

**INSTITUTE OF THE BETHLEMITE SISTERS
DAUGHTERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS
General House**

Bogotá, 19th December 2018

CIRCULAR No. 24 A

**Convocatory to the XXIII General Chapter of the Institute of the Bethlehemite Sisters
Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
27th October to 30th November 2019
Bogotá, Colombia.**

Sister Provincial
Michael Mazarella Pudhota
Sisters Superiors
Sisters of Local Communities
Holy Brother Pedro Betancur Province

Dear Sisters and dear members of the Association of the Bethlehemite Laity, Receive my fraternal greeting this Christmas in which the Lord again invites us to be Bethlehem House of Bread, bread that is broken and shared.

In the communication 28A of November of this year, I made public the beginning of the preparatory time for the XXIIIIGC of the Institute to be held at the end of next year. Time of grace and blessing for all that the Lord has done in our lives and with our lives; miracle of the God with us who by calling us to Bethlehem gives us the gift of living the baptismal commitment in the light of the Bethlehemite Charism.

With this Circular I convoke the Institute and the Association of the Bethlehemite Laity to live with joy and hope the preparation and celebration of our Chapter time, which as His Holiness Francis said, in the discourse to the participants in the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order, celebrated in 2017:

"It is the time of listening to the Lord who speaks to us through the signs of the times, time of mutual listening, and therefore, of openness to what the Lord communicates to us through the brothers; time of serene confrontation and without prejudice between our projects and those of others. All this requires the opening of the mind and the heart. In this sense, the Chapter is a propitious time to exercise the spirit of exodus and hospitality: to leave oneself to welcome with joy the part

of the truth that the other communicates and to walk together towards the full truth, the only that makes us free (Cf. Jn 8, 32). "

With regard to preparation, the provincial sisters and local communities are making progress in the organization of both local and provincial chapters and, at the level of the General Council, since July we have had regular meetings to prepare the General Chapter.

The leading thread that animates our path to the Chapter is



Bethlehem of the love of our Holy Brother Pedro: "Bethlehem is for Peter was the source that nourished his spirituality, the basis of the name he gave to the Order, and the mystery which pointed the way to his followers, as a school of virtues which they were to live, especially humility" (Const. N.2). Bethlehem, which our Blessed Mother Encarnación, lived with fidelity and enriched with new vitality her evangelical experience; Bethlehem, "altar of the first sufferings of Christ and the classroom of his greatest virtues." (Const. N.3).

And both, Pedro and Encarnación, found in the Eucharist the spiritual nourishment that energized their experience of the Charism.

Three scenarios define the scope of the General Chapter, through which we will do the precious exercise of living as the Holy Father insists: memory and prophecy. Memory that leads us to contemplate and thank the wonders that the Lord works in our Bethlehemite life and prophecy that opens us to joy and hope to spread the

fragrance of the Charism in today's history, just as the aroma of bread that spreads out from the oven to mitigate the hunger and gather around the table. Making memory means going to the sources; to the origins; at the very heart of the Charism that Saint Pedro and Blessed Mother Maria Encarnación lived intensely and that their first followers assimilated and radiated in America and in Europe.

Making memory leads us to contemplate the pilgrimage of the Institute that makes its way as it walks and that, between lights and shadows, with joys and fatigues, has sought to incarnate the Charism in each age, making history in the history of humanity.

When we ask ourselves about the present of the Bethlehemite life, we certainly cannot think that with the revision of the commitments of this sexennium we are giving strength to our today. Not in any way. In our preparatory meetings we consider that our present is broad, which favours the understanding of the Institute and the ABL today.

We saw that the last 30 years constitute the present of the Institute. That is, the period from 1989 to 2019 is our present, which we have all lived and live with passion. Present that opens us to project our future with hope.

Next, I describe the three scenarios that will shape our chapter meeting.

CONTEMPLATE THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE

We will go to our roots, to the origin of the Bethlehemite Order and of the Beaterio of Bethlehem; we will walk our history from the Reformation of the Beaterio through the look at the relevant aspects of the General Chapters of the Institute. We will approach the thought of the Superior Generals who have accompanied the Institute; we will see the development of the provinces in their apostolic mission, with explicit reference to the works that were born before 1989 and that are active.

LIVE THE PRESENT WITH PASSION

Our present moves in the creative tension between memory and prophecy: the recognition of the life of holiness of Pedro and Encarnación by the Church and the opening to new ways of incarnating the Charism. In 1997 our Mother was beatified and in 2002 our Father was raised to the altars, becoming the first Saint of Guatemala.

In the year of 1989, within the framework of the XVIIIIGC, the Province of Mission was separated from the Institute and the Chapter Assembly approved the beginning of the Bethlehemite Lay Branch; in the year of 1996, the Prayerful Branch of Our Lady of Bethlehem was opened and in the year of 1998 the Province of Holy Brother Pedro was inaugurated in India.

With the opening of the Institute to share the Charism with the Laity and with the inculturation of the Charism in Asia, in the Province of India, we opened ourselves to the action that God who calls us to expand the tent to welcome, love and serve; by sharing the Charism we live the experience that together we are more; the hands that are multiplied divide and share the bread of Bethlehem.

Dynamics of openness that today more than ever needs of us docility to the Spirit and generosity to share from a collaborative work that strengthens the mission.

With the Chapter Document In the Traces of History, fruit of the XIX General Chapter held in the year 1995, we strengthened the dynamics of carrying forward for each sexennium, in an organized and consistent manner, the purposes and desires that favour the life and mission of the Institute. We will look at three fundamental pillars: identity, formation and mission, according to the chapter documents: 1995 In the Traces of History 2001 Journeying with Holy Brother Pedro towards mercy. 2007 Rekindle the Gift that is

within You 2013 We announce what the Lord has manifested to us. The purposes for the sexennium 2013 - 2019, will be evaluated from two perspectives: through the provinces and from the part of the General Government.

In reviewing our present, our heart goes with affection to the sisters and the laity who lived their commitment with fidelity, we will appreciate the gift of the Bethlehemite life of our sisters and members of the ABL, who in these 30 years have passed to the house of the Father. We will study the journey of the Institute and the laity in these decades; and we will give an account of the state of the formation in a special way, of the initial formation and of the Bethlehemite laity.

At the level of mission, we will study in detail the apostolic exercise of the Institute in these last three decades. Works that are born after 1989; characteristics, sustainability, solidity; we know that some are achieving stability and others have been closed.

Living the present with passion implies bringing to a successful conclusion the study that we have done throughout this year of our Constitutions and the Directory and what we will do in 2019 of the Project of Life the ABL. Valuing, thanking and projecting our being and doing from the dynamics of fidelity and charismatic creativity.

To live the present with passion is to contemplate the scenarios inhabited by the human being, postmodern; scenarios that configure a new way of being and coming from the new generations that emerge from the digital era. We will reflect on the signs of the times that today become for us an opportunity to be good bread that is broken and shared.

The poor and the young as a theological place; the poor refer us to the very Heart of God and young people open us to hope, and both the poor and the young are for us vital options that give strength and dynamism to the incarnation of the Charism.

Millions of human beings go every day in search of a place to live; there are many reasons that today lead migrants and displaced people to cross borders with the desire for a future for themselves and their families. In all the Provinces the migratory phenomenon touches our peoples and countries in a painful way. Impossible not to deepen this reality!

The childhood and youth victims of multiple abuses claim a presence that help them heal and overcome traumas and suffering; these situations and those associated with injustice, the environmental deterioration and mistreatment of human dignity occupy wide spaces of our today, because living the Bethlehemite Charism means attending to the human being from its reality.

PROJECT THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

The General Chapter will find in the two previous scenarios the fundamental basis for projecting our future. It will be the time to receive the divine breath of the Spirit of God for which, throughout the previous days, we will have prepared ourselves with prayer, fraternity and discernment, in order to:

Decide, Choose, Conform, Design, Dream

a future that will be carried out day by day by the faithfulness, the love and the joyful and generous service of each one of us, of the new vocations that the Lord will send us, of the members of the ABL, of the collaborators of the mission and of the people who, by welcoming the message of the Lord, live and project it with the desire for a truly human, just, fraternal and peaceful world.

We are already on the way to XXIIIIGC and for that we are happy. The Lord has been great with us. Let us join the local Chapters and Provincial Chapters with our prayer and with the celebration of the Eucharist. In the case of the local Chapters, all the communities of the Institute and the local associations of the ABL will celebrate the Eucharist on the proper day. For the Provincial Chapters, each community and each local association will choose a day to offer it. All praying for all. All being: Bethlehem, bread that is broken and shared.

May this Christmas and the approaching New Year be for us the precious opportunity to reaffirm our YES to the call to Bethlehem.

**Merry Christmas 2018 and
Happy New Year 2019**

With great affection

Diana Lucía Torres Bonilla Bethl.
Superior General

The schedule of the general house and schedule of local and provincial chapters is attached