



## OPENING ADDRESS

### COUNCIL OF THE FAMILY

13 – 18 JANUARY 2011

#### A FAMILY ON MISSION – NEW FORMS NEW MEANS

I am happy to welcome you all to this Council of the Family. Coming from four Continents we represent all the five vocations and all the members of the Family. (...)

It is very significant for us that this meeting takes place just before the 8<sup>th</sup> February when we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Founder. Such an anniversary invites us to look at this present time and to see how we are living the Charism that our Founder left us and how it may be expressed in a way that is relevant for today. Our meeting can help all of us to open ourselves to the grace of this year that surely invites us to go deeply into our Charism and together listen to the Spirit in order to see how we can continue to offer the Charism to our world. The theme chosen indicates an awareness of a call to openness to change, to newness.

We can live this experience here with a desire to rekindle the gift that is within us, to revitalise the living of our Charism, the gift given for the world through Pierre Bienvenu Noailles. This moment in our story is a graced time that calls us to enter in a new way, individually and as members of one Family, into the heart of the gospel message as seen through the eyes of our Founder. Today the Charism lives in us. We now carry the grace he received as we live our five vocations in one Family. And here in this meeting we can deepen and celebrate that gift together.

The theme for the meeting "**A Family on Mission – New Forms, New Means**" recalls for us the words of our Founder: *While man lives on this earth, he uselessly tries to erect some durable monuments of his wisdom or of his love for the travellers who will come after him ... it is very rare that the ideas and the needs of the century which is finishing respond to all the ideas and needs of that which is about to begin ... for this reason we often see new Societies succeeding older ones. While they propose to follow the same objectives, nevertheless, they **have adopted new forms or new means** which are more in keeping with the circumstances which brought about their birth.* (General rules 1844, 1851) We know that our Founder was capable of listening deeply to the signs of the times and of responding in new ways and with new means during his life time and there is no doubt that he would encourage us to do the same today. We also know that it is challenging to leave past ways or past beliefs behind in order to risk the new. (...)

Equally we know that while we cling to the old and secure, while we want to control each step, we are not able to move in faith and trust into the unknown. The theme "*A Family on Mission, New forms, New Means*" invites us to dream of a way forward that offers, in a meaningful way, our Charism as gift that will make difference in today's world.

As we meet here to reflect, to share and dialogue, and to listen deeply to one another let us realise that the Spirit is continually doing "*new things*" and will enable us to move forward together. If our Founder had clung to the branch of security, of tradition, if he had not taken the risk of doing something new, amidst suspicion and opposition, struggles and failures we would not be gathered here today. The Charism is within us and among us, we may not fully appreciate it, or we may have just a limited view of it. We can only know what is being asked of us for today when we take the risk of setting out, of leaving our branch, and this will always demand that that we walk in faith and trust.

It is only when we are willing to share our ideas and to listen to the ideas of others that the vision can emerge. If we remain attached to our own point of view and do not risk being open to a different one we will miss the opportunity of hearing the Spirit speaking to us in and through our diversity. Let us

recognise that each of us has a glimpse of the truth and that it is together that we will discover the way forward, The choice to explore the theme of our meeting has to be ours, a choice that comes from a heart level that is based on an understanding of our Charism for today, a deep listening to the Spirit and the motivation of wanting to respond for the sake of God's reign in the world. We are the ones today who have the responsibility to live the gift in the context of today. (...)

We know our Founder had the courage to let go of the known, to step out in faith, and to respond to the call he experienced as he allowed himself to be challenged by the needs of the society of his time. He received the inspiration to begin an Association of different vocations with a desire to build a "new society" where unity in diversity could be lived and proclaimed and where its members would *"love, seek and desire God Alone"* in all things, following the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In other words the spirit of God Alone was the energy that would enable the family to make a meaningful contribution in the world. We live in a different time, our world view is changing and *"our perception of God evolves as we evolve and as our God-human relationships evolve"* and today we are growing in an awareness that God is *in* all things and that all things are *in* God. Our living of the spirit of God Alone will be influenced by our world view and our way of seeing/experiencing God.

Therefore today, our Founder would encourage us to live this spirit of God Alone in a much wider context of a Universe that is sacred and permeated with the Divine. It is this spirit, within our hearts, that motivates us, gives us energy and creates the bond of unity that exists among us. It makes us a family which speaks - by our lives of openness to diversity and equality/communion - of God's all-inclusive love. It is like the sap that gives life, which keeps us connected and inspires us to promote and to live consciously the communion that exists in our world. It is this spirit that can help us to be "mystic" to listen deeply to the Spirit at this time and to discern what it means *to seek new ways, new means* to live our mission today.

May our time here be an experience moving forward together, listening to the voice of the Spirit active in our journey as a Family on mission in the reality of our Church and world today.

**Margaret Muldoon**  
**January 2011**