

TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN SERVANTS OF CHARITY'S GENERAL CHAPTER

Saturday, 29 January 2000

*Dear Guanellian Religious,
Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,*

1. I extend my cordial greeting to all of you who in these days are holding the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Servants of Charity. My special congratulations and best wishes go to Fr. Nino Minetti, whom you have reconfirmed in the office of Superior General. I also offer best wishes to Fr. Protógenes José Luft, attending this Chapter, whom I recently appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Barra do Garças, Brazil. May the Lord help them in their respective tasks, so that they can respond to his plans for the congregation and for the Church at the beginning of a new millennium. I would like, through those of you here, to extend my greetings to all the members of Fr. Guanella's work who are spread throughout Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

During your Chapter you have paused to reflect and to pray on a stimulating theme, which you have expressed as: "Charismatic identity and prophetic witness of the Servants of Charity in the Church and in the world of the third Christian millennium". In fact, this is a very fitting occasion for rediscovering the wealth and vitality of the charism entrusted by the Lord to your founder, Bl. Louis Guanella, in today's world.

2. The return to the congregation's genuine sources of spirituality and Gospel witness will help you make a more profound discernment of what the will of God and the call of the Spirit are at this historical transition to the third Christian millennium. This commitment will nourish in each of you a renewed enthusiasm to become a credible manifestation of God's love and tenderness towards the expectations of the poor and the needs of those who live on the fringes of society.

The witness of charity is the great prophetic message of our times. In this Jubilee of the Year 2000, in which the "Holy Door" is symbolically wider to show the greatness of God's merciful love, the tent of charity must also be enlarged throughout the Church to accommodate the multitudes of poor living in contemporary society. This is a major challenge facing the Guanellian religious family.

I know you nurse the desire to extend your presence and charitable witness to nations in Africa and the Far East, through concrete forms of support to people who are in difficulty or are marginalized. I encourage you to continue on this path, treasuring your teaching experience and making your spiritual resources and competence available to those in need.

3. This fundamental commitment, whose primary goal is to meet the immediate, practical needs of the poor, should nevertheless be accompanied by a prophetic message that will affect the social structures themselves, which are at the root of so many acts of injustice and oppression towards the weakest groups. This is a second and more demanding challenge for all who have chosen to follow Christ, the Good Samaritan, who cares for man's physical and spiritual wounds. It involves influencing the cultural and social processes with the power of the Gospel, to enable the human heart to change its criteria of judgment and models of life that contradict God's plan.

As you face these demanding challenges, the shining example of Bl. Louis Guanella will prompt you to choose the commandment of love as the essential criterion of your being and acting, expressed in decisions to serve and to promote the advancement of the poorest people. This will spur you to be present on the frontiers of charity, with full trust in Providence.

As in the past, your religious family can rely on the active contribution of many lay cooperators, both men and women. Drawn by the Guanellian charism, they generously share in your mission as "Good Samaritans" to the marginalized, thus living the basic Gospel vocation to charity.

The presence at your Chapter of representatives of the Guanellian Sisters and of a lay group is very significant in this regard. It will help you to deepen the unity and strengthen the cooperation of Fr. Guanella's spiritual children, so that your witness to charity and your efforts for a more just and fraternal world can be more effective.

4. In the spirit of your blessed founder, in the midst of a world too frequently fraught by tension and individualism, may you be an ever more visible sign of dialogue and fraternal communion, and credible witnesses of reconciliation and peace.

Above all, may you be able each day to rediscover the deep spiritual roots of community life and the service of charity, so that you can continue to see your brethren as a true gift of Providence, especially if they are lonely or in trouble. In your daily work and in your mutual relations, may you always keep alive the ideal of unity indicated by Jesus in the "testament" he left his disciples at the Last Supper: Father, that they may all be one, so that the world may believe that you sent me (cf. *Jn* 17: 21).

In hoping that the guidelines resulting from the General Chapter you are holding during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will bring your institute renewed dynamism and vitality in spiritual commitment, in fraternal life and in service to the poor and marginalized, I invoke the heavenly protection of Our Lady and Bl. Louis Guanella, as I cordially bless you and all the Guanellian communities throughout the world.