

# MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - CONTEMPLATIVE

" To do ordinary things with  
extraordinary love for the  
greater glory of God "



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**“Not yet saints, but want to be saints”**

Corpus Domini 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the document “Vita Consecrata”, the Holy Father Pope John Paul II writes: *“Worthy of praise are those forms of commitment which some Christian married couples assume in certain associations and movements. They confirm by means of a **vow** the obligation of chastity proper to the married state and, without neglecting their duties toward their children, profess poverty and obedience. They do so with the intention of bringing to the perfection of **charity their love**, already ‘consecrated’ in the Sacrament of Matrimony. However, by reason of the above-mentioned principle of discernment, these forms of commitment cannot be included in the specific category of the consecrated life. This necessary clarification regarding the nature of such experiences in no way intends to underestimate this particular path of holiness, from which the action of the Holy Spirit, infinitely rich in gifts and inspirations, is certainly not absent.”* (25 March 1996, John Paul II, V.C. 62: 4)

Since the Lay Missionaries of Charity is a movement of lay people married and single, who make vows of Chastity (conjugal), poverty, obedience and wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor according to their Statutes and Way of Life, they belong to the above mentioned category of lay movement.

In this letter I would like to explain a bit in detail then, what is meant by **vows**, how many kinds of vows there are, what kind of vows the LMCs make, and when and how often the LMCs must renew their vows.

This letter also intends to deal with the kind of crucifixes the LMCs receive, and when and where they are meant to wear them.

It will continue to deal with the nature and frequency of the group meetings and the participation of its members, including the old and bed-ridden LMCs. The letter will conclude with some points about the forthcoming jubilee and its remote preparations.

## **A few premises:**

- I. There can be three groups of people who may want to belong to our Movement:
  1. Those who think they are already saints.
  2. Those who do not want to be saints.
  3. Those who are not yet saints but want to be saints.

If anyone wants to join the LMC Movement he/she must belong to the third group, namely those who are not yet saints but want to be saints.

- II. All the members are not equally gifted and so we must not feel inferior or superior to anyone, nor should we compare or judge according to the fruit one produces. See the parable of the sower: *“...Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some **a hundred fold**, some **sixty**, some **thirty**...”* (Mt 13: 8). This also means that the group members must accept and encourage each other and help one another. At times this can mean to have heroic patience and invincible charity.
- III. No one should join the LMC Movement to pass their leisure time or take their vocation as a hobby. It is not a hobby but a call from God *“to love and suffer and save souls”*. Yes, this is the vocation of

the MCs and the LMCs. This demands at times heroic sacrifices. Jesus himself demanded this sort of sacrifices from Blessed Teresa when he said to her: “*Offer more sacrifices, smile more tenderly, pray more fervently.*” (see Mother’s Founding Grace)

IV. LMCs must read and study their Statutes and the way of life before they make their vows, since they make or renew their vows according to the Statutes and the way of life of the Lay Missionaries of Charity.

#### **The vows.**

What is a vow?

“*The vow is a deliberate and free promise made to God, concerning some good, which is possible and better. The virtue of religion requires that it be fulfilled.*” (Canon 1191/ 1)

The essential elements of a vow are:

- A promise, not a mere wish or desire;
- deliberately and freely made;
- to God, and to him alone;
- according to be fulfilled by reason of the virtue of religion;
- in respect to something, which is in itself positively good, not merely indifferent, and which is both possible of attainment, in all the circumstances, the “better option” for the person in question.

From this it is quite clear that no **vow** should ever be made without the most serious prior consideration on the part of all concerned. All those who make the vows must adequately understand and appreciate the meaning and implication of the vow in question.

#### **The kinds of vows.**

“*A vow is public if it is received in the name of the Church by a lawful Superior, or otherwise it is private.*” (Canon 1192)

The vow of a religious is public, as he or she makes the vow in the name of the Church and is received by a lawful Superior. The vows of the Missionaries of Charity Brothers and Sisters are simple and public. That is why the Superior General or his or her delegate says at the religious profession of his own respective subjects: “*By the authority entrusted to me I accept your vows in the name of the Church, for the community of the Missionaries of Charity. I earnestly...*”, **whereas the vows of the Lay Missionaries of Charity are juridically private**, as the vows are not made in the name of the Church but with and for the Church.

The celebrant at the profession Mass, cardinal or bishop or priest, including the LMC spiritual director, does not receive the LMCs’ vows, but the LMCs make their vows in his presence. The celebrant who signs the vow formula should not write: “In my hands”, but “In my presence”.

I repeat that the vows of the Lay Missionaries of Charity are juridically **private** and are not made in the name of the Church nor received by any lawful Superiors, as the LMCs do not have lawful Superiors, but links, who are not superiors but co-ordinators who are meant to help the group to grow in holiness and increase in number by their words and examples.

The juridically **private nature** of the vows in no way diminishes the seriousness and importance of the vows one makes before God. We can say that the LMCs make their vows in the hands of God, and in the presence of the people.

### **Profession and renewal of vows.**

The LMCs make their vows for one year as a rule, which they renew annually on the same date (they may anticipate another date for special reasons, but not by more than one month). (Cf. Statutes 8 §2) *“Those who do not renew their vows by or before the date of expiry are considered to have practically left the Movement, and this is so especially where there existed no communication or dialogue with the spiritual Director or the persons in charge of the groups.”* (Cf. Statutes 10, d) Please read rule 10 of the Statutes very carefully...It has several practical points which can help the LMCs everywhere, provided they know them and live them.

In order to avoid all confusion and misunderstandings and also to have real spiritual communion (koinonia), I would like to suggest two days a year on which the LMCs all over the world are allowed to make or renew their vows. **The first one is on the eve of Mercy Sunday**, i.e. Saturday before Mercy Sunday; **the other is the first Saturday in October**. Those who are unable to make or renew their vows on these two days of the year can choose any convenient day within 30 days before the expiry. However, the vows will always be made by the eve of Mercy Sunday or by the first Saturday in October, according to when one makes his or her vows.

I give you an example here: “I (N.N.) make my vows till the eve of Mercy Sunday 2007 or till the first Saturday of October 2007...” This will remind the LMCs always and everywhere to remember when to make or renew their vows. **The annual renewal of vows should always be by or before the expiry date and never after their expiry.**

### **Crucifixes.**

*“Let the cross be for you as it was for Jesus, the proof of the greatest love.”* (Pope Paul VI, Evangelica Testificatio, 29).

Our Statutes states: *“The sign of consecration is a simple crucifix which they receive at the beginning of the period of formation, to be worn over the heart or around the neck, and a larger one is given at the time of the first profession.”* (Statutes n°. 6)

This means that the LMCs receive two kinds of crucifixes. The small one is worn over the heart or around the neck all the time. The big crucifix is not meant to be worn over the heart or around the neck, but to be kept near one’s bed side. On overnight travel the LMCs should carry it along in his/her bag. It should remind us of the vows we have taken and may help us to live them faithfully no matter where we are.

### **The LMC groups and group meetings.**

The members of the Lay Missionaries of Charity must make the Movement their second family, especially the local group where they meet. This is part of the fourth vow of wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor. This service of love is vital for our groups to grow in holiness and increase in number. It is of no use to join the Lay Missionaries of Charity if the members do not want to grow better, humbler and holier. Sinners and weak we all are and will always be. But still, with God’s help, we have to try to become gentler, kinder, more willing to bear the wrongs, more forgiving and more ready to accept forgiveness.

Your presence at each LMC meeting is absolutely vital; and you must make every effort not to miss the LMC group meetings. You may be tempted to reason at times that you get nothing out of the meeting. But then you need to ask yourself: what am I giving? It must be a mutual giving and receiving. This also

demands some preparations for each member of the group. There is plenty of material to read and reflect. *“If there is a will, there is a way”* is true of us all.

#### **The frequency of the LMC group meeting.**

The more meetings the better. In Rome, where the LMCs began, the group continues to meet every single Saturday, as it has for the past 22 years. In some places the LMCs meet once in two weeks. Let us make that the minimum, once every two weeks. Please choose a convenient day of the week and try to meet.

The groups, as a rule, begin with an hour of adoration, during which part of the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed; we must also have time for silent personal prayer in the spirit of contemplation and profound adoration. Finishing the hour of prayer, the group now meets with the Spiritual Director or an M.C. Sister or M.C. Brother. It is necessary to have a systematic approach regarding the material for study and sharing. The Church wants the lay people to build their lives on solid doctrinal, spiritual, pastoral and practical grounds. It is absolutely vital to study the Spirit and charism of Blessed Teresa of Kolkata and our LMC Spirit and way of life in particular.

In some places where LMCs are scattered and meet only once a month as a rule, members must make every effort not to miss the meeting. Twelve meetings in a year are very few indeed!

The LMCs in formation are bound to study the Statutes and the way of life of the Movement, and the related documents, especially *“Christifideles Laici”*, *“Familiaris Consortio”*, etc., besides to know more deeply the MC Spirit and charism (see above).

#### **The sick, the old and bed ridden LMCs.**

They may be allowed to renew their vows if they are helped to make use of their sickness, old age and inconveniences of life as a means to grow in holiness and resemble Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Their physical illness and infirmities, their many trials of life such as loneliness, weaknesses, misery and wretchedness, etc, can be used as means to save souls. Indeed, many a saint has done that. Our bodies may get old and sick, we can be bed-ridden, but our souls should fly in love. It is usual to feel tired, weak and lonely. But let us serve the Lord with our tiredness and use our weakness as a means, as a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block. In the words of St. Paul, who said when he spoke of the Cross: *“a stumbling block to the Jews and a folly to the gentiles, but for us who believe it is the power and the wisdom of God.”* (1Cor 1: 18 ff.) The more the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, the more fruit it will produce. (Cf. Jn 12: 24) St. Thérèse of Lisieux said: *“I will sing always, even if more roses must be gathered from amidst thorns, and the longer and the sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.”*

*“To become a saint,”* writes Blessed Teresa of Kolkata, *“one must suffer much and to love much we must suffer much more. Suffering begets love, but it is fruitful also because it begets life for souls.”*...Yes, this is the vocation of every member of the MC family: *“to love and suffer and save souls.”* Let us beget souls in suffering love!

#### **LMC Jubilee**

For the LMCs, the year two-thousand and nine is the jubilee year, as on 16 April 2009 the LMCs complete 25 years of its existence. It is Thursday within the octave of Easter. The preparations for the jubilee year will begin on 16 April 2008, which is Wednesday in the fourth week of Easter. It is necessary for us to plan the jubilee year properly and much in advance. In fact we may start to reflect on it and may begin to

bring forward valuable suggestions: the theme for the jubilee year, the way of celebrating the jubilee, etc. The celebrations can be in the local, national and international levels.

In the first place it has to be a year of thanksgiving to God for the gift of the LMC movement, for Blessed Teresa of Kolkata, for her fidelity, generosity and thirst for souls until her last breath, for all the LMCs in the world, for those who have been with the Movement from the beginning.

It is also a time to ask pardon for all our sins, negligence, tepidity, indifference, coldness, pride and other sins committed against our vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor, including the members of our families and the LMC movement. There is so much to be sorry for, and so much more to be grateful to God.

As I was writing this letter the thought crossed my mind, namely, who is going to be the first LMC saint? Who will be there for his or her beatification and canonization? Don't you want to be a saint, a great saint like St. Joseph Moscati, St. Gianna Beretta Molla, Blessed Luigi and Maria Quatrocchi, Blessed Kateri Thekavita and many others of our time and all times.

A word of thank you to all LMCs of the world, who tirelessly work hard to live their vocation more faithfully and more perseveringly in the midst of many storms, earthquakes and even volcanoes. May the grace of God enable each one of us to persevere enthusiastically in our vocation till the day we die, remembering again the words of Jesus to Blessed Teresa: *"Your vocation is to love and suffer and save souls."*

The place and date of the national LMC retreats in the year 2006:

- 1) Canada and U.S.A.
  - a) Vancouver: 1 to 4 June 2006
  - b) Toronto: 8 to 11 June 2006
- 2) Italy, Rome: 6 to 9 July 2006
- 3) Australia, Melbourne: 10 to 13 August 2006
- 4) Spain, Madrid: September 2006 ?
- 5) India, Pune (Mumbai): 16 to 19 November 2006

These are some of the retreats in which I am invited to participate. I do not know about the retreats in other countries, where we have LMCS in big or small number. Thanks be to God we have LMCs in 44 countries now. We must pray more fervently and offer more sacrifices that the LMCs may grow in holiness and increase in number and may not only be in 44 countries but 144 countries of the world. Let us continue to love God and one another until we die of love.

Love and prayers.

God bless you.

Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C.