Greetings from Rome where we are now almost acclimatized to the hot sun, days without rain and the air con! It is a huge privilege to spend time with such a diverse group of people. We are multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-aged and international! But, we are something like the people at the first Pentecost because we can understand one another most of the time! This is because we have a shared history, a shared charism, many interpreters and great technology!

The first evening (June 15th) we were officially welcomed by Sr. Marie; later we enjoyed a lovely concert of classical music performed by a very talented young people’s group; this was followed by a most interesting talk on the beginnings of Christianity in Rome. This wonderful welcome was organised by Sr. Marina and Sisters from the Italian province; in fact they continue to look after us so that we want for nothing!

On Sunday, feast of the Holy Trinity, we began with Mass during which Klara (Czech Republic) performed a very moving and prayer-filled dance, symbolising the total giving of ourselves to God and to the Chapter process. After Mass, we were led to the Chapter Room, following the Chapter candle and singing: ‘Lead me, guide me on your way.’ We gathered there and each one was called forth to sign a beautiful poster containing the Chapter logo; this was to demonstrate our commitment as delegates. It was a very moving and solemn opening liturgy.

In her address, Sr. Marie reminded us that this Chapter is a faith event and she urged us all to be ‘creatively present, lovingly engaged and courageously active’ during the process. Marie made a few references to our bearing witness to the gift of compassion and the importance of remembering our stories which tell of how we live that compassion; we follow in the footsteps of Nicolas Barré and many Sisters and other companions down through the years who have shown us how to make the witness to compassion a reality in our lives.

We had two days on discernment; this was to help us understand how to live out our faith by seeking God in all things and preparing us for the work of the chapter. Much prayer and discernment has already gone on in our Provinces and we as delegates know that we
have to listen to the call of God and search for the new path which he is calling us to find in our journey as an Institute. Our facilitators reminded us that God has an image and a hope of what we are becoming and that we should not let God dream alone.

We had a very comprehensive report from the General Council covering the main aspects of their work in the Institute during the last six years, following the Chapter in Locquirec, France, when we were invited to ‘choose life and to be like clay in the potter’s hands.’ It was amazing to hear the detail of how this mandate has been fulfilled; clearly it would not have happened without the tremendous work done by the General Council. It has given us much hope and enthusiasm to trust that the Spirit will continue to lead us if we remain faithful to his promptings. We also had the opportunity to look at some critical statistics of the number of Sisters, age distribution, etc, since 2013. Some of us saw fragility and diminishing numbers while others rejoiced in our many gifts and in the signs of new life. It is indeed a time to have faith and to trust the plans that God has in mind for us.

We have had reports from our Provinces in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe describing what headlines are being made in our countries, how we have responded to the Chapter mandate (2013) and our hopes and dreams for the future. We all felt very encouraged to hear stories of hope, of vitality, of new shoots in ministry; of growth in our collaboration with the laity, and of our deepening awareness to care for planet earth. We will continue to hold in our hearts the many situations of violence, of conflict, of displacement of peoples which were also described. It is humbling to know that our communities are ready to respond to God’s call no matter how daunting the challenges and how few the labourers!

Thank you for your loving support, particularly for your prayer that we will remain open to the Holy Spirit and see, understand and courageously set out on the path we are being called to travel.