

MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - CONTEMPLATIVE

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



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LAY MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY (LMCs) ORIGIN AND HISTORY

In the month of December 1981 a group of co-workers came to meet me in Via S. Agapito 8, Rome, at our house, saying that they were fed up with the structured Church and so they wanted to belong to the Church of Mother Teresa. I made them sit down and after making some enquiries I realised that they were in need of real catechism. So we began a two-hour weekly meeting every Friday from 8 to 10 p.m.. These meetings were conducted with great liberty and openness. We shared ideas, opinions and ideals inspired by what Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity stood for. I also told them that there is no Church of Mother Teresa, that she is not the foundress of a new Church but of a religious congregation approved and recognised by the authoritative Church; and that if the bishop of Calcutta in the first place and then also *Propaganda Fidei* in Rome did not give permission she could not have done what she had been doing, and the congregation of the Missionaries of Charity would not have existed. She is a real and faithful daughter of the Church who discerned God's call and responded to Him in and through the Church.

For over two years the group met. The number was always on the increase. We were about 25. From this prayer group there came two men and two women who expressed a desire to belong to the Missionaries of Charity in a closer way through some sort of bond even though they were lay people. We reflected, prayed and decided to make some sort of vows..., although they had to be juridically private. I wrote a formula, named the group "*Nazareth Family Movement*", and fixed the date of their vows for Tuesday in Holy Week, 16 April 1984, to be made in our Chapel in Rome.

When all was set, I went to meet Mother Teresa in the Sisters' house in Casilina and explained our programme of that afternoon to her. She agreed so willingly to come and join us in the celebration of the Eucharist, and she took her place very close to the four who made their vows. She also made them sign their vow formula on the altar, after which both of us, Mother Teresa and myself, signed. All were very happy, although we did not know what the future might hold in store. After the ceremony Mother and the four professed and myself went to the Parish priest, Don Isidoro Del Lungo, and told him of the vows and the existence of the new group in his parish. We had his blessing and came back to our house and had some refreshments. Mother spoke to the Brothers with great joy. She spoke of the importance of encouraging the families to pray together, as she used to say: "*The family that prays together, stays together*". "*If lay people are so hungry for God, how much more we M.C.s, especially you contemplative Brothers, should be hungry and thirsty for God. Pray, Brothers, that we may not spoil God's work, but remain faithful to our Charism. It is better that the Congregation dies before I die if it relaxes its spirit of poverty and simplicity. Our poverty is*

a great gift. For us poverty means freedom. Let us pray to our Lady. Though she was chosen to be the Mother of God, in her own eyes she was a simple handmaid of the Lord who went in haste to take care of her cousin Elizabeth. There is much to learn from her. You men especially must cling to Our Lady. Pray often: Mary Mother of Jesus, be a mother to me just now". As she finished the talk we had a cup of tea and then we took her back to Casilina.

26 May 1985. Change of name from "Nazareth Family Movement" to "*Lay Missionaries of Charity*".

In a few months there were many enquiries about the new Movement and some of us found it difficult to explain to people what it was all about; besides, we still did not have any written statutes. The name sounded strange as it did not directly and immediately express the adherence of the movement to the M.C. family. Thus the idea arose to change the name to "*Lay Missionaries of Charity*". However, we wanted to have the full approval and support of Mother Teresa before we did this. So on Pentecost Sunday, 26 May 1985, after a long discussion and dialogue, Mother Teresa finally also happily accepted the new name as *The Movement of the Lay Missionaries of Charity*. Everybody felt happy about this change as it directly indicates adherence to the whole Missionaries of Charity family. It was a real gift of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost Sunday 1985.

Although we now had a better title for our Movement we still did not have any clearly defined rules or statutes for its members. Many started asking for well defined rules that the members could follow and through which they could realise their hearts' desires and quench the thirst of Jesus on the Cross for love of their own souls and all the poorest of the poor whom they felt called to serve.

There is a confrontation between two sorts of time: our time and God's time. In Greek, the word "*Chronos*" indicates successive time, whereas "*Kairos*" indicates the appropriate time, or God's time. Weeks and months passed by. It was hard for me to put the Statutes for lay people into writing as I am a religious and a priest. So I prayed to the Holy Spirit and to the Holy family to help me to formulate the rules for the LMCs and, in the end, help came. From September 1986 to February 1987 I devoted most of my time and energy to the writing of the Statutes.

I struggled much, read and reflected, concentrating especially on the recent teachings of the Church with regard to families; in other words, what does our Mother Church expect from and for lay people today. To my surprise I found so much material that I almost got frightened. How many lay people really live up to the Church's expectations, I wondered, and how few lay people know their sublime vocation and mission in the contemporary world where they are called to live and work. Gone are those days when the Church principally took into consideration the holiness of religious, priests and the dignitaries of the Church. With the Second Vatican Council the Church spelled out more clearly and very convincingly the universal call to holiness, directed to all men of good will whether lay or religious. Mother Teresa repeatedly recalled in all her talks that "*holiness in no more considered to be the luxury of the few but the simple duty of every Christian*". We are then duty bound to strive for holiness. "*Be perfected as your Father in heaven is perfect*" (Mt 5, 48).

The Statutes of the Lay Missionaries of Charity were written in the light of such an understanding and of the solid teaching of the Church. For some, the requirements of the Statutes may be felt to be above their strength and power. In fact, holiness is always something above everyone's power. Without God's help, which when sought will never be wanting, no one can reach any height of perfection. Jesus knew when he invited people "*to be perfected as our Father in heaven is perfect*" that none of us will ever reach such heights of perfection, and yet He wants us to try; also, no one can ever think that he has achieved his goal -- no matter how perfect he has become, he is still far from being perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. There is, then, no room for pride or complacency or discouragement.

Our LMC Statutes propose a very high ideal toward which we need to strive everyday. We need to go step by step holding on to the hands of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and guided by the Holy Spirit and not by our feelings and fears. Our God is omnipotent, i.e. all powerful. He is omniscient, and that means all knowing, and He is omnipresent, and that means He is present everywhere. This is our God who leaves us not even for a fraction of a second. So, dearly beloved LMCs, have no fear. Jesus is there to help us, to strengthen us, to guide us; and the Holy Family is our model of humility, charity, silence and prayer. All the three persons of the Holy Family are very special. The way they loved each other, the way they helped one another, the way they grew in holiness too, were unique and exemplary for all families of the world and especially for all LMCs of all generations.

Thanks be to God, like any living organism that grows and spreads, the LMCs also grow and spread, under the shadow of the tree of the cross. Hardships, trials and growing pains accepted with peace, tranquillity and love are indispensable elements for stability and strength and for producing fruit in abundance for the Lord and for His glory. Jesus' thirst for love of souls on the Cross cannot be quenched without prayer and sacrifice and without loving concern and service in humility and charity.

The LMCs can be found in practically all continents of the world in smaller or bigger numbers. With God's help and with the assistance of many priests and religious the already existing groups are growing in holiness and in number, and new groups are being formed in some places with the help of the M.C. Sisters and with the guidance of some holy and zealous priests whom we call Spiritual Directors. Due thanks to all those who help us in any way.

I wish to meet each single LMC and want to encourage you all in person, wanting to pray with you. I want to tell you that Jesus our Lord loves you immensely. Yours is a vocation. Hold on to Jesus who has called you. When trials come, when the wind blows, the torrents come and the rain falls and buffets you, hold on to the Holy Family. For all three persons of the Holy Family, from the first moment of the divine response of Our Lady, suffering began. As the eternal Logos took His home in the virginal womb of Our Lady, many trials too found their place in her life and the lives of all those who were closely associated with her, especially St. Joseph. All three suffered; but their suffering was divine and redemptive. The shadow of Calvary fell even on that moment when our Lady conceived the Divine Word in her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit; it began to unfold in her life till it reached its peak on Good Friday. It was in fact at Gethsemane that the "fiat" of Jesus was joined to the "fiat" of His Mother. Each LMC must join his or her

“fiat” with the words of Jesus: “*Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine*” (Lk 22, 42), and of Mary: “*Let it be done to me, as you say*” (Lk 1, 38). Let this be our constant attitude and our unceasing prayer specially when we are tired of life and tried in many ways and are tempted to give up our vocation. Let us then say with our Lady: “let it be done to me as you say”, and be like St. Joseph who, “when he awoke from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had told him to do” (Mt 1, 24; 2, 14). To this end I pray and ask the prayers of all.

The LMCs have had two International Meetings so far: the first was held in Rome in the first week of October 1992 and the second in Lourdes in the last week of September 1996.

Remote preparations are now being made for the third International LMC Meeting in Rome, from Sunday 30 September to Sunday 7 October 2001. As an advance on the previous meetings, we could try to organise our retreat and conferences in four main languages; English, Italian, Spanish and French. Groups of LMCs speaking other languages could try to join in one of these four main language groups. We need to search for Cardinals, Bishops, Priests and LMCs who know the M.C. Spirit and Charism well and are able to express it in words so that the LMC International Meeting may become a profound Pentecostal experience for all and may foster LMC vocations and make the mission of the Movement more clear and convincing in this new millennium.

If you think that this method could be useful and practical, and that by it the central message of our meetings can be conveyed to most of the LMCs, then we may also need many volunteers to organise, to plan and to contact the right persons. These volunteers could also help to make travel arrangements well in advance which would enable the participants to get air tickets at very reasonable prices.

We also need everyone to start praying for the success and fruitfulness of this meeting. One of the Novena prayers could be

*“Breath into me, Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Move in me, Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit,
that I may love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit,
that I may defend all that is holy.
Protect me, Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy” (St. Augustine).*

with one *Hail Mary* and *Glory be to the Father* at the end. You are also most welcome to pray or sing “*Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us, melt us, mould us, fill us and use us*”. Down through the centuries God has used many a saint and prophet to communicate His message of love to all men of good will. Especially in our own day our beloved Mother Teresa of Calcutta was chosen to be the apostle of love and compassion to the poorest of the poor of the whole world. Every LMC is also called to participate in the self-same mission and ministry of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity.

Love and prayers. God bless you.

Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C.