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*Priore Generale*

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**Feast of Saint John of God - March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011**

***YEAR OF THE FAMILY OF SAINT JOHN OF GOD***  
**2011 - March 8 - 2012**

My dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality

*Preamble*

This year the celebration of the **Feast of Our Founder, Saint John of God, on March 8<sup>th</sup>** also marks the beginning of *The Year of the Family of Saint John of God*. In the name of Saint John of God I greet and thank all **the members of The Family of Saint John of God**, all those men and women, religious Brothers, and lay people around the world who form this great family and together are continuing John of God's work in the vast area of health care and social needs.

In a very special way I greet and wish peace and healing for all those people, children, adults and older people, who, because of a particular need in your life, have sought help in a Saint John of God Centre or avail of some other services provided by the Order. During your time in a Saint John of God centre or service I hope you feel that you are being cared for and treated as a family member. Furthermore, when you leave the facility we hope that you will take with you positive memories, even if these are combined with memories of suffering or pain caused by your illness or disability. Your presence and patient endurance of suffering was an inspiration that enriched the lives of those who cared for you as well as your fellow patients.

Furthermore I pray, through the intercession of Saint John of God, Patron of the Sick, that for whatever reason you find yourself in a Saint John of God facility that it will be a pleasant, life-giving experience that will help you to regain a new sense of wellbeing and hope for your life.

### *The Way of Saint John of God*

Like us today, John Ciudad was totally dependent on what became ‘his family’ whether they were volunteers, his guests in the ‘House of Hospitality’ and those to whom he ministered, his donors or paid personnel. John of God teaches us that the encounter between two human beings is first and foremost an encounter between a brother or sister. John has left us a great example of how to treat each other by the way he himself approached people. What endeared John to his fellow citizens was the fact that he stood in solidarity with them. Not only that but he showed them a way in which they could build community, a community that had its neediest members at the centre of all concern and care. John’s humility was born of an insight that he had into the innate dignity of every human being who is made in the likeness and image of God<sup>1</sup>.

I am conscious that today not only are there many families throughout the world suffering as a result of the economic crises that has griped the world for the past number of years, and is set to continue for some time to come yet, but that there are many members of The Family of Saint John of God who are struggling because of debt, a reduction in income and unemployment that is the cause of great hardship for them. Let us stand in solidarity with them, encourage and help them in whatever way that we can, as John of God would wish it.

### *Hospitality A Shared Gift*

We have become increasingly aware that the Gift or Charism of Hospitality in the manner of Saint John of God transcends the Brothers who have made profession in the Order<sup>2</sup> and that it is also shared by the Co-workers. This understanding, which has slowly evolved, challenges all of the followers of John of God to identify so closely with the mission that other people will feel drawn and encouraged to do likewise. In the spirit of our Constitutions, therefore, as followers of John of God it must be for all of us our greatest joy to be in contact with those to whom our mission is directed. We welcome them and serve them with loving-kindness, understanding and a spirit of faith, which they deserve as persons and as children of God. We place all our energy, talents and skills at their disposition in the various tasks entrusted to us<sup>3</sup>. We can now say that the Co-workers are **co-responsible** with the Brothers for the mission of the Order.

### *A context in which to place **The Year of Family of Saint John of God***

I believe that it is important to note that in the past while we may not have referred to ourselves as a ‘Family’ as such, it can be stated that in general there

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 1:27

<sup>2</sup> General Statutes 2: 20

<sup>3</sup>Constitutions 2: 22b

always existed a close friendly relationship between the Brothers and Co-workers. I believe the *nature of our ministry* and the *Charism of Hospitality* itself inclines us towards a healthy inter-reliant, respectful relationship based on mutual respect and trust. The close relationship that existed between John of God and Juan d'Avila, Angulo, served as the model to follow as Angulo enjoyed the absolute confidence of his employer and the relationship between the two men was very close. John referred to Angulo affectionately as “*my companion*” and they became great friends. He was an exemplary employee and deserved to be called Juan’s friend.” (Cfr. José Maria Javierre, “John of God – Loco in Granada”, Ch. 26)

The late Br. Matias de Mina, an historian, described Juan d'Avila as a prototype of the Co-worker. Perhaps it was an indication of their relationship that ‘Angulo’ was the nickname that John of God gave Juan! As we look towards and plan for the future, central to our thinking, planning and focus has to be the mission i.e. the **purpose for which our Order** was brought into existence and the **Charism of John-of-God-Hospitality** that was bequeathed to it.

#### *Together creating the ‘Music of Hospitality’*

As I stated earlier one of the great awakenings or developments that has taken place within the Order in recent years is the recognition that the Co-workers, because of their numbers, professional skills and commitment, are the greatest resource the Order has to enable it fulfil its mission.<sup>4</sup> The numbers of Brothers are few by comparison, a most significant presence, but few in number nonetheless. This is certainly not to minimise the importance of the presence of the Brothers in our works. The Brothers are called to be and need to be seen as evangelisers, ‘icons of hospitality’ rather than people in charge who are perceived to wield control and power. Because of the universal nature of the Vocation of the Brother the presence of the Brothers of Saint John of God will help to prevent fragmentation of the Saint John of God Family and help to keep the memory, vision and dream of Saint John of God alive. We read in scripture that the followers of Christ are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.<sup>5</sup> Salt is a preservative, so Brothers in particular as men consecrated in Hospitality are called to preserve the ‘flavour’ of John-of-God-Hospitality. By the way they live their commitment as Religious Brothers they show the way to Christ – who is the Light of the World. When reflecting on the lives of outstanding Hospitallers we see clearly how they were both ‘salt’ and ‘light’ for the world in which they lived and the people with whom they shared their lives e.g. John of God himself, Benedict Menni, Richard Pampuri; Blesseds Olallo Valdes, Eustace Kugler; and Brothers William Gagnon and Fortunatus Thanhauser and so many others.

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<sup>4</sup> Charter of Hospitality 1:1

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5, 13-16

Accepting each other as members of this great *Family of Saint John of God*, united in one mission, gives hope and new meaning to the significance of **John-of-God-Hospitality** for our time. The Family of Saint John of God can be compared to an orchestra which has many members who play a variety of instruments. The members of the orchestra need to have a keen ear so that they can harmonise with one another and, together, create music that delights the ear of the listener. Likewise each member of the Family of Saint John of God needs to have a listening ear and an open heart to hear the voice of the one being served and the colleague one works with. The ear represents the whole person - eyes, mind and heart.

Working together in harmony, as a team, the members of the Family of Saint John of God produce the '**Music of Hospitality**' that is holistic in service, welcoming, soothing, healing and sensitive to respecting the person being served. When listening to each other, when we listen to the sick and poor, we hear God speak through them asking for justice and generosity in response to their needs. In the words of the late Brother Pierluigi Marchesi, former Prior General, the brothers and sisters we serve become 'our university', but we must be good students and listen to our teachers! As I have stated earlier God's voice speaks in the lonely and marginalized, and invites our compassion. God speaks in the cries of those oppressed by war, by violence and by injustice, and asks for solidarity.

*A mission we are called to fulfil*

Again the Family of Saint John of God can be compared to the *pomegranate* that contains within itself a great variety of seeds, each one being different. Likewise the members of the Family of Saint John of God come from different backgrounds, professions, religions, cultures, languages etc. This is not only a great richness to have *it is a mission we are called to fulfil*. Our society is polarised, broken and almost paranoid against the 'foreigner'; anyone who holds different views, religion, behaves differently or looks different to 'our group' is treated with suspicion. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening, with so much suffering and hardship as a result of the continuing economic crises.

Our society has great need of a model to follow, someone to show a way forward, someone to demonstrate that things can be different. Surely the ones who have *received* the **Gift of Hospitality** are the ones best placed to provide leadership in this regard. We can show how human beings can live in harmony; how people need to care for each other, especially those in greatest need, to be in solidarity with the poor, the disenfranchised and the marginalised, as shown us by John of God. We, as a Family, can demonstrate how people should relate to each other, irrespective of differences. Being united as a Family that is multicultural, multinational, multilingual etc. demonstrates that it is possible to be involved in the pursuit of a common mission, a common activity that is transforming and

benefits the entire human family. This is one of the **challenges and opportunities** that needs to *find an echo in our hearts* and *a response that is truly Hospitaller* in the spirit and manner of John of God.

*We can do so much more together*

Only together can we enter as a ‘WE’ into the heart of John-of-God-Hospitality. Seeing ourselves as a Family and working together as a Family opens up enormous possibilities for the mission to which we are all committed. Instead of the Brothers struggling on their own, united with the tens of thousands of Co-workers who share the dream and vision of John of God as do the Brothers, the possibilities for doing good are limitless. We are also supported in ministry by tens of thousands of benefactors, volunteers and friends who are also Family Members. Many of these contribute their time, some donate a portion of their earnings and others continually offer prayers for the success of the mission and for those to whom the mission is directed.

When one imagines the positive effects, the possibilities that open up for the work of John of God by marshalling the energy, commitment and expertise of so many followers of John of God across the world it is truly breathtaking. The people available to serve and the expertise to be drawn on means that an ever increasing number of sick, poor and needy people can be reached and given holistic care in the manner and spirit of Saint John of God. This will continue into the future beyond our wildest dreams, even with the reduction in the numbers of Brothers. In the world in which we live isn’t it fantastic to be able to offer a model of community, a family that cares about each other and whose members are there to offer the best possible service to people who are feeling vulnerable, ill or in need of assistance because of a particular need in their lives?

### **Year of The Family of Saint John of God**

*The Year of The Family of Saint John of God* can be understood in five ways. First of all, as a special time for personal reflection and individual conversion so that everything we do corresponds to God’s will for us and expresses our sense of unity<sup>6</sup>. This will open us up to the movement of the Holy Spirit, who breaths where he wills<sup>7</sup>, to present and future reality as we engage together in the process of discerning a way forward.

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<sup>6</sup> Cont. 1: 6b

<sup>7</sup> John 3: 8

Secondly, I would hope that the *Year of The Family of Saint John of God* will give rise to an intense effort at promoting the way life of the Brothers in the local churches around the world. We all know that the best advertisement for our way of life is the quality of our own lives.

Thirdly, I would see this year as an opportunity to hold retreats, seminars and courses in which both Brothers and Co-workers participate and engage. To study individually and together the publications and documentation already published. Unfortunately, many of our documents are left on shelves to gather dust. This is a great shame as it isolates individuals and communities from having an up-to-date understanding of how the Order sees itself, and how it is endeavoring to live out its Hospitaller Mission in a world that is constantly changing and in the need of light and direction. It also prevents active participation in shaping a future in which all have a stake. It would be important also, as a dynamic, to invite Brothers and Co-workers to share their experiences, their hopes and dreams for the future of the Family and its mission. It is an opportunity to organize and celebrate events pertaining to the Centre, Province etc, and to use these opportunities to give recognition and show appreciation for services rendered, exceptional achievements, especially related to the exercise of Hospitality, years of profession of Brothers and other events in the lives of the membership – both Co-workers and Brothers.

Fourthly, the General Curia has produced a short DVD that endeavors to convey an awareness of what it means to belong to *The Family of Saint John of God*. A number of international events are already arranged as are a number of activities and events at the Province and local levels. For further information of these events you can contact the Order's website [www.ohsjd.org](http://www.ohsjd.org) or that of your Province or centre.

Fifthly, I see the *Year of The Family of Saint John of God* as a preparation for our General Chapter to be held in 2012 in Fatima, Portugal, by creating an awareness of the trends, issues, the strengths, weakness and opportunities that **The Family of Saint John of God** faces in the immediate and long term future.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, let us prepare well for one of the most important events in the calendar of The Family of Saint John of God i.e. **The Feast of Saint John of God**.

A man who so surprised, astounded and, at the same time, inspired the people of Granada that the only name they could think of to give him that described what he meant to them was *John OF GOD*. We know of no other individual in history who was given such a descriptive, apt, exalted and revealing name by his neighbours and fellow citizens. Is it any wonder that the humble John of God still

fascinates, inspires and attracts thousands of followers who continue his work in the manner and spirit that he has shown?

Let us also endeavour to make *The Year of The Family of Saint John of God* special by spreading John's message and by inviting others to share the joy that comes *from doing good to others for the love of God*<sup>8</sup>.

In our prayers and liturgical celebrations let us place the needs of our worldwide Family, the events of this year and above all the needs of the tens of thousands of people who find themselves in a Saint John of God centre or service **are being served in some way by a follower of Saint John of God. Let us pray** that, by the manner in which they are cared for, they will experience the presence of God in their lives and the love that He has for each one – a love that is beyond all understanding<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, I pray that each one of you will have an enjoyable, blessed and fruitful **Year of The Family of Saint John of God** and a very happy **Saint John of God Feastday!**

As always, fraternally yours in Saint John of God.



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

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<sup>8</sup> John of God's begging cry

<sup>9</sup> Eph 3: 14-21