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### Christmas Letter from Sr Marie and the Central Team 2018



Journey to Bethlehem

The Christmas season is with us once again and I wish you an abundance of joy as we celebrate this special feast. Christmas is one of the times when we are especially united throughout the Institute as we pray for and send greetings to one another. May your celebration of Emmanuel, God-with-us, bring you great joy – *“a joy to be shared by the whole people”* (Lk 2:10), including each one of you and your loved ones.

On Christmas night the Light comes to shatter the darkness. Darkness and despair are dispelled and the dawn heralds new life and freedom for all people. Joy is released upon the earth and it is time to share in the goodness of God. A child is born, an unknown and unnoticed child, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. This child is the Messiah, the Saviour, the glory of God, breathing and sleeping among us.

On this night God chose to be born among us, who believe in the Word that has been given to us. On this Christmas night may God find us awake, with our hearts open, so that the space inside us might become a haven of peace for all those who touch our lives: those whose faces we see each day, those who reach out to us and those whom we often take for granted.

Our Christmas card this year shows Joseph and Mary, with her unborn child, on their journey to Bethlehem. The glory of the yet unborn Lord is shining around Mary and Joseph, a light still hidden from the people. *“Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s town*

*called Bethlehem, in order to be registered, together with Mary his betrothed, who was with child.” (Lk 2:4-5).*

The journey to Bethlehem was not an easy one for Joseph and Mary. It was not the way Mary imagined life would be in the days before the birth of her child. They were forced to leave their home in Nazareth just when she was about to have her baby. After the long journey to Bethlehem, there was no lodging awaiting them and they had to take shelter in a stable.



The seasons of Advent and Christmas bring a beautiful reminder of how we might find hope in the darkness, in times of confusion. It is helpful to be able to turn to Mary during this time, knowing that she was also afraid and confused at times, but she willingly walked the unknown path ahead of her. She, together with Joseph, persevered even in the darkest moments. *“When we are able to take the next step, with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life and be surprised at how far we go”.* (Henri Nouwen)

The Christmas story is full of challenges, not least of which is the unexpected and startling way that God chose to be born among us. It is both breathtaking and simple. It makes us wonder. *“A saviour has been born to us, he is Christ the Lord”* (Lk. 2). This child belongs to God and to all people.

*“As for Mary”,* the Gospel says, *“she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* She thought about them; she prayed about them; she pondered. She is our model of a prayerful, listening, discerning person. Perhaps she was fearful, but she remained open to the unfolding mystery, trying to understand its meaning and to continue to respond to what God was asking of her.

We know very little about Joseph, except that he too was a very good listener. He listened to the angel who appeared to him in a dream and told him that the child in Mary’s womb was conceived through the Holy Spirit. Although this was completely outside Joseph’s experience

he listened deeply and did as the angel asked; *“he took his wife to his home”* (Matt.1:24). He reorganised his whole life around his new, unexpected family. He also listened to the angels in Bethlehem; *“Do not be afraid. Listen! I bring news of great joy”*. (Lk. 2:10)

We, too, are invited to listen deeply, especially during this Christmas when we are in the midst of preparing for the General Chapter, the theme of which is **“Listen! I am sending you on a new path”**. This journey will be taken together with all our sisters and friends throughout the world. It is a journey, like that of Mary and Joseph and the Infant Jesus, which is unfolding step by step. Let us *Listen!*, and listen attentively to the Lord through one another, as we are led towards a new path, a new horizon. Let us listen ever more deeply and with our hearts. Let us listen to the Lord, who is gradually revealing which path to take.

*“Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges:  
can you not see it?”* (Isaiah 43:19)

Towards what new horizon are we being led? Pope Francis tells us, *“For the great human family, it is necessary to renew always the common horizon toward which we are journeying. The horizon of hope! This is the horizon that makes a good journey.”*

Christmas has meaning for us only when we are personally touched by it and welcome the birth of Christ in our hearts. Christmas invites us to reflect on who Christ is for each one of us, what he means for us and for our lives. What is the “added value” that Christ gives to our lives? Is our life with Christ different from the life of a person who does not believe in Christ, whose life is not touched and shaped by his presence?

On Christmas Day, more than any other day in the year, it is good to remember that we have no other authentic light but Christ. He is born for us today. He came down from Heaven to light an eternal flame within us. We cannot keep the light for ourselves; it is meant for all peoples. May we draw on our creativity to unite with all people of good will, whatever their faith or origin, so that the light of Christ may be revealed in our world. May this light so invade our darkness that abundant joy may spread throughout the earth! At Christmas, *“amid so much darkness, let us see the light of hope and be men and women who bring hope to others.”* (Pope Francis)

At the centre of all our Christmas celebrations is the newborn Christ child lying in a manger – and the love and salvation that he brings to the world. Christmas reminds us that God has

come close to us, that he desires to walk the path of life with each one of us. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in wishing you all a very happy, hopeful and joyful Christmas,

Sr Marie.



## PENTECOST 2018

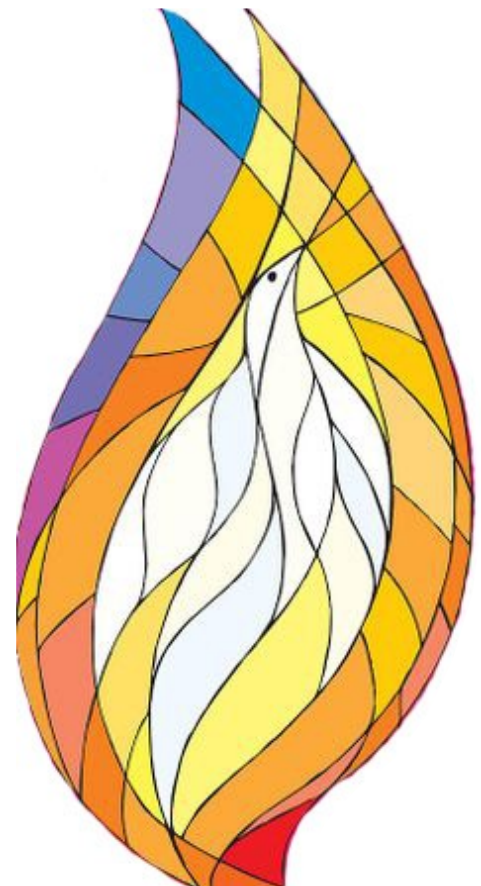
Dearest Sisters and Friends,

**A** very happy and holy feast of Pentecost to you all! May you be filled with joy, faith and courage as you open your hearts to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit on this great feast.

It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that enables the Easter 'Alleluia' to resonate through every aspect of our lives. The Holy Spirit helps us to live the new life that we are offered. Joy will triumph over uncertainty, because the promise offered to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit will never be diminished.

The Feast of Pentecost invites us to reflect deeply on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives today and to look at the ways we respond to them. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he was very much aware that his time in active ministry was running out. He needed to select a person to continue the mission into the future. He chose Timothy as a credible witness to the Gospel and urged him to *"fan into a flame the gifts God had given him"* (2 Tim 1:6) and to continue the work of sharing the Good News with all people. Paul knew this mission would require courage and reliance on the grace of God. Timothy kept on feeding the flame of God's gifts and spoke openly of Christ. He was aflame with God's love and always knew that the promises of Jesus would never fail him.

That same message is given to each of us. We are invited to replace fear with courage and hope and not limit ourselves in the fullness of our response to God's call. As we face the challenges that life brings, let us call on the grace of the Spirit to sustain the fire within us and help us be courageous in sharing the Word of God. Let us practise in our own lives what we have been teaching and preaching – love, forgiveness, peace, justice and hope. The same power that transformed the early disciples is available to us at all times.



With the Holy Spirit we can consciously choose to “*fan into a flame*” the gifts God has given to each of us individually and to the various groups to which we belong.

*What gifts are you being called to fan into a flame?*

It is clear from the words of Jesus himself, “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”(Lk. 11:13), that God longs to give the Holy Spirit to us and that all we have to do is ask. The Spirit often works quietly and secretly



we also need to be prepared for wind and fire! Do not doubt that God will give his Spirit to all who seek him. We can be certain that the direction of a life led by the Spirit will bring fulfilment and enable that person to give glory to God.

When we have an open and generous heart, it is so much easier to recognise the voice of God’s spirit. If our attitude is right, and if we really want to hear that voice, then we can be sure that we will hear it. The limits to the effectiveness of the Spirit in our lives are the ones we set ourselves. When we say ‘yes’ to the Holy Spirit from the depths of our hearts, we recognise the gentle power of God’s spirit within us.

The recent document from Pope Francis, ‘Gaudete et Exsultate’ (Rejoice and be Glad), is a call to ‘holiness’ – a simple and practical guide to living our lives in honesty and truth. Francis says, “*This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures*”. (16) He continues, “*Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace.*” (34)

Holiness is not about being a special sort of person or living apart from the world but about being a good next-door neighbour, finding a better way of doing what we do already, and carrying out ordinary acts in an extraordinary way. Holiness needs times of quiet, solitude and silence. Pope Francis asks, “*Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire.*” (151)

The Holy Spirit is always with us, always in our hearts. If we listen to him he teaches us the path of wisdom, which is seeing with God’s eyes, listening with God’s ears, loving

with God's heart, and judging with God's judgement. We just have to ask the Holy Spirit.

*When has the presence of the Holy Spirit offered you comfort and consolation at times of difficulty in your life?*

One of Nicolas Barré's gifts to us was his total conviction of the power of the Holy Spirit to work wonders in our lives, beyond all our expectations. This conviction came from his own lived experience. He urges us to *"be faithful and allow yourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, as a feather is carried by the wind"* (L 9). As we continue our journey from the recent Council of the Institute in Kuala Lumpur towards the General Chapter next year, let us *"Stay Awake!"* and allow the Holy Spirit to give new life to the creativity and imagination within each of us - sisters, friends and faithful collaborators - as we search together for the way forward.

So wherever we are today, whatever is happening in our lives, the Spirit is with us. Inspired by the activity of the Holy Spirit, we have the courage to lift our hearts in hope. The Spirit will fill us, making us new.

May the Spirit of Pentecost sweep through your life, your heart, your imagination, and transform you into someone whose heart is on fire with the love of God!

Kimiko, Maria and Noreen join me in assuring you of our prayer as we celebrate the feast of Pentecost once again. Come, Holy Spirit!

*Maire*

