General Visitation
Living Hospitality Hopefully and Boldly
Province of the Good Shepherd in North America
May 9 – June 24, 2016

Final Report for the St John of God Family
Orangeville / Ontario Canada
June 23, 2016
1. The Prior General’s Letter of Announcement

In his circular from 2 February 2013 our Prior General Jesús Etayo announced the canonical visitation for the Sexennium 2012 – 2018 and went on to describe its goals:

“The canonical visitation is a brotherly visit which first and foremost serves
- to evaluate the information as objectively as possible, shedding light on the situations as they exist;
- to animate and project the future of the communities and institutions to be consistent with the “Declarations of the last General Chapter”, particularly based on the lines of action and priorities for the Sexennium;
- to take the most appropriate decisions with the aim of superseding whatever limitations and constraints that may exist and improve our response in personal, community and apostolic terms;
- to enable the Visitator to inform the whole Order of the Hospitaller Family of St John of God about the lines of action and the projects being promoted by the General Curia and any other information of interest and relevance to the whole Order.”

During its first Definitory session of the Sexennium 2012 - 2018 from 8 to 10 January 2013 Brother Rudolf Knopp was tasked to carry out the visitation.

The Provincial and the Council of the Province of the Good Shepherd in North America appointed Sr. Christina Kazimirek of the Order of the Felician Sisters the secretary for this visitation.

‘Living Hospitality Hopefully and Boldly’

In his letter convoking the visitation the Prior General went on to say: “We have chosen this title to send out an appeal to keep faith and trust in the vocation we have received and to place our whole being and all our energies and talents, however poor and weak they may be, at the service of the mission of hospitality to which we have been sent in the manner of St John. Practicing hospitality today and making it visible demands boldness. This is not the time to cast backward glances, to be paralyzed by the difficulties we encounter at every level or fall into a passive attitude, which is typical of those who live with little hope and without energy. On the contrary, it is a time to devote the whole of our being, and all our energies to fostering hospitality, and to do so boldly.”

1. Visitation of the Communities in the Province

During the visitation the Visitator Brother Rudolf Knopp, was accompanied by Brother Justin Howson, the Provincial of the North American Province.
In order to summarize the visitation in one image I would like to borrow from Pope Francis who repeatedly uses the symbol of the polyhedron.
In Evangelii Gaudium the Pope says: “Our model is not the sphere ..., where every point is equidistant from the center, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness”.

In his post-synod apostolic exhortation AMORIS LAETITIA the Pope quotes the example of the polyhedron when talking about the interventions of the Synod Fathers to which he had “paid close heed” and which are to him like “… a multifaceted gem reflecting many legitimate concerns and honest questions”.

Looking at the polyhedron, is it not also a valid image for the entire Order with its 22 provinces? Every single province is different, with things that are positive and things that not so positive but they are all directed towards the core, towards ‘Hospitality in the manner of St John of God’.

During the visitation I have seen and heard, experienced and felt a great many things: Some of them joyful, some alarming, some giving rise to hope, some worrying and also some that were encouraging. There were questions – some that could be answered and some that could not. There were ideas and reflections about the future, some within a tight framework and some along a broad horizon.

But all of it was geared to our joint center and core: Hospitality in the manner of St John of God. In short: It was a visitation of a living province. A real polyhedron of the visitation.

Every center receives its own individual report. So there is no need to repeat any of it here. What I would like to do during this Assembly of the Province is to show the aspects and tendencies across the Province as well as possible lines of action. Looking for a suitable structure for this report I have finally settled on the values of our Order: Hospitality – Quality, Respect, Responsibility and Spirituality for they are the essence of all our documents, Constitutions and General Statutes. Perhaps this presentation will help to make them a little less abstract and as such easier to tie in with day-to-day reality.

2. Hospitality

Hospitality is our core value with our four guiding values – Quality, Respect, Responsibility and Spirituality – illustrating its conceptual meaning.

Brother Matthias Barrett was a model of Hospitality which largely defined the main characteristics of the apostolate of what is today the Province of the Good Shepherd in North America. His motto ‘Charity Unlimited’ is a beautiful description of hospitality. In his post-synod apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia Pope Francis develops a wonderful thought on this very ‘Charity Unlimited’ based on Thomas Aquinas. He says:

---

1 Cf. Pope Francis I, Evangelii Gaudium, Rome 2013, Chapter 236
2 Pope Francis I, Amoris Laetitia, Rome 2016, Chapter 4
“Love [Charity], by its very nature, has no limit to its increase, for it is a participation in that infinite charity which is the Holy Spirit... Nor on the part of the subject can its limit be fixed, because as charity grows, so too does its capacity for an even greater increase”. Saint Paul also prays: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another” (1 TH 3:12), and again, “concerning fraternal love... we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more” (1 TH 4:9-10).\(^3\)

The Province has another important model of Hospitality, God’s servant Brother William Gagnon for whom Vietnam was an important focus of his work. The Province should continue to promote his memory and, where possible, also encourage his veneration.

Hospitality has been lived in the past and is being lived today. All the wonderful things that have been happening should not be consigned to oblivion. Hospitality, too, needs a historical memory. For all our care and concern for the person we encounter along the way or the person outside our door we should not neglect maintaining chronicles and archives. It is important that all the agencies issue annual reports. This is not only positive and needed for their historical memory but also for public relations.

As requested by the Holy See, any notable works of art and/or works by important local artists or any objects linked to its history should be archived by every social services agency. This should be done before the Provincial Chapter 2018 and coordinated with the Provincial. Please do not consider this to be unnecessary work. Art is the expression of our striving for living hospitality, our search for God as well as our search for harmony. We should not risk losing these wonderful treasures.

Efforts surrounding corporate identity are to be commended even if this is not our main concern. It is nice to see how the memory of Brother Mathias Barret is being kept alive and present while the distinctive signs of the Hospitaller Order (pomegranate, depictions of St John of God, the name Hospitaller Order) have started to come in. Centers might differ in this respect yet things have started to move. Use the available space and continue to develop. The Leadership of the Province is working on a new common layout and deserves every support when it comes to implementing it. This is not just about appearances. Hospitality needs something by which it can be recognized.

We Brothers are not necessarily at ease when it comes to being out in public and actively carrying out PR. ‘Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet’ still rings in our ears. Yet in a world of multimedia it is what is good in the world that needs more publicity. I can only encourage the entire St John of God Family to be actively involved in public relations. I explicitly call on my Brothers to offer their presence and support for these public relations efforts. Let us not look for ‘artificial sacrifices’ but let us offer up those that serve the apostolate.

In terms of lived Hospitality the Province and the Community of Services do not start from scratch. There is the dedication of each individual co-worker and there is the legacy of Brother Matthias Barrett which can be channeled into the Family of St John of

\(^3\) Pope Francis I, Amoris Laetitia, Rome 2016, Paragraph 134
God. In this context, the first endeavors to set up a ‘School of Hospitality’ and offer co-workers a ‘Granada Experience’ are very pleasing to see. This allows co-workers to find their way into Hospitality and then to bring Hospitality to life themselves. This is the very basis of a St John of God Family which is both alive and creative.

3. Quality

excellence, professionalism, holistic care, awareness of new needs, model of union with our Co-workers, model of St John of God type care, welcoming architecture and furnishings, collaboration with third parties

It is both gratifying and encouraging that the leadership and the entire St John of God Family in North America is making efforts to continue optimizing current programs and developing new ones as is illustrated by a number of special programs. And creativity is not restricted to formal training, education and resocialization programs but also extends to a wide variety of leisure programs.

There is strong awareness in the Province for high quality service offerings and it is great to see that the setting up of quality management structures has now begun. In today’s world it is no longer enough to be good at what you do. You also need to be able to prove it and stand up to scrutiny.

In recent times much has been done to improve the look and feel of the centers with some being rather more active than others. There is still potential for further improvements. In the early days of the Order in France hospitals were referred to as ‘Hôtel Dieu’. This might also be a model for the social services agencies in the Province: Our centers should become ‘Hôtel Dieu’.

The General Chapter in 2012 in Fatima called for the setting up of networks and the optimization of our service offerings. The North American Province has picked up on this for quite some time by extending both their provincial network and that of their agencies.

The quality of the services offered by the St John of God Family is not just a matter for the Brothers. Good quality only comes from people working together. There is a wonderful thought in Pope Francis’ post-synod exhortation ‘Amoris Laetitia’ which is warning to us Brothers:
“Rather than speak absolutely of the superiority of virginity, it should be enough to point out that the different states of life complement one another, and consequently that some can be more perfect in one way and others in another”.  

A final reflection on the issue of Quality: More cooperation is needed across the Province. Commissions should be set up and the professional skills that exist in one agency need to be harnessed to the benefit of all the centers in the Province by embracing the

---

4 Pope Francis I, Amoris Laetitia, Rome 2016, Paragraph 159
concept ‘best practice’. This kind of co-operation should not stop at the borders of the Province but should also lead to closer co-operation with the Province of Los Angeles.

4. Respect

respect for the other, humanization, human dimension, mutual responsibility toward co-workers and Brothers, understanding, holistic vision, promotion of social justice, civil and human rights, involvement of relatives

The General Chapter’s precept that “we must listen particularly to the voices of the guests in our care, in order to safeguard their rights and improve the quality of the care we provide them with” is already being satisfied to a very great extent by the Province’s centers. But there is further potential for development. This is an area where we can never do enough. Our Superior General Pierluigi Marchesi once stated it quite succinctly: Those in our care are our university!

Education and further education are of great importance to the service community in any center or province. Some of the educational contents are required of us by law; others arise from the activity itself. But we should not forget that dealing with vulnerable folks takes more than just professional expertise. Pope Benedict XVI describes it beautifully in his Encyclical Deus caritas est: “Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”.

---

5 "Deus Caritas Est", Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI. 2006. Cf. Article 31a: Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of Caritas (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: They should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).
5. Responsibility

fidelity to the ideals of St John of God and the Order, ethics (bioethics, social ethics, management ethics), protection of the environment, social responsibility, sustainability, justice, fair distribution of our resources

The Province’s centers care for many who have been marked by life (vulnerable), among them young people and children. Therefore, our attention has to focus fully on the prevention of abuse and violations (Safeguarding). Not just here and there, but constantly and everywhere. Awareness of this issue must not be allowed to diminish in the centers.

During his visit to England in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized that the ethical principles of a democracy should not only be based on social consensus. The global financial crisis had illustrated the inadequacy of ‘pragmatic, short-term solutions’ to complex social and ethical problems. Catholic understanding was, however, that the most important role of religion was not to supply ethical norms, he continued, since non-believers were, of course, also able to identify objective moral principles by means of reason. Religion was rather to take on a ‘corrective role’ in the social debate on values. It is this responsibility that is also stressed by the General Chapter of 2012 in Fatima: “The General and Provincial Ethics and Bioethics Commissions must be strengthened so that they can guarantee formation and appropriate decision-taking in respect of these matters throughout the whole Order”. The Province has already appointed a bioethics commission. It is a matter for discussion at the provincial level whether there is need for an ethics commission in each center.

Compared to other provinces, government funding is very low. About 2/3 of the budget must be met by fundraising activities. This is a challenge. The entire Family of St. John of God in the Province is encouraged and called upon to assist. You do have creative minds where fundraising is concerned, but cooperation between them does need to be enhanced.

Environmental awareness, the protection of creation is not yet very pronounced in the US and Canada. Pope Francis exhorts with impressive words in his encyclical "Laudato Si" to respect, to have responsible handling of creation. As an ecclesiastical institution we should not wait until we are forced to protect creation by more environmental laws. It has to be a concern for our Order to preserve creation. This is not done by big investments or changes. We just need to start simply, in our local communities, for example, to use less disposable items such has cups, plates, cutlery, etc.

6. Spirituality

pastoral service, evangelization, offering spiritual care to those of other religions, ecumenism, collaboration with parishes, dioceses, other confessions
Let us introduce this topic with an apology. The General Curia’s document on pastoral care in the centers of the Order has a flaw. There is no dedicated consideration of pastoral work with homeless people. We shall make a virtue of necessity, then. The co-workers and Brothers of the province working in homeless pastoral services could fill this gap using their professional expertise.

Pope Francis, who is loved as much as feared for his plain language, says in Evangelii Gaudium: “Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems”\(^6\). This is reflected in the broad approach to pastoral work in the majority of the Province’s centers. I would only say that where pastoral care and spirituality are concerned, the focus of our efforts should not only be on the folks, but also on co-workers and volunteers.

During the days of the visitation, we also celebrated the feast day of the Blessed Eustachius Kugler, a Brother of St. John of God. He was a member of my province, the Bavarian Province. So please allow me to quote him. In his visitation report from 1927 at Bad Wörishofen, he says: “With regard to the House itself, much has been repaired and improved in the last few years. Although we, dear Brothers, have to see that our houses do not lag behind in all the modern facilities, I would still like to express a caution and a desire not to let this be our main concern. The main concern is and remains the Spirit that dwells in them”\(^7\). I believe this to be a good closing sentence on the topic of spirituality.

### 7. Contemplations

Some contemplations before I conclude. This is a text by Michael Fischer, Professor for Quality and Ethics at the University of Hall in Tyrol, Austria. It is a text that may help not to lose sight of how the Mission of our Order is full of hope, despite all the present worries for the Province. The text is inspired by the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are you for you contribute to a considerate and caring company culture. You will grow in love.
Blessed are you for you have the wherewithal to hold fast against the constraints of ever increasing economization and commercialization. You will contribute to the kind of development that is fit for human beings.
Blessed are you for you stand firm against the abuse of power in your companies. You will present a powerful alternative.
Blessed are you for you happily commit to follow an ethical course of action. You will break through the practical constraints of what are deemed to be the facts.
Blessed are you for you do not serve solely the interests of shareholders.

---

\(^6\) Pope Francis I, Evangelii Gaudium, Rome 2013, Chapter 47
\(^7\) Visitation report of 24th June 1927
You will bear witness that the Kingdom of God is all embracing. Blessed are you for you dare to take small steps always mindful of withstanding the tension arising from the big goals. Through courage to embrace the small detail, the fragment, you will find the way to true humanity. Blessed are you for you keep striving for an organizational structure that accords with the gospel. You will continue to discover creative powers. Blessed are you for you do not just talk but act. You will provide the havens of hope.

8. Conclusions

Firstly, my sincerest thanks to Brother Justin Howson, Provincial for the preparation and organization of the visitation. This also includes the good discussions we had in advance of the visitation.

A heartfelt thank you to all the members of the St. John of God Family in the North American Province for their cordial welcome and the open and congenial atmosphere during our talks, which allowed the General Curia an insight into the life of the centers and the Province at large. It was a very enriching experience for me. Thank you also for the efforts you made to understand my English. I am sure that on occasion you must have had to turn not one, but two blind eyes.

Thank you to those in the Executive for striving every day to set a credible example of hospitality. This is not easy in an era of upheaval for the Church and in society. In fact, it is a challenge. Do not just choose a responsible path, but chose a path that challenges and inspires.

I wish to say thank you to all the members of the St. John of God Family (co-workers and volunteers) for their daily practice of hospitality at grass roots level, working with human beings in search of succor. St. John of God and Brother Matthias Barrett would have been delighted!

My sincere thanks are owed to Sister Christina Kazimirek, who accompanied me as secretary during this visitation.

In conclusion, let me say THANK YOU to you all from the bottom of my heart for wonderful and enriching times together. I felt very much at ease and welcomed among you.

Orangeville, June 23, 2016

Brother Rudolf Knopp
General Councilor

Copy to
- General Curia
- Brother Justin Howson, Provincial