



Ref. No. 20/40

Rome, 23 March 2020

To all Religious of the Sacred Heart

Dear Sisters,

Greetings from Rome! We wanted to share with you that, faced with the magnitude of this pandemic and the possibility that travel to Italy would potentially become impossible, we decided to cut short our visits to Latin America and return to Rome. Daphne, Bodo, Marie-Jeanne and I arrived home last night after a 4 day journey through 7 airports and six countries (Caracas, Havana, Mexico City, Madrid, Frankfurt, Munich, Rome) thanks to the help of Cuca Maset, Reyna González and our sisters of Venezuela and Spain. Our community members, Isabelle, Yuka, Bernie and Margaret who had accompanied our journey via our *whatsApp* community were at the front door to greet us when we arrived. Anne Corry, our ninth community member is still in Australia where she went for the provincial chapter, and it seems that she may be there for some time because of flight bans to Italy. For the four of us, it is a joy to be home, even though now we have to observe a strict two-week quarantine. We have turned our team room and our terrace into a kitchen and dining room for the time being and are trying to self-isolate as much as possible without being obsessive. Like so many people in our world, this experience calls us to patience, creativity, humility and trust (among other things!).

The world has changed in the last week; it has mobilized all of us and the daily life of everyone is deeply shaken. We have heard from many provinces and each one is taking the necessary steps to deal with this unprecedented situation, particularly in the care of our elder sisters. We are grateful for all our collaborators, especially the nursing staff in the eldercare homes where our sisters live. So far, the news we are receiving from the different provinces is good.

As you know, Italy is one of the countries most deeply affected. As you may know, we have two infirmaries in Italy, both of which are in the north of the country where the coronavirus is most virulent. So far, we are blessed that our Italian sisters are doing well. As I write this letter from my room, the spirit of the Italian people is very present in the singing I am hearing from the balconies of our neighborhood. Please pray for this country, which is suffering now and will continue to suffer into the future.

The virus is also having an impact on us as a congregation on an international level. Some provinces have had to postpone their provincial chapter, to date Malta and ENW and we anticipate that more may need to do the same. The International Heads Conference, which was to take place in Miami in April, has been transformed into a virtual conference, and will be available online. The provincials of Europe canceled their meeting in Rome and met online, benefiting from simultaneous translation provided by the UISG. The International Communications Team (Imma De Stefanis, Joy Luz and Florence de la Villéon) have been in contact with provincials to offer assistance to provinces in using new communication tools (Zoom Meetings, Skype, etc) to facilitate possibilities for communication within the provinces and among ourselves.

The reality of this moment is teaching us new things on many different levels. Next week, the team will talk with the communications team about ways that we might have more up to date information about the provinces in a more “horizontal” way. We encourage you to respond to the proposal of the communication team that offers an easy online training to enable us all to communicate by videoconference. Interesting religious and cultural initiatives are emerging on the Internet from all sides. Perhaps we can find a way to share the many prayers and reflections that are circulating in our different cultures and contexts. Most important, we need to stay connected to each other.

It is an unprecedented phenomena that the vast majority of the world is experiencing a common threat. I was struck by an article in the NY Times by Thomas Friedman, a noted author and journalist, which I read in the Mexico airport in which he says “our planet is not just interconnected, its interdependent and in many ways, even fused.” Perhaps this moment is giving us an opportunity to see the world with new eyes. For us as Religious of the Sacred Heart, the question is *What God is inviting us to be and to act the one with another during this time? In light of the coronavirus, what does it mean to be Artisans of Hope in a Blessed and Broken World? How are we called to be more human in the radical style of Jesus? What is the transforming action of the Spirit that we experience in the silence? What frontiers am I being asked to cross and what life am I asked to accompany at the edge? With whom and how am I called to live a new solidarity?*

Before I end this letter, I’d like to share a reflection I had on our journey home to Rome. A few days before we left Venezuela, we visited the local public hospital in Cumaná where our recently professed sister, Julie, works as an emergency room doctor. It was, to say the least, a very scary and painful situation, to see the suffering of God’s people. As we travelled back to Rome, I kept seeing the patients in that large and crowded emergency room being treated by well-trained doctors who did not have the equipment or the medicine they needed to help their patients. This situation exists because so many of our countries who make up this “fused world” have placed an embargo on Venezuela. While this embargo is mostly about political and economic differences among governments, if the coronavirus escalates in Venezuela, the people with whom we live and work will surely die as will many marginalized people all over the world. As we went from plane to plane over the four days of travel, I kept reflecting on how privileged and secure we are as members of the Society and how many of us live with a foot in two worlds. Some of us



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may die in this pandemic, but it's not because we do not have what we need. And, of course, my second reflection was on *what is the call in all of this for me and for us?*

I leave you with this thought from Richard Rohr OFM

Suffering is a universal experience occurring across space and time, revealing the Truth that going down, going through, and going into the unknown can be powerfully transformative.

Let us pray for each other as we live this journey together as One Body, for our people and our families, and especially for our world.

With love and prayer,

Barbara RSCJ

P.S, This letter is addressed to RSCJ and you are welcome to share it with our collaborators and the family of the Sacred Heart.