



CIRCULAR LETTER

TO THE BROTHERS

FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR

COMMEMORATING THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR OF

THE FOUNDING OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE RESURRECTION

OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

*God willing, I begin the journey
toward the immense task of our new activity.
There are so many expectations for our new work,
so much that my heart is pounding
and can sense the fear of not omitting anything.
In the power of our Lord's resurrection there is hope.
Let us pray, let us pray together. The time has arrived!
The Lord Jesus asks us to weigh anchor and to set out into the deep water.
(Fr. Jerome Kajsiewicz, Letters, Vol. 8, p. 183)*

Dear Brothers!

The waters have long passed beneath the bridges of the Tiber since the 32nd General Chapter, held in Rome on June 1 – 22, 2011, elected the new government of the Congregation. It is true that as superior general I have made myself present to you on various occasions, but this time I would like to share a broader reflection on the occasion of the jubilee year which is coming to an end. We have celebrated it in various ways, but in a rather discreet manner. Some gatherings have been organized, as well as celebrations in the parishes or religious houses on the Provincial or local community levels. For this occasion some publications have come out in the different languages.

While writing these words I have in front of me the *Circular Letter* written on the occasion of the previous jubilee year (150 years) by the General Curia of that time, which reminds us: “The Congregation of the Resurrection is not a work of our own or our own possession, but is rather the work of the Lord and his possession [...]. We must return to the divine institution of our community and to our spiritual roots.” I am in full agreement with these words.

Reflecting on our history of more than a century and at the same time taking part in the life of the Church, I would like to indicate certain areas or places which seem to me to be important for us and for future generations, so that “... no sacrifice will be wasted, and even if we might vanish from the earth, our bones, like those of Elisha, will prophesy and the one who touches them will rise.”

(Kajsiewicz, Homily at Paris, 1842)

1. Conversion – entering the Paschal Mystery.

The time preceding the birth of the Congregation was a dramatic period, which saw the conversion and the return to Christ of Bogdan Jański and his most faithful followers, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz. This experience made them understand that conversion is not a single act but a process which embraces and lasts our entire life. In this context the analysis of our history made by John Iwicki, in the preface of his second volume of the history of the Congregation, seems to remain valid: “If ever our history is to have any relevance and meaning for us as Resurrectionists, that

is, if it is to serve as a 'teacher of life', then it must be viewed in the light of *metanoia* which is an integral part of our charism. (*Resurrectionist Charism*, Vol. 2, p. XI)

Following upon all that was expressed at our last Chapter, I would like to add that conversion is the characteristic of every Resurrectionist of every time, an indispensable element of our identity. Therefore, even today all of us "must constantly die to self (self-will, self-love, self-activity) in order to rise by the power of the Holy Spirit to a new life of love in Christ." (*Constitutions*, 1) This act of molding oneself into a new man in Christ risen is the content and the goal to which the whole formation process tends, which, as our document on ongoing formation affirms, extends to every aspect of the life of the religious and lasts our whole life. No one can exempt himself from this commitment. Each one of us, supported by the community, is responsible for his own growth. There is no need to remind ourselves that in this task faithfulness to prayer and traditional ascetical practices, without which it would be difficult to speak of spiritual life, will help.

2. Fraternal community – the context of growth.

Since the first days of the "House of Jański" our founder concerned himself with strong fraternal ties, with a friendly atmosphere among the members. He himself experienced the strength with which evil attracts us, how weak the human will is, and how great is the misery of man. He also knew that good intentions, projects and ideas can be carried out and advanced only by bringing together strengths held in common. After four years of the official existence of the "House", Bogdan defined in his diary three fundamental ends of their union and their social life: to confirm themselves in conversion, to practice the spiritual life, and to prepare themselves to offer their own lives in the future (August 1, 1839).

Together with the Chapter, which cautions us to avoid an excessive dispersion of our presence, and conscious of how essential these ends are for our growth, I would like to encourage you to take an interest in community life. In particular, let us be concerned about those constitutional aspects of community life: prayers, meals, recreation, the periodic meetings of the religious houses and spiritual retreats. As we know, these practices lead to a deepening of personal ties, to an improved communication and as a consequence also to a clearer discernment of the will of God. We should remind ourselves that fraternal life on the one hand is a gift from on high, but on the other hand it is also the work of our hands; and therefore its value for us depends on how much we have invested in it.

3. Being a religious – the power of giving witness.

The religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience have always been a fundamental outline of this path for the following of Christ in total devotion and sacrifice. When our Fathers, two years after the death of the Elder Brother, brought to fulfillment the process of founding the Congregation and outlined its

identity, they first wrote and accepted the rule, and then elected the superior and chose the name “Brothers of the Resurrection”; then, finally on Easter morning, March 27, 1842, in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian they professed their vows. These vows bound them together definitively in a unique community and became a sure road to personal sanctification, which is confirmed by our history. The first Resurrectionists were born in this way. One of them, immediately after, gave this joyous testimony: “Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Finally, finally the work of the Lord and his mercy on us has been fulfilled. I write to you as a religious. [...] Glory to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!” (Kajsiewicz to Kozmian, *Listy*, vol. 2, p. 7)

The catacombs are a place of burial and thus of death and darkness; but Easter, on the contrary, indicates the Resurrection, new life and light. To be a religious means to live this continuous tension between Evil and Good, between the Fall and Rebirth, between an existence in the Darkness of sin and Life in the Light of grace. I direct to you a hopeful encouragement with the words of Blessed John Paul II: “Consecrated women and men, old and young alike, live faithfully your commitment to God, in mutual edification and mutual support! Despite the difficulties you may occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, you have the task of once more inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and of his Son's Gospel. Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only belong to Christ but that ‘you have become Christ!’” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrate*, 109)

4. Being brothers – to promote fraternity.

Religious life in the Church was begun by brothers; the priests came later. The history of our own community as well begins with brothers, who in 1836 joined themselves under the guidance of the elder brother Bogdan Jański, while the first priests arrived only in 1841. Even though we are a clerical congregation, the choice of fraternal life is inserted very clearly in our *Constitutions*: “We believe that God calls us to live together as brothers—sharing the gifts that we have received, supporting one another, praying and working together for his glory.” (Charism Statement of the Congregation) It is interesting to note that only in the articles dedicated to post-novitiate formation do we find a differentiation between brothers who are prepared for the priesthood and those who are formed for other apostolic tasks. Officially we used to call them by the name of “lay brothers” or “coadjutor brothers” or “brother collaborators”. However, in our informal communication, we refer to them simply as Brothers, without any qualifier. These brothers have never been a very numerous group, but they have always been present, carrying out various forms of service in the different sectors of the apostolate.

We are all grateful for their presence, because it is they, the brothers, who effectively remind the religious priests of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ, to be lived among us and with every man and woman (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrate*, 60). We thank them for their faithfulness to prayer, for their clear witness and for their joyous commitment in the apostolates, which is the best way to promote new vocations.

5. Filadelfia –friendship of brothers and sisters.

Our first Fathers, and in particular Semenenko and Kajsiewicz, sought with great determination to found an analogous female community that like us would have the support of lay collaborators. They promoted in various ways the birth of female communities: Resurrectionist Sisters, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Sisters of Nazareth, Felician Sisters, Dominican Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, Sisters Consolers, Adoration Sisters of Reparation. Our Fathers, the more they saw the convergence of the ends of a specific community with those of our Congregation, the more they supported it, helping it to write the rule and the constitutions, offering themselves as spiritual directors and accompanying the community in the discernment of God's will and their charisms. Through the years these reciprocal contacts continued mutually. Today in various countries in the world we maintain fruitful collaboration also with other religious communities, masculine and feminine; and indeed we can affirm in harmony with the thought of St. Bernard: "We all need one another: the spiritual good which I do not own and possess, I receive from others" (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrate*, 52).

I am glad about the reality of living this ecclesial communion and for the collaboration of Resurrectionists with various institutes of consecrated life. This represents a continuity with our best traditions, following the path of our history; besides, this example of interreligious fraternity can be an encouragement for the building of further faith communities where "all can experience the hope, joy and peace of Christ's Resurrection" (Charism Statement of the Congregation).

6. The office of authority – service to the community.

In consecrated life the position of superior, even local, "... has always been of great importance for the spiritual life and for mission" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrate*, 43). So it happened that our first priests, Semenenko and Kajsiewicz, carried out between them thirty-three years of service in authority as superiors general, taking care of all of the members and works of the Congregation. They fulfilled this task with the awareness that behind religious authority there is always Christ himself; they expressed this conviction many times: "It is Jesus Christ himself who is governing us, more than you can

imagine. This is my strength. It can also at the same time be your safeguard.” (Semenenko to Przewłocki, *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 25); “Remember that in faith I am for you the instrument and organ of God’s will.” (Kajsiewicz to Jełowicki, *Letters*, vol. 7, p. 27) The other side of the service of authority is obedience which, Kajsiewicz regretted, was not always perfect: “The desire for obedience among us is great, but the ability to obey, to put it that way, is still lacking. For the love of God, let us stop once and for all this superficial camaraderie!” (*Listy*, vol. 6, p. 82)

In this context I thank all the superiors (major and local) for their dedication on behalf of the community; I thank them in a special way because they protect our unity, they care for fraternal life, they promote the spirituality of communion and they are mediators for discerning God’s will. Remember that your task “

(Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 28). Finally I would like to thank all of the brothers, because they treat with faith these human mediations—which can at times be limited and imperfect, yet are, however, always binding—and in looking beyond themselves they move toward holiness, giving witness to the primacy of God and the higher values – supernatural and eternal.

7. Ministry of the Word – messengers of hope.

Our founder Bogdan Jański, converted by the Word, became also himself a messenger of the Word to others. He did this in different ways: writing letters, conversing, suggesting books of spirituality and leading people back to the sacramental life. The co-founders also, after having received priestly ordination, threw themselves immediately into labors in the “Lord’s vineyard”. Their zeal is seen in their words addressed to the external brethren in Paris: “God is now freeing our hands for work. Let us lift up our hearts to him. Let us purify our motives, to make them as pure as the light of day in his sight. May it be only his love that fills our hearts. May it be the good of our brothers which animates us – such a great good! We are now new persons, a new creation in Jesus Christ [...]. May we become his living instruments! Even though we are unworthy, let us associate ourselves with everything that is holy and good in the world today, and we will conquer.” (Semenenko, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 121) We know that our early Fathers had the extraordinary talent and charism of proclaiming the Word of God. It is also true that entire generations of our preachers and missionaries, pastors and catechists, educators and professors, dedicated themselves to the dignified office of announcing the Word; they did it with great professionalism, passion and generosity.

Grateful to all those who even today are in various ways at the service of the Word, I would like to call to mind, together with Pope Benedict XVI, that we are the ones who proclaim and at the same time the first ones to whom this Word is addressed. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, draws us to himself, transforms us, gives us new life, includes us in his mission and gives us the capacity to proclaim him effectively. The greater is our devotion to the Lord and our life in common permeated with a fraternal spirit, the more fruitful will our service be. Our ministry will bear the “*Logos of Hope*” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) because “in order to be able to live fully each moment, men and women need ‘the great hope’ which is ‘the God who possesses a human face and who «has loved us to the end»” (Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 91).

8. The ministry of sanctification – ministers of the Mysteries of God.

As with all priests, so also our Fathers exercised the ministry of sanctification through the administration of the Sacraments, the liturgical prayer of the Church and various forms of worship. They were often sought after as confessors, and so important personages both from the Church and from society knelt at their confessionals. The Eucharist was always at the center of their daily life; through it they situated their day-to-day existence in God’s time and drew from it the strength to carry forward each day’s commitments. They were aware that they were living from the Eucharist and for the Eucharist, and for this reason every Holy Mass they celebrated with great joy and devotion. Father Semenenko confides to a sister: “... during Holy Mass when I hold in my hands the most holy chalice from which we drink, with faith in the spirit I have in my hands the heart of the Lord, the lover of man, and truly from his heart I drink this, his most precious blood which is our life.” (*Listy*, vol. 10, p. 214) Our Fathers knew well how important prayer is for religious life, and they were therefore very diligent in their time for prayer, and they encouraged the others to do the same. The superior general wrote to the brothers in Paris: “My very dear friends, my dearest brothers, remain in peace. In spite of your many occupations do not neglect prayer. Let it precede all that you do, for in it God gives strength and peace, and this is what you need amid such storms and attacks that you have to suffer” (Semenenko, *Letters*, vol. 7, p.10).

The majority of us draw near to the altar every day and participate with joy and love in the Mysteries of God with the charismatic awareness that it is the risen Lord himself who is working in us, with us and through us. Some among us offer at the altar their sufferings, sicknesses, weaknesses and all their other human limitations. This is a very precious and indispensable offering. Keeping in mind everything written in the *Constitutions*, I encourage you to “become men of prayer. In this way we will be like Christ’s first apostles, who devoted themselves to ‘prayer and the ministry of the word’” (54).

9. Missio ad gentes – new horizons of hope.

Just after the Second Vatican Council, in our *Constitutions*, revised in 1982, in the section dealing with apostolates we find new articles concerning missionary activity; the missionary spirit, however, has been present since the beginning of our Congregation. We would always go, according to the possibilities of our personnel, to those places of spiritual and material need, and to where the Holy Father would send us; we endeavored to form communities of faith, hope and love with full respect for the various local cultures (cf. *Constitutions*, 220). In this manner, as the years passed we began to work in Italy: in Mentorella (1857) and Pescara (1933); in Canada (1857); in Bulgaria (1863); in the United States (1865); in Poland (1880); in Austria (1897); in Bermuda (1953); in Brazil (1958); in Bolivia (1959); in the Holy Land (1972); in Australia (1978); in Germany (1983); in Ukraine (1990); in Slovakia (1993); and in Tanzania (2002). Today, this most recent mission, which will shortly celebrate the tenth anniversary of its foundation, is the *pupilla oculis* of the Congregation, the youngest mission, in Africa.

I rejoice together with the Chapter, because our service is bringing forth the fruit of new vocations. In the recently established Novitiate, three young men have begun their canonical period of formation. Together with the Capitular Fathers I ask your support in prayer and material assistance as well for this new frontier of hope. Be always open to the fundamental missionary activity of the Church, which is the proclamation of Christ to those who still do not know Him, and let us remember that, “Despite the understandable difficulties which some of them will meet, it is good to remind everyone that just as ‘faith is strengthened when it is given to others’, so the mission strengthens the consecrated life, gives it new enthusiasm and new motivation, and elicits faithfulness.” (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 78)

10. New evangelization – together with the laity.

The Nuncio Apostolico in Poland, His Excellency Celestino Migliore, has rightly noted: “... your history began in the “House” that Bogdan Jański founded in Paris in the mid-19th Century. This was his new evangelization such as it could be understood in that period. He did not want to remain in only one place, but felt a particular esteem and fascination for the words of Christ: ‘Go out to all the world.’ (Homily, September 24, 2011). John Paul II, introducing this new evangelization among the tasks of the Church, underlined in it a threefold newness: in its enthusiasm, its methods and its modes of expression (March 9, 1983). Benedict XVI, in convoking the Synod of Bishops for 2012 on the theme, “The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith”, undoubtedly desires to revive the faith in the countries of ancient Christian tradition. This

objective, among others, has been present with the Holy Father since the first days of his mandate. He said, in the homily delivered during the Eucharist at the beginning of his pontificate: “The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.”

We are aware that the “newness” of the proclamation of Christ risen is a task so great that an ample collaboration with the laity is needed. Previous general chapters made clear this demand, and furthermore the last Chapter broadened an article of the Constitutions, inserting the following text: “It is a part of our tradition that there are associations of laity living the Resurrectionist charism and mission, according to their state of life. The presence of the laity in our ministry ought to mean a real collaboration – the laity working with us in genuine communion with the Church”. I heartily encourage you to look for and to form collaborators for this work: “The responsibility of announcing and proclaiming is not the work of a single person or a select few, but a gift given to every person who confidently responds to the call of faith. Nor is transmitting the faith a specialized work assigned to a group of people or specifically designated individuals, but an experience of every Christian and the entire Church.” (XIII Ordinary General Assembly, “The New Evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith”, *Lineamenta*, 12)

11. Beatification processes – seeking models and intercessors.

It seems as if beatification processes are the “Achilles’ heel” of our Congregation. Already in 1920 the XVII General Chapter decided to name Fr. Paul Smolikowski the Postulator General for all the processes of beatification and canonization of the Congregation. Many times we have tried to organize all of the written patrimony of our Fathers, but despite our human efforts, costs and good will, we have always stopped halfway along the road. Meanwhile some persons who were close to our Fathers and some who were under their spiritual direction have already been elevated to the glory of the altars (St. Edmund Bojanowski, St. Joseph Pelczar, St. Joseph Bilczewski, Blessed Celine Borzęcka, Blessed Frances Siedliska, Blessed Marcelline Darowska). In this context it is gratifying to see that, thanks to the commitment and the work of the last Postulator General, we have succeeded in concluding the process of the Servant of God Bogdan Jański at the diocesan level. The solemn closing of this process, with the participation of the members of the extended general council and the diocesan bishop, took place on April 18, 2008 in Płock. A little before the Chapter, furthermore, on September 14, 2010, the *positio* on the Servant of God Paul Smolikowski was approved, having been submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints only in 1994.

If we truly desire that the Church officially recognize our Venerable Fathers as models to follow, and permit us to offer them public veneration, in order to obtain this all of us should contribute; each one of us should pledge to engage himself, in life and in work. The chapters one after another ask us tirelessly to pray and to promote our candidates. Let our superiors promote among the faithful the prayer of intercession.

12. Turning to the future – our next anniversaries.

With this letter I would like not only to recall and narrate our illustrious past, but also to sketch and outline, as much as possible, our immediate future, obviously marked by the past. On the way towards the next general chapter some jubilee moments await us, in which we will be able to learn once more from history and celebrate the *magnalia Dei*. Just next year is the second centennial of the birth of Fr. Jerome Kajsiewicz, and in two years we will celebrate the same “birthday” of Fr. Peter Semenenko; while in 2016 we will commemorate 175 years of the priestly ordination of the same Fathers. In 2013 150 years will have passed since we have been present in Bulgaria; elsewhere, in 2016 our mission in the United States will be 150 years old. Also our educational institutions are preparing celebrations of their anniversaries: the major seminary of the South American Region will be 25 years old in 2013, while St. Jerome’s University in Waterloo will celebrate 150 years of its founding in 2015.

Since the time of the great Jubilee of the year 2000 we know that every recurrence of important events and every anniversary is permeated with the presence of God and his salvific action (cf. Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 16). One help to experience this presence is reflecting on our patrimony, which in recent decades has been handed down to us either in print or digital form. I think of the *Diary* of Bogdan Jański, the *Letters* of the Founders and other various publications. Taking this occasion, I would like to thank all of those past and present who have contributed and have dedicated themselves to deciphering the manuscripts and the translations, in the work of elaboration, editing, and publication of the various texts.

13. Mary – Guide in our faith and model of hope.

Pope Pius IX’s entrusting *in perpetuum* of the Marian Sanctuary of Mentorella to our care was an extraordinary sign for the first Resurrectionists. This indicated to the young Community, not yet officially recognized, that it had received its “Mother” and its official place in the Church. For this reason our Fathers chose precisely Mentorella as the location for the VI General Chapter to

take place, during which they defined the purpose and the objectives of the Congregation.

Giving thanks to the Mother of God for her presence in the image of Our Lady of Mentorella, at this conclusion of our Jubilee Year I would like to entrust to her our future.

Our Lady of Mentorella, Full of grace and clemency!
Mother of the Congregation, which like your Son
was born not in the family home but in a foreign land.
In years past you gathered us under your protective mantle,
and now even today do not let us stray far from you,
because where you are, there is also Jesus.
Let us feel how great is the love of the Father
which has found us again, has chosen and called us.

Faithful and powerful Patroness of our Congregation!
Take under your protection the entire religious community:
each province, the region, all the houses throughout the world,
the institutes of formation, the parishes and the works.
Under your careful protection I entrust every Resurrectionist.
Receive us all just as we are:
with our joys and our good will,
with our deficiencies and our concerns.
Renew in us enthusiasm and hope.

You who believed the Word and brought this Incarnate Word to Elizabeth,
strengthen us in the faith and help us to bring to others – as you did –
by the ways of evangelization,
the Risen Lord!

In eo Christo Reddivivo,



Bernard Hylla CR
Superior General
XIX successor of Elder Brother Bogdan Jański

Roma, December 25, 2011, on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord