

REGLAS
Y CONSTITUCIONES
QUE HAN DE OBSERVAR Y CUMPLIR
LAS HERMANAS DE LA CARIDAD
DEL SANTO HOSPITAL
REAL Y GENERAL
DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE GRACIA
DE LA CIUDAD DE ZARAGOZA.



CON LICENCIA:

ZARAGOZA: *En la imprenta del mismo.*

Año de 1824.

**200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
APPROVAL OF THE
CONSTITUTIONS OF 1824**





**«Charity which is the true name of this
Congregation must be the mark by which they
are to be known.»**

(Const. 1824, ch. 13)



In one of the definitions on Constitutions of the Religious Congregations it is said: “Constitutions are gifts and graces received by the founders, handed over in written form so that those who may read them receive the same gifts and graces.”

What are these gifts and graces? The Charism, the Mission and the Spirit.

This year we celebrate the 200 years of the approval of our Constitutions of 1824. On 16th July 1825 our sisters took the first Vows.

This anniversary invites us to look back, to re – read the gifts and graces received by our founders and to re – live them in today’s context. The document *Perfectae Caritatis* of the II Vatican Council called the Religious Congregations to “a constant return to the sources of their foundations and to adapt themselves to the changing signs of our times”. Therefore, after almost 60 years, we need to change our thought pattern and our ideology as they can be old wineskins which may not contain the answers for the new challenges. There are new paths to walk on, new possibilities to explore, new questions to ask and new strategies to respond to as people change, objectives are different and new needs emerge.

Going back to the origins we know does not mean going back to the original ministries we were carrying out, neither the way how they were carried out then. But the spirit with which the Charism and the Mission are to be lived has not changed and this is what the Council asked the religious Congregations to go back.

The first realization of Constitutions, in our Congregation, is to be found in the “Little Notebook of Father John” around 1805. These Constitutions are the Foundational Letter and lay the foundations for the life of our first Sisters who serve Jesus Christ in the person of the needy with heroic self-giving.

This Little Notebook was not accepted by the Hospital’s Board, because it contained the scheme of a Congregation of universal expansion. For this reason, the President Bishop of the French Board of the Hospital, Fray Miguel Suarez de Santander, drafted Constitutions for the Sisters in 1812. They “never came into force” because they did not contain the spirit of the Fraternity.

The Charismatic ideal of the Constitutions of 1805 takes a new form in those of 1824 to adapt to the historical situation of the Sisters in the Hospital



of Our Lady of Grace. At this moment, the Fraternity becomes a diocesan Congregation.

Over the years, we have revised the Constitutions to adapt ourselves to the changes introduced in the Canon Law, to add new norms of government as the expansion was taking place or to improve the language. But the spirit of all these revised and updated editions is based on the Constitutions of 1824.

Right from its beginnings, the Sitiada¹ tried to present the Sisterhood from becoming a religious congregation. Implicitly in their dealings and explicitly in the Constitutions of 1812 it is made clear to the Sisters. The introduction letter written for these Constitutions says in this way:

«I have considered this small group of Sisters not as a few harmless women who now live edifying lives, not as a child in the cradle, who is not to be feared, but looking at the times ahead, and learning from the past experience that people and institutions that are weak at the beginning became strong and almost irresistible, I have closed the door to any possibility of growth on their part, ensuring their absolute subordination to the hospital board and totally excluding any independence on their part. This is the foundation stone on which rise the entire edifice of these Constitutions». (Sitiada, 9th December 1811).

For the Sitiada, the sisters were merely voluntary workers from whom they should obtain the maximum profit.

In the prologue of this Constitutions of 1824, we read:

«Blessed you dearest Sisters, the spirit of charity has brought you to this holy Hospital so as to serve the sick, this is the purpose of your coming, for this only purpose have you been brought by the hospital Board, it is with its permission that you exist and if it may judge necessary or convenient, for some serious reason, to take you back or transfer elsewhere it could do so freely. You do not constitute a religious Congregation approved by the Church, you take no solemn vows nor keep cloister, whether perpetual or temporal, you are nothing more than servants of Jesus Christ, assigned to the care of the sick patients of the Holy Hospital».

Really shocking expressions. The lives of the sisters are in the hands of the Board, “you exist with its permission”. The Board is given absolute unlimited power.

¹ Government Board of Our Lady of Grace Hospital.



But, Father John Bonal, Mother Maria Rafols and the sisters, were very clear about their call and the purpose for which they were coming which is expressed in the 1st number of the Constitutions:

«We, Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, thankfully recognize that our Congregation is a gift bestowed by Christ on his Church...». (Const. 2010, No. 1)

The consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element of her mission, since it manifests the inner intimate nature of the christian vocation. The profession of the Evangelical Counsels is an integral part of the Church's life and a very much-needed stimulus for an ever greater fidelity to the Gospel. (VC 3)

They were sure about the “why” of what they were coming to do. Charity for the sake of Charity has no meaning. The Founders and first Sisters were deeply rooted in God's Love and in every person they served they saw the face of Jesus.

In the Constitutions of 1824 the first chapter begins with the final name of the institute:

«Charity which is the true name of this Congregation must be the mark by which they are to be known». (Const. 1824, ch. 13)

A question was made to Jesus: “Master, which is the greatest commandment?... “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...” In reality, the sacrifice of charity is more agreeable to God than any other victim in holocaust and any other kind of work, because no good works are holy which are not moved by charity from which all good works spring up.

«Charity is love received and given. It is grace. Its source is the wellspring of the Father's love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (Jn 13:1) and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). As objects of God's love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity...». (Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, no. 5)

Only when the consecrated persons allow themselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, they can widen the horizons of the narrow human aspirations



and, at the same time, understand more deeply the people and their life histories, going beyond the most obvious, but often superficial aspects. Countless challenges are today emerging in the world of the ideas, in new areas as well as in those in which the consecrated life has traditionally been present. (VC 99)

The religious people, religious women are not called to be keepers of institutions, but pioneers of new approaches, called to respond to new needs and to develop them in alternative ways to meet those needs. Various religious founders at different historical periods initiated something new. They did not give old and readymade answers to the new challenges. The New Testament speaks about the position of Jesus: “Let us go to other villages” (Mk 1:38).

Our Founders and first Sisters were pioneers in many fields being creative, innovative and risking themselves to walk on the path less travelled. They were committed seekers of God. Without a committed search for God in contemplation, all kinds of good service lose their purpose and relevance. This all-important purpose of a determined search for God is beautifully expressed throughout the Constitutions of 1824.

Today certain absence of a vibrant spirituality can be sensed everywhere. We cannot be truly spiritual if the fruits of the Spirit are not visible in our life (Gal 5: 22-23) Witness is impossible without a renewed spirituality, nourished by the continuing experience of God through prayer. Efforts are made, but radicality is lacking because often the agreements of the General and Provincial Chapters which reflect a high degree of radicality and demanding options remain so just on paper.

Three responses came up in the synod hall in Rome to the question: “Will the present form of Religious Life survive in the future?” Some will die, some will be founded anew, some will adapt and renew themselves in response to the signs of the times. We have to listen constantly to the renewing action of the Spirit. Every time Jesus says “You have heard... but I tell you”, He is questioning us: change the way, change the way you are living and the way you are doing”.

Vows are the manifestation of our love for God: Chastity a vow of love that does not change its significance for whatever changes may take place in the world; poverty a vow that gives us freedom and the vow of obedience that helps us discern God’s will at every moment, understood in its real sense,



the meaning will be the same no matter whatever changes may takes place in the world.

“You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished. Look to the future, where the spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.” (VC 110)

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