called, as a whole, to carry out the ministry of care. The gift of communion binds us to the parish community, the local Church and the entire Body of Christ, making us workers of communion, reconciliation and dialogue, collaborating so that the Church may be a welcoming house for all, especially the poorest of the poor and forgotten. From a unified heart in Christ is radiated the joy and peace that attracts many and leads to the Springs of life.

A patristic text that enlightens

St. Bernard expresses thus: *“For this, if you are wise, you will manifest yourself a vessel and not a waterway. Almost instantly, the waterway receives and immediately pours away; instead the vessel waits until it is full and so it shares, without damage, what is superabundant. In truth, there are in the Church, today, many waterways and very few vessels. Those who pour on us heavenly stream have such great charity that they want to release before having received the infusion, more prepared to speak than to listen, ready to teach what they have not learned, impatient to direct others, they who don't know how to govern themselves”*².

From the closing talk Sr. Marta Finotelli at the International Seminar

“Being personally and as Congregation a vessel more and more welcoming of the Life that springs from the Trinitarian Source to pour it again on others: community, God's people, humanity, those who are entrusted in our ministry of care, the whole creation. In love of the Lord, in an impassioned search of truth and transparency, let us help us to become as Congregation a warm and rich embrace of sympathy, a presence full of God's tenderness for our contemporaries, in communion and holiness of life.

For this it seems possible to re-express our pastoral ministry as care for the life in Christ, ours and that of the others, in every moment and every situation, in every relationship and in every form of service that we are called to accomplish. To care of the life in Christ as constant attention and as basic orientation of our being and doing in situation.

We accompany persons to the encounter with Him, the Living one, so that we become more and more his disciples in ecclesial communion and his missionaries in their environments of life. We ourselves and those whom we accompany so this way to reach the distant ones, the astray and to give evangelical witnessing in the service to the most poor.

² St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, XVIII, 3, in *Opere di S. Bernardo (VI)*, Scriptorum Claravallense. Fondazione di studi cistercensi, Milano, 2006, p. 237.