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Prot. N. 89/20

A MORE HUMAN AND SHARED RELIGIOUS LIFE

Letter from the Prior General
to the Brothers and Sisters of the Order

Dear brothers and sisters:

Walking in fraternal unity is the necessary condition to respond, as Augustinians, to the demands of this time marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the social and economic consequences which we can already see. There is no doubt that together we are stronger when facing challenges. Only united will we be able to open new horizons never imagined, to create hopes that were almost lost, and to reach new goals. "Goodness is a possession that spreads out more and more widely insofar as those who share it are united in undivided love. In fact, anyone who is unwilling to share this possession will find that he does not possess it at all, but, the more he is able to love the one who shares it with him, the greater he will find that his own possession of it becomes." (*The City of God* 15,5).

With this desire to walk together, fostering a greater relationship among all people through the means at our disposal, the General Council of the Order wants to initiate a new path with the circumscriptions, communities and brothers and sisters, to face the reality that is emerging because of the pandemic and its personal, social, pastoral and structural consequences.

The desire of the General Council is to promote more fluid communication with the members of the Order at different levels, beginning with the Major Superiors. Through new technologies we have started a dialogue with them to learn about the situation, exchange ideas and experiences and help in decision-making.

There is no room for nostalgic glances at the past; It is impossible to return to the previous situation, as if everything had been just a bad dream. The world has changed and the reality we are experiencing requires us to react appropriately, consistently and responsibly. For this I consider it essential to promote communion: among us and in the Risen Christ. And, from there, we must respond. "The Head and the body form one single Christ ... Show, then, that you are a body worthy of such a Head" (*Sermon* 341, 11.13).

We can use the tools at our disposal and can share materials that help us all and which we can make available to each other. The Institute of Augustinian Spirituality offers us a document entitled "*A Time of Hope*". It reflects on the current situation and its challenges, from a Christian and Augustinian

perspective. It is a serious, profound and provocative document. I think that it is convenient for each of us to read it calmly and to reflect on its different proposals. You can also discuss it at the community and circumscriptional level, with the pedagogical assistance it offers.

It is simply an open proposal, a working document. Each one will need to discover the best way to use it. We know that cultural, social, religious, economic and relational situations are very different in each part of the Order. This diversity constitutes a real treasure if one lives in communion. It is up to us to continue the dialogue, to extract ideas that can help us to walk together, as Christians and as Augustinians, at this moment in history. We are being challenged to develop concrete options and decisions that we all must make, according to the circumstances of time, place and culture, and in accordance with our charism (cf. CC 16).

At the same time, I encourage you to send ideas, reflections and proposals that may be useful to all the brothers and sisters of the Order. We seek to share life by emphasizing communion, favoring dialogue to better serve the Church and the men and women of our time. That is why I wish that our options and our decisions be courageous, risky, and renovative, while being always guided by the Gospel.

In this path we must all be involved: Members of the General Council, General Commissions, Major Superiors, Provincial and Vicarial Councils, Delegations, Regional Organizations, communities of the Order, religious brothers, sisters of contemplative life and lay Fraternities. The journey and the challenges along the way belong to everyone and are for everyone.

The Holy Father insistently asks us to "touch the flesh of Christ in suffering people." This necessary openness to the human reality of suffering places us before the many conflicts that are arising and will arise in the coming years. Without a doubt, with the help of God, we will have to heal many wounds as we face complex and, at times, inhumane situations.

I want to thank the Institute of Augustinian Spirituality, especially its president and its executive committee, for the great help they are offering us in these dark times. The materials they send to us (prayers, reflections, guidelines) are proving to be very useful for many of our communities and our brothers and sister individually. Without sharing our faith, we cannot live communion and without communion, we cannot live the Augustinian fraternity. Without these, our despair only grows stronger.

We must always keep in mind that "the Augustinian community is called to be a prophetic sign in the world to the extent that fraternal life becomes a source of sharing and a cause of hope" (CC 33).

May Mary, Our Mother of Good Counsel, illuminate our way and intercede for us before her Son who died and rose to new life.

Rome, May 26, 2020



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