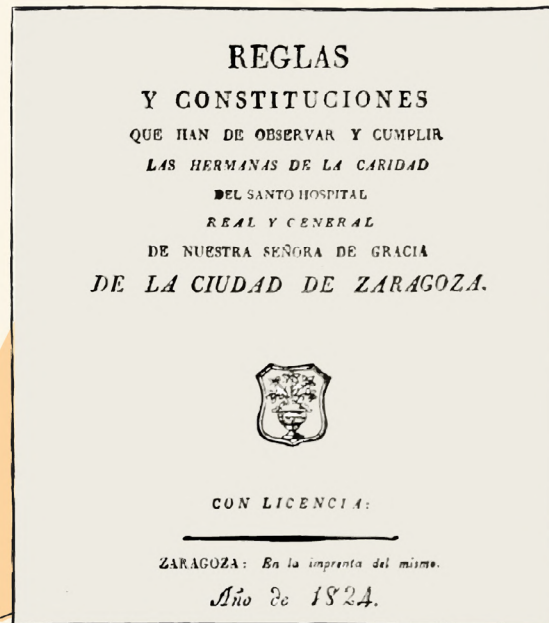


200th Anniversary of the approval of the **CONSTITUTIONS OF 1824**



EVANGELICAL COUNSELS THE PROPHETIC HEARTBEAT OF HOSPITALITY: OUR FOURTH VOW IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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With this work that was requested of us from the General Government, to make a close study of what it means to resignify the evangelical vows or counsels in the present, we end the journey of the evangelical vows or counsels with our fourth vow, the vow of Hospitality. That is why I will try to highlight the vitality, breadth and relevance of the vow of hospitality in the current context.

1. DO WE RESPOND OR DO WE ONLY PROMISE? THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE

In the DNA of religious life, in its genetic code, from its origins to the present day, there is a non-negotiable and unique motivation: “to seek God”. What has always characterized her has been the incessant search for God and the desire to identify with His will. It is the permanent invitation to a Divine-Human covenant in which God has the initiative.¹

If we can say with honesty and credibility “I vow to God”, it is because God Himself, Father-Mother, through His Son Jesus and His Spirit, “instructs us internally”. The external Teacher (Jesus and His Gospel) and the interior Teacher (The Holy Spirit) guide, design and initiate for us a particular path of life that we are called, invited, to follow. Consecrated life is a way of life under the permanent counseling of the Spirit of Jesus, our “Counselor”.²

Only when the vows become a space capable of welcoming God and others (do) the evangelical counsels reveal their prophecy and their beauty.³

Hospitality is born as a gift of the Holy Spirit, who inspires and keeps alive, from our founders and in each sister, the grace to welcome. God, in His love, reveals Himself as the first Host: The Father who welcomes, The Son who becomes a guest and The Spirit who animates every gesture of openness. The Incarnation of Jesus, who dwells among us, and the constant action of the Spirit, are the foundation of this Charism. Thus, Hospitality is first and foremost a divine initiative, a call to see the face of Christ in the most vulnerable and to make welcome a sacrament of encounter with God.

The answer to this gift is the vow of hospitality: a perpetual “yes”, pronounced with humility, which converts the grace received into a concrete commitment. Each sister, sustained by the action of the Spirit, promises to live hospitality as a way of life, integrating poverty, chastity and obedience in the service of others, especially those most in need.

1 Cf. GARCÍA PAREDES, José Cristo Rey., *The “charm” of Religious Life: an alliance and three councils*, San Pablo, Madrid 2021, p. 54.

2 <https://www.xtorey.es/dimension-profetica-de-los-consejos-evangelicos-obediencia-celibato-pobreza/>

3 Cf. RINO COZZA, csj., “The Vows: To Become Companions or Companions of All,” *Religious Life*, 22 Jan 2021.



2. WHY A FOURTH VOW? A LOOK AT OUR HISTORY⁴

Our fourth vow of hospitality has already been taken - throughout history - by some monastic orders and institutes of apostolic life. It is part of the hospitable tradition of the congregations born from the twelfth century onwards. The poor are the “Masters and Lords” of the sisters (or brothers), who must feel demanded and commanded by those they serve.

This special vow has been a central element in the identity of our Congregation and its formulation has evolved over time. In the first constitutional texts, hospitality appears as the way to exercise Charity through service to the poor and sick. That is precisely the purpose and object of the congregation:

Our Congregation, instituted for the good and relief of the poor sick, has and proposes as its sole ob-ject to serve and assist them in whatever hospital it has the proportion to establish. (CCP, p.76)

In the previous editions of the text of the Constitutions - from 1883 to 1952 - care for the sick in hospitals was extended to the homes of orphaned children, the demented(insane), schools, foundling home and other needs of the poorest.

Hospitality has been of such importance since our origins that in the formulas of the profession it is included as the fourth vow. This is how the primitive Constitutions express it:

... I offer and promise to Our Lord Jesus Christ.... to fulfill the vows of Obedience, Chastity, Poverty and Hospitality, which I hope through God I will keep and fulfill as long as I live in this Congrega-tion... in accordance with its Devout (Pious) Statutes. (CC Primitivas, pp 175-76)

In this constitutional text, the sixth chapter of the first treatise is dedicated to the great “virtue of Hospitality”:

... it will enrich the souls of those who practice it with the poor sick who are needy and worthy of com-passion. Our Sisters, day and night, will assist the Sick with all charity and love, looking at in each one the person of Jesus Christ... (CCP, pp. 89-91)

And the requirements to carry it out were also taken into account, from the material and spiritual point of view.⁵

4 Cf. NIEVES MORENO, SUSANA, Hospitality, expression of Charity. Its evolution in the constitutional texts of the Sisters of Charity of Santa Ana and reinterpretation today, Dissertation of the Master's Degree in The-ology, Madrid 2012, UPS-ITVR Madrid. (This part of the fourth vow was researched from the work done by Fr. Paulino Alonso on the fourth vow in our congregation)

5 CCP, pp. 123-128; 138-144.



The wording of the vow of hospitality has changed throughout congregational history. In the beginning, it was formulated as a vow of “hospitality”:

... I promise to keep poverty, obedience, chastity and hospitality, for the time of one year (having taken the oath of stability you can say: for the time that I remain in this Brotherhood) (CC 1824, p. 146)

In the CC of 1889, hospitality was made explicit as a vow of “service to those still sick with contagious disease”:

The Sisters... they make the three customary simple vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, to which they add the simple special vow to serve the sick, even those infected with epidemics.

After the revision of the constitutional text required by the Second Vatican Council, it was returned to the initial formulation, as a vow of “hospitality”.⁶

...I take a vow of chastity, poverty, obedience and hospitality, ... according to the Constitutions of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne... to live Charity in the service of the Church... (CC 1981 and CC1991, 14)

... to live Charity at the service of the Kingdom...(CC 2011, 15).

These changes have significantly enriched the understanding of our charism that must be translated and applied in the various ministries of our institute.

The vow of “hospitality” is a “special vow” that expresses the intuition of our Founders, the specific purpose and reason of our Congregation, our identity, our charism and spirit.⁷

The Sisters consecrate themselves to God through the special vow of Hospitality and the profession of evangelical counsels lived in fraternity (CC 1991, 2).

For the Sister of Charity of St. Anne, hospitality was and continues to be a form of giving one’s life to God through service to others. It means welcoming people with total and constant dedication, even at the risk of one’s own life, as a transparency of God’s love and mercy towards all.

By the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and hospitality, each sister publicly expresses the full gift of herself to God... (CC 1991, 13).

⁶ Cf. the study by Fr. Paulino Alonso, The Fourth Vow or Special Vow of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne.

⁷ “We concretize the charism and spirit in the mission, by the special vow of hospitality, with which we express before the Church and the world our congregational identity.” CC1991, 6.



... As a requirement of the Congregational charism, our first Sisters consecrated themselves with a vow of hospitality to live charity at the service of the sick and helpless, in a continuous and heroic dedication, even to the point of giving their lives. (CC 1991, 16)

... We commit ourselves by the vow of hospitality to give ourselves 'day by day' to the service of the needy, especially the poorest, even at the risk of our lives." (CC1991, 17)

Furthermore (In addition,) this vow qualifies in a special way the three evangelical counsels – poverty, chastity and obedience:

... By this vow our chastity is realized in a constant surrender, to the end, our poverty is oriented to-wards sharing with the poorest and our obedience is offered in availability, at the service of the needy, recognizing them as "our Lords." (CC 1991, 20)

We will follow Christ, virgin, poor and obedient, realizing in the Church ... welcoming and serving the poor, ..., according to the vow of hospitality that defines the charity of our Founders and of our Con-gregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne. (CC 1991, 174)

In the 2011 Constitutions, the importance (scope) of the vow of hospitality is much more elaborated and theologically enriched and the Christological foundation is much clearer:

Hospitality is a gift of the Spirit, which identifies us with Jesus... With his life he showed the way of Hospitality, preferably welcoming the poorest and most abandoned as his guests and friends, proclaiming and making salvation present. (CC 2011, 16)

As for the commitments that the vow of hospitality entails to the mission, the current text is very much identified with the sensitivity of our time, while maintaining its fidelity to its origins. There is already talk of a "spirituality and culture of hospitality" and of the prophetic denunciation necessary for our world:

... to take care of our fraternal life by fostering acceptance, respect, interpersonal and intercultural relationships, overcoming differences..., to deepen the spirituality of Hospitality that impels us to be mystics and prophets, to promote the culture of Hospitality and to denounce situations of injustice that oppose it...(CC 2011, 19)

Hospitality in the Charism is considered the most important focus, defining the way of being and doing of the Congregation. It is the core of the Charism, a reflection of God's Hospitality and shapes our Mission. The formulation of the current charism as "Charity... made Hospitality" (CC 2011), was introduced in the renewed constitutions of 1981, after post-conciliar studies... This way of exercising Charity "made Hospitality" is the backbone of all the areas of the Institute's identity (mission, community life, spirituality, formation and organization). It is understood as an expression and extension of the theological virtue of Charity.



Hospitality has evolved from being a service to the sick and a charitable virtue, to becoming the core of our congregation's identity and mission. We consider it a gift of the Spirit that reflects God's hospitality and is key to the Church's mission in today's world.

It is essential to distinguish the permanent action of the Holy Spirit as the protagonist of hospitality. He inspires, acts and actualizes this charism in each sister, recalling that hospitality is mystical (encounter with God), missionary (brings joy), community (unites us) and ecological (cares for creation). The response of each sister, in making her perpetual vow, is always humble: she recognizes that the strength to welcome comes from God, and that her self-giving is possible because the Spirit sustains and renews grace every day.



3. HOSPITALITY 3.0 WHAT SOURCE CODE DOES OUR CHARISM NEED IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?

Religious life is not ending, it is in a process of transformation in the face of a change of era with new paradigms: scientific-technological, ecological (everything is connected, the local is affected by the global and vice versa). Collaboration with others and finding new paths is imperative to sustain a meaningful mission in the future.

There are things that we should do better, be more visible, transmit our charism more clearly, and find languages to speak of God today in a way that is more accessible to many people who no longer have the background of a sociologically Christian society. But, even with all this, we should not think about “reverting” the situation to a previous state, but about finding the way to a future where we can continue to have a mission, a place and a word to say⁸

Today, more than ever, the consecrated life is called to be an alternative proposal in the world, and a sign of prophecy in the Church, from the joy of the Gospel, transmitted and shared through radical and credible witness.

How can congregation leaders assist their members in seeing the vows in a new and fresh way as religious life continues to evolve?

Everything requires renewal nowadays, everything. Consecrated life and its way of living the Covenant through evangelical vows or counsels is also in need of innovation at the service of the men and women of the world in which we live.

If we look at the “evangelical counsels” and the “three vows”, of Religious life from a prophetic perspective, the question arises: *what message do the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity, poverty and hospitality convey to today’s society?*

The evangelical counsels we profess must be lived with creativity, which is one of the marks of our connection and friendship with the Spirit. This is always a process that stretches us – openness of heart, mind, and will. Sometimes we forget that vows are to be Good News, both for us and for those we meet in life. Our participation in the Kingdom of God is through life in love guided by the evangelical counsels. *How do the evangelical counsels challenge us today?*

The evangelical counsels of the Spirit that we profess need to be contextualized in our time, in our multicultural societies, as prophetic and existential symbols that denounce idolatry and orient us towards the Kingdom of love, of great fraternity-sisterhood, of justice, peace and care for Creation.

⁸ RODRÍGUEZ OLAIZOLA, JOSÉ M, “Looking to the Future in Religious Life”, <https://pastoralsj.org/mirando-hacia-el-futuro-en-la-vida-religiosa/>



The Charism makes the way we live the vows different. The charism shapes and makes love flow in the way we live the evangelical counsels, and it concretizes the way we follow Christ. Therefore, by the vow of hospitality, Obedience calls me to offer myself in availability to the service of those in need, whom we recognize as “our Lords”; Poverty orients me towards sharing with the poorest; and consecrated chastity, I live it in constant dedication to the end.



4. CAN AN OLD VOW HEAL WOUNDS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY? CONTEX-TUALIZING THE FOURTH VOW OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality has accompanied the history of the People of God and of the Church. From Abraham, who unknowingly welcomed God himself, to Jesus, who identified himself with the hungry and marginalized, welcome has been a sign of the Covenant and of the Kingdom. The first Christian communities opened their homes and their tables, and over the centuries, saints and congregations have made hospitality a work of social and spiritual transformation.

The Church in a mission of hospitality translates as a community open and welcoming to the “other”, to the different. A community that goes out to meet the other, that becomes a tent (field) hospital to welcome and care for. A humble community, full of meekness and mercy that seeks the paths of its mission in dialogue, respectful and committed listening, insertion, integration, paths that guarantee communion in relationships and the acceptance of differences without canceling (annulling) them.

A) HOSPITALITY IN THE FACE OF THE MODELS (PARADIGMS) OF THE XXI CENTURY

Hospitality today transcends the walls of the home: it is a radical welcome to the mi-grant, to the digital excluded, to the wounded earth. It is intercultural dialogue, denun-ciation of unjust structures and integral ecology. The Holy Spirit inspires innovative forms of this charism, adapted to challenges such as digitalization, human mobility, and the planetary crisis. For our Congregation, living the vow of hospitality implies being a “bridge” between God and humanity, weaving fraternity in a world of conflicts.

Today humanity asks us to use new keys to reinterpret the action of the Spirit as “pro-phetic hospitality”. Here are the keys:

- **Ethical-anthropological:** Hospitality is human DNA: an innate attitude that unites us in reciprocity (D. Innerarity). According to Derrida, it is the foundation of all cul-ture. Welcoming the “other” – even in its difference – germinates a new global ethic, an antidote to fundamentalism. As Steiner said: “We are guests of each other”.
- **Theological:** God reveals himself as the first Host: his Covenant with humanity cul-minates in the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit makes us simultaneous guests and hosts, called to see Christ in the needy (Mt 25). Benedict XVI sums it up: “Charity is the es-sence of God; without it, hospitality is impossible.”
- **Ecclesiological:** The Church is a “sacrament of hospitality”: an open house where the diacony of love is lived. Francis defines it as a “field hospital,” with a



clear mission: To go out to meet (especially the vulnerable). Practice synodality (everyone, every-one, everyone). Creating a culture of welcome (Fratelli tutti).

➤ **Ecological:** Laudato si' extends hospitality to the care of the Common Home. Our vote demands: Denounce environmental injustices. Act with concrete commitments (e.g., reduction of the ecological footprint in communities). To integrate the cry of the poor and the planet into our spirituality.

➤ **Sociological:** In the face of migration and inequalities, hospitality is an alternative to dehumanizing globalization. Urgent questions: How can we incarnate Charity made Hospitality in dialogue with science and technology? What does secular thought contribute to this charism, and how do we assume it?

B) MISSIONARY AND PASTORAL CHALLENGES

Taking into account the different perspectives of hospitality that today's new models (paradigms) give us, I present some implications and pastoral challenges that open horizons for us in the Mission.

The vow of hospitality inserts the Congregation into the one Mission of the Church, bringing its specific charismatic ministry. The Sisters and Laity of the St. Anne Family participate in this mission of being a space of God's hospitality to the world.

➤ The vow of hospitality entails practical pastoral commitments such as attentive (solici-tous) service to those in need (seeing them as "Lords"), welcoming the "other" and the different, adopting an evangelizing style marked by hospitality, dialogue and the promotion of a culture of hospitality.

➤ The mission of hospitality in the Church is understood as service and caring love for one's neighbor, especially for the poorest and most needy. The Church is by nature a community of faith, a "dwelling place of the Spirit" where God's hospitality is experienced and celebrated, thus becoming a community for all, where new relationships are given because we all form a new family in Christ, through the Spirit.

➤ The Church has always recognized the mysterious presence of the Lord - the divine guest - in every human being, especially in the most needy (cf. Mt 25:31-45). Each person is our neighbor, he is a mysterious guest who demands our attention and service, our hospitality. Hospitality is the way of exercising and being charity for others, manifested in welcome, closeness, detail and generous and free (gratuitous) solicitude.

➤ Whoever responds to the need with free and liberating love, becomes the real host of the God who visits us in that person. The love of Jesus has no borders, which is why it is inclusive and dialogue-oriented. Those who live and act in this way in their relationship with others show the profound value of Christian hospitality, they become the seed of a new social order. And this is what the Church seeks to accomplish in her mission of hospitality.



- But the Church must also show herself to be a servant and hospitable community in her internal dynamics, that is, from the mutual relationships of respectful acceptance that are established within her (*Lumen Gentium*), and in her relationship with the world (*Gaudium et Spes*).
- From the origins and fully recovered in the post-conciliar stage, the vow of hospitality implies a service dedicated to those in need, recognizing them as “our Lords”. This service must be total and constant, even at the risk of one’s own life. Service goes beyond mere assistance; it is a witness to God’s love.
- In the current context of pluralism and globalization, hospitality translates into an open welcome to the “other”, to the different (social, religious, ideological, cultural). A welcome that implies respect, non-discrimination and non-possessiveness, seeking insertion and integration. The encounter with the other is an event that implies reciprocity and alliance. In a religious sense, the guest can be seen as a mystery in whom divinity is revealed, like God Himself. In a context of secularity and estrangement from God, openness to transcendence as the most different “oth-er” is a manifestation of sacred hospitality.
- An evangelizing style marked by hospitality, which manifests the love of the Father as Christ. With a permanent attitude of openness to the evangelical values that exist in people of any culture and religion; of appreciation and recognition of each human being, seeing Christ in him. Humanizing society from fraternity, justice, peace, preferential and attentive attention to the most needy, the promotion of people and their dignity and the defense of their rights.
- Dialogue as a way to authentic encounter, enriching relationships *ad intra* (within the Church and the Congregation) and *ad extra* (with the rest of humanity).
- The commitment to the promotion of a “Culture of Hospitality” that increases a “spirituality of hospitality” so necessary for today’s world and that makes us accessories (accomplices) of excellent (exquisite) care for those who come to our “home”. In this sense, we are called to deepen the sense of human fraternity and social friendship that Pope Francis fostered in *Fratelli tutti*.

In summary, the pastoral perspectives that come from the vow of hospitality are broad and dynamic, ranging from direct service to the most vulnerable to conversion towards an integral ecology and care for our planet, through the promotion of relationships of dialogue and welcome in a plural world, as well as the search for an encounter with the Other. as a relationship with the Mystery of God and his transcendence.

C) THE CONGREGATIONAL HORIZON

In summary: Hospitality is the Spirit’s counsel for today, which we discern and welcome as a vow forever that challenges us to be prophets of encounter in a divided world. As Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, we are called to embody her with missionary creativity, responding to the adequate moment (*Kairos*) of our time.



In this context we recall what our Constitutions tell us and what the recent General Chapters have reminded us:

“By the vow of Hospitality... giving ourselves day by day to the service of the needy, especially the poorest” (CC 2011, 18), today implies being able to offer the Church and the world a “new Hospitality” that responds to the cry of the earth, as we note in number 19:

*Hospitality, which expresses our Charism and shapes our mission, commits us to:
... to promote the culture of hospitality and to denounce situations of injustice that oppose it, to promote an ecological awareness that respects our planet as everyone's home, defending life in all its manifestations.*

Care for Creation implies respect for human life and the “responsibilities to the resources of the biosphere” that derive from it. However, in terms of action, our main focus has remained on the care of the sick and the needy, on the educational care of children and young people without there being a wide development in the field of environmental care. And this call is important and necessary, since inaction makes us accessories (accomplices) in the neglect of the environment and, consequently, of the life and dignity of the most vulnerable and of future generations.

In recent General Chapters, the Agreement on this theme: “Communion with our brothers and with Creation” remains strong:

Contemplating Creation as the Tent of Encounter of God and man, we feel called to intertwine our lives in Communion with all Creation.... we want as a Congregation:

- *Look at our surroundings with God's compassionate eyes, And in response to the pain of the Earth and of Jesus' favorites, to make ourselves present on platforms that seek to be Good News for the world, from the defense of human rights and the denunciation of approaches that generate injustice and threaten life in all its manifestations.*
- *To promote ecological awareness, acquiring concrete commitments that lead us to improve the situation of the Planet, taking care of Nature and our closest environment, responsibly using the re-sources that Mother Earth offers us all equally. We know that, in this harmony with our brother and the Earth, which must spring from our being contemplatives in action, we collaborate “with the greatest care, with all detail, with all love” in the Creative Work of God.*



CONCLUSION: A PATH OF HOPE TODAY

In the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, hospitality is the encounter between the gift of God and the bold response of the heart. The Spirit awakens charisma; the sister embodies him with her vow, transforming a world fractured by exclusion into a “tabernacle of encounters” where Christ reveals himself in every face welcomed (“I was a stranger and you welcomed me”).

This vote is not just another service, but the main idea (axis) that gives meaning to our identity and mission. Like the energy (sap) that brings new life (enlivens) the other commitments, it recreates (reinvents) itself in the face of current challenges – ethical, ecological, social – with prophetic creativity, inviting us to be:

- **Architects of encounter** in contemporary loneliness (solitude).
- **Translators of the Gospel** in languages of radical acceptance.

The charism of hospitality, gift and promise, turns history into a sacred space where God and humanity embrace each other.

Hospitality, in the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne, is a dance between divine gift and human response. God offers the charism; The sister, with her vote, embodies It in history. In a world wounded by loneliness and exclusion, this commitment is a lighthouse (beacon) of hope and the eloquent language of the Gospel: *“I was a stranger, and you welcomed me”*. In this way, the gift of the Spirit and the human promise merge into a single song of welcome, transforming the world into a tabernacle of encounters where Christ is always the awaited guest.

In the historical evolution of the Congregation, hospitality has been consolidated as the central element of our identity and mission, not only a service, but a way of life that soak (permeates) the other vows and that is constantly re-signified to respond prophetically to the complex challenges of the world and the Church today from multiple perspectives (ethical, theological, ecclesiological, ecological and sociological), inviting transformation and creativity.



FOR REFLECTION

“Reality forces us to redefine the vows so that they mark our life and spirituality and serve the world”.⁹

1. **Charismatic identity in action** What daily gestures – in our personal and community life – reveal that hospitality is not just another vow, but the heart that beats in our other commitments? (Poverty, Chastity, Obedience).
2. **Prophecy in the key of welcome:** If our vow of hospitality had a voice to cry out today... what injustices would it denounce? What new reality are we called to bring in-to being in this fragmented world?
3. **The challenge of difference:** Which ‘others’ are more difficult for us to welcome? (Those from the outside? Those from the inside? Those who think differently?) Where do we find resistance to living hospitality as a true transformative encounter?
4. **Hospitality as relational DNA:** How do we go from ‘having welcoming spaces’ to BE-ING in themselves ‘meeting territories’? Let us think of a concrete example where we have seen dialogue flourish beyond borders (community, Church, society).

⁹ Nadia Coppa, President of the UISG, in the VR magazine,



5. **Integral ecology: utopia or commitment?** What three practical changes – in our home, works and consumption – can already embody the care of the ‘Common Home’ as an extension of our vow? (Ex: reducing plastics, alliances with eco-projects...)
6. **Reinventing the charism:** What ‘new languages’ of hospitality does this time ask of us? (Technology to accompany the isolated, migrant networks, eco-technologies...) What unexpected allies could we co-create answers with?
7. **Whispers of the Spirit:** If the Spirit were to launch a ‘viral challenge’ on our charism today, would it be more of ‘creative audacity’ or ‘contemplative deepening’? What first step do we urgently need to take?



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