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Priore Generale

TO THE WHOLE ORDER.

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My dear Brothers and Co-workers,

1 Preamble.

It is just a year since we celebrated the 66th General Chapter of the Order with the title or theme of “Passion for the Hospitality of Saint John of God in the world of today.” I wanted to share with you a short reflection on what life has been like for us at the level of the General Government over that period of time, some of the things that have occurred and events that we have been involved in other than the Provincial Chapters, although obviously the Chapters took up most of our time over a seven month period. I want also to take this opportunity to give a brief overview of the Order, as I see it, having had the opportunity to preside at all of the Provincial Chapters.

1.1 God of Surprises.

But first of all I would like to state something related to our election to the General Government of the Order and related matters. I recall a book that I read some years ago entitled, *God of Surprises* in which the author describes his own conversion from a harsh to a true image of God, one of God who is gentle and compassionate. I can safely say that God certainly surprised all of us when we were elected to serve on the General

Government of the Order towards the end of the General Chapter of October 2006! In my own case, while very much aware of my unworthiness and many limitations, I see my election as Prior General, as a privilege beyond words to express, which fills me with awe, wonder and I have to say at times apprehension when I think of what is expected of me and the office which I hold. Trusting in the power of God active in me, however, and the constant accompaniment and guidance of Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel and our Father, St. John of God I can face each day with courage, a deep sense of hope and joy. The goodwill, constant prayers and support shown me by Brothers and Co-workers alike, around the Order I find reassuring, almost overwhelming at times, but at the same time I feel energized with an ever deepening sense of belonging to a great *Hospitaller Family*

1.2 Looking back over the year.

Before dealing with particular events that occurred, or in which we were involved over the past year, I thought I might reflect, albeit briefly, on what the past year has meant to us as members of the General Government and the Order in General. I would like to preface this with a remark related to our Order's system of handing over offices after the election of the General Government, and the same applies to the Provincial Government. In some religious institutes for example, even though a new government has been elected at the Chapter, the newly elected team does not take office for a number of months. This seemingly sensible arrangement allows members of the incoming team some time to take leave of their respective Province, hand over their responsibilities to their successors, plan their term and commence studying the language, where this is necessary. In other words there is an ordered transfer that is carried out at a 'leisurely' pace to the benefit of all.

On the other hand, in our Order once the new Government is elected they immediately have total responsibility and have to make decisions for which they may not necessarily be well prepared. This can put added strain on an individual who has to cope with having had to leave his Province, family and friends and enter a completely new culture, with new responsibilities and challenges that are now global rather than local. I believe with the revision of the General Statutes this is something we might consider changing.

Given this scenario, as Br. Vincent and myself were the only members of the previous General Government to be returned to office, when the new Councillors and the General Secretary arrived in Rome within a month after their election and appointment, they had to hit the ground running, so to speak. It is a tribute to the caliber of the Brothers their sense of obedience, duty and generosity that they got down to work immediately on their arrival in Rome. For some, this even meant postponing the difficult, but necessary challenge of learning the Italian language in order to concentrate on working with other members of the team. They had the task of drawing up a program of action for the coming six years and of dealing with other urgent matters related to their particular area of responsibility.

1.3 A call to serve.

One of the things we did very early on, was to travel to Granada to ‘sit at the feet of the master’, our Father, St. John of God, tracing his footsteps, reflecting, praying and as a family in the presence of our father, we shared among ourselves who we were, where we were coming from in terms of background and experiences. We also shared our fears, hopes, possible challenges that lay ahead of us, as we saw them at that time, but above all we shared our dreams for the Order over the coming six year period and the role we were being called upon to exercise as a General Government in order to bring to fruition or reality these dreams. We found this experience very helpful in terms of our bonding as a community, the shaping of a shared vision, one that would call upon each one of us to work as a team and that would involve all of the Provincials and Delegates working together with us in a true sense of collegiality.

I see my role, and that of the General Council, above all else as an opportunity to serve the Order that we love with every fiber of our being; advance its mission of hospitality, that we believe in passionately, as a living, vibrant and pertinent response to the needs and inequalities that seems are characteristic of modern society, and the deep longing, that is in the human heart for wholeness. Today’s society is becoming increasingly selfish and polarized with the divide between the rich and poor increasing at an alarming rate. This at a time when the world never had so much resources, technology and know how available to it, that if used wisely in accordance with the Creator’s wishes could transform the face of the earth, and yet lamentably vast numbers of people are living in appalling conditions that are dehumanizing, suffering and dying from preventable illness, being

marginalized because of the nature of their illness, disability or social condition.

2 Hospitality is the answer.

I see *hospitality practiced in the style of St. John of God* as the antidote, the answer to this appalling situation in the world today. *Hospitality, in the way modeled by St. John of God* was never more urgent and never more relevant than in the world of today. What the world of suffering needs are more *prophets of hospitality*. I advisedly state, *more prophets of hospitality*, because by the grace of God we have many prophets of hospitality, Brothers but also Co-workers, within our Order. We need to acknowledge, support and encourage them. We need to encourage every initiative, every move, be it ever so small or humble. We need to encourage and affirm anyone who is willing to reach out to bring a little relief, a ray of hope to a heart weighed down by suffering, pain or a sense of abandonment by God and humanity.

3 Provincial Chapters.

Within four months of the General Chapter, we held the Provincial Chapters throughout the Order. In all, we presided over and participated in twenty four Chapters beginning with the English Province on 12th. February 2007 and concluding in Lome, Africa on the 23rd. August 2007. One of the beautiful and inspiring things we experienced as we journeyed around the Order to participate in the Provincial Chapters, was the commitment and dedication of our Brothers and Co-workers in the pursuit of the Order's mission of hospitality. We saw creativity, imagination and collaboration with other likeminded individuals, organizations and governments that share our values, which has resulted in countless numbers of poor and sick people coming to know, in the words of St. Paul, "the height and the depth, the width and the breath of the love that God has for them"¹, through the ministry that they have received in our centres. What better way to show this love than by being at their side when people feel most vulnerable and needy.

3.1 *New expressions of hospitality.*

There are also wonderful new expressions of hospitality in so many places, practiced by dedicated followers of St. John of God most of whom are not Brothers, i.e. lay Co-workers, some work closely with Brothers while others

¹ St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians 3:18-19

work in situations, programs or facilities where there is no Brother. The fascination with and attraction that John of God and his work has for so many people even in our modern world, his way of being human, being Christian, being brother to people in their time of need, opens up new and exiting possibilities for the Order today. This is the case in terms of ministry, in terms of attracting men who wish to dedicate their lives to God as religious brothers, but it is also true of the type of lay person who wishes to become part of the *hospitaller family* as a Co-worker. However, we need to be creative, act ‘outside the box’, so to speak, think globally while acting locally, we need to be ready to do things differently, to go outside of our comfort zone, to let go of many things and attitudes of the past, to sacrifice ourselves as Jesus, John of God, Benedict Menni, John Grande, Richard Pampuri, the Spanish and Columbian Martyrs and so many other followers of John of God, canonized and not canonized, who have shown us how to become instruments in bringing about the Reign of God on earth.

3.2 Promoting communion.

One of the things the General Government decided when we drew up the lines of action for the coming six year period, was that I would preside at all of the Provincial Chapters, and that at least two General Councillors would accompany me. Br. Pascual had presided over all of the Provincial Chapters throughout his 12 years as Prior General and he often stated that he found this a most important time in the life of a Province, a moment of grace and that the experience for him personally was most informative and helpful in his role as animator of the whole Order. For the same reasons, now that the Chapters are completed and when I reflect back over the past year, I too am very pleased that I participated in all of the Chapters.

Our participation at the Provincial Chapters was most important in terms of providing us with the opportunity, among other things, to promote communion within the Order, help to create an awareness of the importance of the Resolutions coming from the General Chapter, build a sense of unity for the Order worldwide and help to focus on areas of our life that the General Chapter considered of critical importance as we journey into the new millennium. These issues related, in broad terms, to the life of the Brothers, the mission of the Order, formation and governance. As the result of the reflection and personal and group analysis during the Chapter, the Chapter Document (Instrumentum Laboris) formed the basis of this study,

following which, we as a General Government set out the priorities, guidelines for action and objectives in the coming six years.

3.3 *Chapter as a time of grace.*

Because of the very full schedules of the Chapters, with the constant travel from one Province to another over different time zones and climates, initially I found it demanding but once I got into the rhythm I began to enjoy the experience and found it both stimulating and inspiring. I share Br. Pascual's point of view that the Chapter is a moment of grace for the Province, an ecclesial event because it is a gathering of men and women devoted to the work of the Church. We take part in the mission of the Church. (Pope Benedict XVI DEC 25a). The main thrust of the discussions during the Chapter and resolutions that come out of the Chapter therefore, are centered on and motivated by endeavoring to find new ways of providing a better service to those who come to our centers or services. There is also an acute awareness that there are many unmet needs in society and we therefore are constantly evaluating and searching for ways in which we might be able to respond to these needs, obviously within the resources available to us.

These mission orientated discussions, which are what motivates us as a Religious Order, obviously has the person we serve at the centre. Even if we ourselves are not always aware of this, in the society in which we live and exercise our ministry a person centered approach is rarer than we realize. Unfortunately society is often motivated by greed, profit and materialism. A Co-worker, a communist, confirmed this when he stated; *being with a group of men and women (during the Chapter of one of our Provinces) who spent five days discussing how they could improve the service they were providing to their clients was a completely new experience for me. Not only that, he went on, but they agonized over the plight of others on the margins of society and how they might reach out to them also. There was no talk of how 'we could become wealthier', this filled him with amazement. He went on to state that in this context being referred to as a **Co-worker** made me feel deeply honored and gave rise in me a determination 'to be a really good Co-worker of the Order.'*

3.4 *A sense of pride.*

I often mused to myself during the ‘Chapter pilgrimage’ how I wished that every member of the Order could share the experience the General Government were having of participating in the Provincial Chapters. In the first instance it fills one with a deep sense of pride in our vocation as men consecrated in hospitality to continuing Christ’s healing ministry in the world of today, to see so much being done by so few, for so many suffering men and women in their time of vulnerability and need around the world. It is, as it were, one great embrace of love of a world of suffering caused by violence, discrimination, marginalization because of illness, disability, social deprivation and mistrust. ²I believe that for a Co-worker, no matter what ones personal religious affiliation may be, to be a part of this great hospitaller movement surely must be deeply satisfying as an individual and a professional. For one who is Christian, a follower of Jesus, it is an opportunity to be true to ones Baptismal Consecration by becoming hospitality for others in the way shown by St. John of God.

3.5 Great hospitaller movement.

As a human being to be part of an organization that has as its core value respect for the dignity and rights of each human being, caring for the stranger, a fellow traveller on the road of life, in a way that he/she is made to feel that they are special, unique and of immense value, is rare in a world that is obsessed with materialism, ambition and individualism, with scant respect for human life, dignity, rights and property of others. Being part of a hospitaller movement, a family, that is devoted solely to brining the flame of love, healing, respect, dignity and hope to suffering humanity across the world, is to be engaged in something of real value in life. From the perspective of the individual who is engaged in this hospitaller movement, it is also life giving and deeply enriching. Following in the footsteps of St. John of God in this way not only helps one to be a better human being ourselves, but a better member of whatever church or religious affiliation one belongs to.

If one takes a global view of the Order’s mission in the world of today, there is hardly a human condition that inflicts pain and suffering on the human person to which the Order in some part of the world is not endeavoring to respond. Motivated by the example of the indefatigable figure of John of God, who saw people not by color, creed or any other stereotypical brand,

² Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St. John of God: 67 b.

their social condition or illness, but as a suffering brother or sister, in the 21st century hospitality is finding new forms of expression that respond to the needs of people in any given time and place.

4. Central role that Co-workers have in advancing the mission of Hospitality.

Another exciting factor, which I believe is part of God's plan for the Order, is an ever increasing awareness of and appreciation for the central role that the Co-workers play in continuing the mission of St. John of God in partnership with the Brothers. How else would it be possible for an average of 60,000 people's lives be touched each day in some way or other by a follower of St. John of God?³ Unfortunately, where there is resistance to this development either because of the economic situation of the Centers concerned and or providing services which may not achieve a high standard because we do not appoint the most competent individual, be it a Brother or Co-worker to a leadership position, we need to acknowledge this reality and make the necessary changes. To resist this change or if we fail to address it, the movement the Order has promoted over the past forty years, since the Second Vatican Council, goes contrary to the Order's own legislation, promulgated by successive General Chapters, guided by the Holy Spirit and reflection on the nature and mission of the Order. Putting a personal agenda before that which the Order promotes not only has a negative effect on the services being provided to people we serve, but also creates confusion in the minds of the Co-workers who have studied our documents.

If the leadership is not perceived to be earnestly trying to implement the Chapter Resolutions then there is conflict with the supreme authority of the Order, the General Chapter and the danger of giving a counter witness to religious obedience and the Order's mission and values.⁴ In this type of environment there is the risk that the mission of the Order will be compromised, as it is unable to provide quality care effectively and efficiently through pursuit of excellence with sound management practices.⁵ The role of the Brother is characterized by five fundamental factors which are *to become and be more explicitly a critical conscience, moral guide, and*

³ 2006 General Chapter 3.2; Charismatic management, b

⁴ HUMANIZATION Chapter 1 'The Humanized Hospital'.

⁵ Charter of Hospitality 4.4

*prophetic presence, open to new needs, in a renewed spirit of integration with the Co-workers.*⁶

4.1. *Ours is a ministry of the Church.*

It was encouraging to observe in many Provincial Chapters, however, that the role of the Co-workers is acknowledged and appreciated. Where this is the case there was a sense of urgency around the need to provide the Co-workers with the necessary preparation and ongoing education in order that they understand the Order's mission and values in the first place, that they buy into them; that they understand that ours is not just another institute or service within the state's health care service network or whatever, but *a ministry of the Church* as emphasized by Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*: 25. Secondly that they get to know John of God, his philosophy and the values by which he lived and that motivated him in his work. Co-workers are not a substitute for Brothers but partners with the Brothers in pursuit of the mission of the Hospitaller Order in a given country, whether or not they actually work in the same facility or otherwise work separately in different centers or in services many miles apart.

This way of seeing the Order and understanding its mission, I believe, will generate new energy for the mission by the Brothers and Co-workers alike, lead to greater acceptance, mutual trust and respect for each other, enlist greater commitment with a sense of having responsibility for the future of the Order and its mission of hospitality. This also underlines the importance of the *“Brothers boldly setting about changing their personal and professional lives, and their structures, in order to rebuild a new covenant with suffering humanity.”*⁷

Hospitaller experiences and educational opportunities will need to be solidly based on the fundamental teachings of the Order and the Church on social issues and the transmission of the values of the Order (General Chapter, Mission of the Order, D). In this regard a number of Chapters made concrete resolutions to set up ‘Schools of Hospitality’, or arrange special educational and experiential opportunities for Co-workers and Brothers related to hospitality. We have our *prophets of hospitality* among our Brothers and Co-

⁶ Report on the State of Formation in the Order, Chapter 3:1.

⁷ Br. Pierluigi Marchesi HUMANIZATION

workers, as I stated earlier. At another point in history these would be referred to as pioneers, but prophets seems a more apt description because what these men and women do in the name and in the spirit of St. John of God, is truly prophetic.

5. The Charter of Hospitality.

Furthermore it is interesting to see how many of the Provinces are using the Charter of Hospitality to great effect in the education of Co-workers and in the Charismatic Management of our centers i.e. administering and managing them in the style of St. John of God. Where the Charter of Hospitality is not being used to any great extent, there is the danger of a gradual erosion of values with a tendency to adopt a more secular business-like approach in the administration and management of services. As we are increasingly involving others in our ministry of hospitality, as we should be, through networking, collaboration with government and non-governmental organizations, re-structuring the management of our centers and so on, there is the danger that unless people *think with the Order* they will be more influenced by others, rather than bringing the vision and philosophy of St. John of God to bear on the relationship, which would be of benefit to the persons served, which must always be our objective.

In the society in which we live and work there is the danger of a gradual veering away from the Order's influence, dilution and erosion of its values, even a rejection of some of its core values e.g. client/patient centered holistic service; striving to provide a service of the highest quality in a humanizing and hospitable environment. Should this be allowed to develop it is only a matter of time before the particular service no longer can be considered a ministry of the Church, because it no longer "*expresses our identity, since the reason for our existence in the Church is to live and manifest the charism of hospitality the Spirit of St. John of God.*" (Constitutions Chapter 1,6).

The Charter of Hospitality is the *Magna Carta* of the Order in terms of its Mission of Hospitality and how we are to exercise it on a daily basis. It also seeks to clarify certain questions and addresses other issues that are considered to be of relevance. It is of great importance that The Charter of Hospitality be in the hands of every Director and Manager of our Centers and Services and that they are well versed in its contents. It should be used alongside the life of St. John of God and other relevant Order Documents in

our schools, induction programs and ongoing education of Co-workers. The Charter seeks to *'clarify issues that have to be clarified in order to give a clear idea of what kind of hospitality we are being called upon to practice today, as the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God...if we are to continue embodying the prophecy of St. John of God.'* (Introduction C.H. Br. Pascual Piles)

Because of the importance that we place on the Charter of Hospitality, we have set up a small working group to develop a 'Users Handbook' as a guide for the use of the Charter. They will also examine the possibility of at least adding some references to other related Order Documents.

6. *Safeguarding our environment.*

One of the recompenses of traveling to different countries is that one becomes aware of the beauty, the richness, the immense resources and the endless variety that nature gives us, which is an expression of the immense love that God the Father has for humanity and for all of creation, of which he is the heart and the source. St. Francis of Assisi, like so many other men and women saints down the centuries, including John of God, delighted in creation because they were consumed with love of God and saw nature as an expression, a reflection of the beauty of God. Irish Poet, Joseph Mary Plunket, beautifully describes how the contemplation of nature can raise the mind and the heart to God, when he writes, *"I see his blood upon the rose and in the stars the glory of his eyes, His body gleams amid eternal snows, His tears fall from the skies. I see his face in every flower, the thunder and the singing of the birds are but his voice-and craven by His power; rocks are His written words"*

On the other hand when one travels you can also be moved to tears to see how little we care for our mother earth. The wanton destruction of our forests, the pollution of our rivers, the indifference of planners and industrialists has resulted in an ecological crisis that is fast making vast areas of our planet uninhabitable and hostile for humanity.⁸ The melting of the polar cap is already having devastating effects on the natural life in that region, which will also have unforeseen consequences for humanity as a whole.

⁸ Novo Millennio Ineunte, 51

6.1. An increased awareness of responsibility for the planet.

I was encouraged nevertheless, to see in some Provinces that there is an acute awareness of the importance of maintaining the ecological balance and the sustainable and equitable use of the world's resources, reducing carbon emissions, recycling of waste and so on⁹. In one of the largest General Hospitals of the Order the need for paper has been greatly reduced by the use of modern technology, with an objective to be 'paper free' by 2010. Let all of us 'be hospitable to mother earth', care for it, as it has cared for us. To ensure that future generations will enjoy a sunset without their eyes burning from pollution and their lungs being damaged by smog, to be able to look on the beauty of a flower that raises the mind and heart to God, to have clean water to drink and food to eat, let each one of us take seriously the protection of our planet with concrete action.

As an Order with more than 300 hospitals and services in 51 countries, not only do we have the need of energy but we also consume an enormous amount of energy to sustain our ministry. Unfortunately, we also have the potential to be agents in the destruction of life, rather than being partners in and promoters and servants of life. In the true spirit of hospitality, let all of us do our part to practice, educate and involve others in protecting the great treasure that is nature and of which we must be grateful, diligent custodians and protectors if future generations are to enjoy what we now enjoy.

7. We cannot rest: the globalization of hospitality is called for.

As I stated above, there is so much being done by the members of the Order across the world that benefits humanity, it makes me feel very proud to be part of this great *Hospitaller Family*. However, we cannot rest, we must not become complacent, there is so much still to be done, there are so many people, especially in the developing countries who will never enjoy a day free of anxiety not knowing where the next meal will come from, afraid of getting sick because there is no medicine and no money. Forty years ago Pope Paul VI warned of the widening gap between rich and poor nations; today we speak of a digital divide and recognize the negative impact of globalization. The Pope's challenge remains: "The present state of affairs must be confronted boldly, and its concomitant injustices must be challenged

⁹ Charter of Hospitality 4.2.6.

and overcome. Continuing development calls for bold innovations that will work profound changes.” (Populorum Progressio 32)

With 11 children dying every minute, how can we not become involved in movements, lobbying our political and religious representatives? Any activity that will help to create an awareness of this appalling situation demands a response from governments and the international community as a whole, and will help to make a difference if sufficient people raise their voice in protest, in appeal, in peaceful action.

7.1. Specific challenges for the Order.

With people suffering from a mental illness in so many countries of the world, even ones that would be considered ‘progressive’ and economically stable, living in dehumanizing conditions in institutions or walking the streets unloved, uncared for, how can we look the other way? The Order of St. John of God has a very substantial commitment to the promotion of mental health around the world, providing care and treatment for people when they become mentally ill, engaged in education, research and other preventative processes.

This sensitivity by the followers of John of God for people who suffer from a mental illness, often times brought on by the stress and strain of life, is rooted in the experience and example of our Founder, St. John of God, who became known as the ‘Loco of Granada’. John was called this, in my view, as much because of his undertaking of what appeared to many as an impossible task, that of caring for the poor and abandoned people of the city of Granada, than the fact that he had spent a spell in a mental institution, although obviously, at first in the minds of some people at least, they would try to make a connection between the two events. They might have done this as a way to ease their own discomfort at seeing John doing what they knew in their hearts they should be doing something about. This is why once they came to understand John’s mission, practically the whole of Granada became involved in his project.

What the Order does today in the area of mental health can also be seen as God’s response to the prayer of John of God *‘for a place of my own where I can bring the mentally ill and the poor and serve them as I wish’*, but there is much still to be done. There is no section of society or group of people more discriminated against than people who develop a mental illness. With a 500

year history of providing treatment, research and prevention in the area of mental health we need to mobilize our resources, draw on the knowledge that we have available to us in order to reform many of our own institutions. People look to us for leadership, creativity and commitment in this area of human need. Conscious of our responsibility and the urgency that there is in this regard, we need to setup *models of health care* that governments and other interested parties can emulate, to the benefit of people who develop a mental illness and their families. Creating awareness through public education on what a mental illness consists of and how it can be prevented, is of great importance in our day more than ever before. Through the use of modern technology and the media we can do a great deal in this regard.

6.2. The needs are great but the resources are in short supply.

A major challenge for the Order in many of the developing countries in which it has a presence, is the updating and replacing of old buildings and structures that were built by the missionaries more than half a century ago. This will take huge resources and careful planning to avoid a crisis situation in a few years time. The staff of the Office of Missions and International Cooperation at the General Curia has been increased with a full time Director, in addition to the General Councillors of Africa, Asia and America. It is hoped to develop stronger links with the centers in the developing countries, facilitate planning and project development. With easy access and contact with the donors and other interested parties in the industrialized countries and fundraising offices, as well as with the Provincial Curia in the developing countries, to accelerate, the response for specific assistance and ensure transparency, efficiency and accountability.

Unfortunately the list of needs and the numbers of people in need is a vast one, the reader can add categories of persons in great need in the society in which you live be it in the parish, village, whether it be in the industrialized north or the developing south. The needs and numbers of people may be more obvious in one part of the world than the other, e.g. the developing countries, but the unsavory fact is, that even in the midst of plenty in industrialized countries, people go hungry, lack medicine and a place to sleep, job opportunities and education and the lack of security that is required by an ever increasing elderly population.

8. Renewal of our lives.

In less than ten years the Church will celebrate the 50th. anniversary since the Second Vatican Council. I believe that this provides us with an opportunity to engage in a process of renewal. For some it will be a 'second' renewal for most it will be their first time. So the question people might ask is, how do you go about the renewal process? The word renewal in the words of Pope John XXIII means *aggiornamento* or updating of the Church and by implication the religious life. The means that the Council suggested as instruments of renewal for religious, was to engage in a reflective study of scripture and the life of the founder of their particular institute. Personally, the word I prefer to renewal is, *re-directing* or *re-focusing*. I believe this gives greater clarity to what we are proposing.

8.1. Times may have changed, but the advice of the Council is still valid.

We are living through very different times, different experiences, challenges and opportunities, than even in the days of Vatican II. But I believe the advice of the Fathers of the Council still holds good; we need to engage in a study of scripture and the life of St. John of God. Personally, there is hardly a day goes by that I am not amazed at the stature of John of God, when I reflect on any aspect of his life. When one realizes what John accomplished in such a short period of time, his ability to captivate, attract and enthuse others in what he was doing, it is really amazing. I find it even more challenging when I see the confidence that John had in his relationship with God that propelled him into action, to do what he did i.e. to give not just a home to the poor, the sick and marginalized people of Granada, but the hope of a better life for some, and for others the comfort, security of love and friendship at the time of their death; to go where normally he would not go e.g. the red light areas of the city to save the women caught up in prostitution; to the royal palace to seek help for his poor; to address people in a manner that people normally would be very reluctant to do, yet for John it became the norm with which to address people, even the Prince, i.e. as *brother or sister*. The renewal of our lives as religious Brothers, as missionaries, prophets in our place of work, as evangelists in the market place, must begin with us sitting at the feet of the master himself – the man who *became hospitality for others*, John of God.

9. Some other events, commissions and activities following the General Chapter.

On December 22nd. 2006 the Brothers and some Co-workers from the communities in Rome were invited for a ceremony at which the new General Government presented an outline of some policies that we would be pursuing in the immediate future, with an opportunity for dialogue. Following this, we shared a special Celebration of the Eucharist presided over by Mgr. Jose Luis Redrado, O.H. and an evening meal.

Among visits that I made in December, 2006, to the communities in Rome, Italy, Ireland, England, Korea, Japan and China was a visit to former Prior General, Br. Maria Alfons Gautier, at the Residence of de Magallon, whom I found in reasonably good health and very interested in the affairs of the Order. As it was only a couple of days before Christmas, December 23rd., we had a special Christmas Dinner with the Brothers of both Communities in Marsiglia.

Various Commissions were setup, including the one to revise the General Statutes. All are working at their particular areas of responsibility. One of the important decisions that we made immediately after the General Chapter was to appoint six Co-workers, representing the various languages used by the Order, as 'Extended General Council Members', which has greatly enriched our Council Meetings, especially in matters pertaining to the mission of the Order. We also appointed a Co-worker, Dr. Carlo M. Cellucci, as General Director of the St. John Calibita Hospital on the Tiber Island.

10. Conclusion.

From my visit to all 24 Chapters in all five continents I have become even more aware not only of great needs, but of the opportunities that exist for *Hospitality practiced in the way of John of God* in any country or situation where people are suffering because of violence, discrimination, or are marginalized and neglected because of the nature of their illness, disability or social status. I believe that all of us have a responsibility to protect, safeguard the Order's patrimony i.e. *the gift of hospitality that God has given to the Church through St. John of God and wishes to continue to share with the suffering people of our time.*

In addition I see the role of leadership within the Order, to project an image of the Order that is progressive, live by and uphold gospel values, is deeply

concerned with issues that adversely affect humankind, the environment and the efforts that the Order is making to address these issues and its willingness to work with others who share our philosophy and values to achieve this goal. To keep alive the memory of John of God and constantly articulate his message, endeavoring to incarnate in themselves the gift of hospitality, becoming hospitality for others in the way modeled by John of God.

Finally, I remember in my prayers each day all the Brothers and Co-workers of the Order, thanking God for the work that you do for so many suffering brothers and sisters in so many parts of the world, some of you under very difficult and trying circumstances. Let the words of St. John of God give you comfort, strength and renewed energy in the service of hospitality, “*What you do is recorded in the Book of Life.*”

I thank all of you for your support and especially for your prayers. Let us move forward together, members of one *Hospitaller Family*, so that the project of John of God, finding an echo in the hearts of many more followers, as Brothers and Co-workers, will be instrumental in bring healing and hope to more and more people in need.

May Our Blessed Lady, Mother of Good Counsel, St. John of God, our Brother and Patron of the Order, St. Raphael the Archangel, whose Feast we celebrate on the 24th. of October, and all of our saints and martyrs continue to intercede for all of us, so that we may faithfully live our vocation in life and together continue the work of St. John of God for the benefit of our suffering brothers and sisters.

As always, united with you in St. John of God.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Donatus Forkan O.H.", written in dark ink.

Br. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General.