



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE SISTERS OF DIVINE LOVE

*To Reverend Mother Matilde Fravolini
Superior General of the Sisters of Divine Love*

1. I learned with pleasure that this Religious Family is preparing to celebrate the third centenary of its foundation next year. Indeed, it was on 13 September 1705 that Cardinal Marc' Antonio Barbarigo, Bishop of Montefiascone and Corneta, Tarquinia, founded the Congregation of Divine Love. It was the last important apostolic project of a Pastor who, from the very start of his episcopal ministry in the Dioceses of Upper Lazio and earlier in the Island of Corfù, had worked effectively to implement the ecclesiastical reform introduced by the directives of the Council of Trent. He did this both by establishing a far-reaching network of evangelization and catechesis through the Institute of the Religious Teachers Filippini and by opening a Seminary for the cultural and spiritual training of clergy. In addition, with his pastoral visits and the celebration of diocesan Synods, the holy prelate was concerned to impress a lasting pastoral renewal on the parishes, with a view to deeply influencing the religious and moral life of the population. He is likewise remembered for his concern for the condition of women at that time, and for the types of religious education that he started for the benefit of underprivileged girls.

2. At the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium as I thank God with you, Reverend Mother, and with all the Sisters for the 300 years of the Institute's life, I would like to address to each and every Religious the invitation of Jesus to Peter: "*Duc in altum*", put out into the deep! (Lk 5: 4).

Your distinctive charism is up-to-date and involves you in the spirituality of communion and mission that I pointed out to the Church in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. By virtue of the special consecration to God that distinguishes you, dear Sisters of Divine Love, you are called to be witnesses of God's mercy in every situation. I urge you in particular to foster the spirit of hospitality in your houses, opening yourselves to the

needs of others to spread the good fragrance of charity and help to bring about that "divine history for love" to which your founder liked to refer.

Never cease to promote an authentic spirituality of communion that finds inspiration and support in the sublime mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. From that divine Source, you draw the warmth of the charity that you are called to transmit through the various activities of liturgical life, catechesis, formation at youth recreation centres, at professional schools and workshops, assistance to the family in homes for single women with children and at counselling centres for the weak and the marginalized.

3. In the light of the great cultural and social changes that have occurred in our modern age, the foresight of Cardinal Marc' Antonio Barbarigo seems prophetic. Three centuries ago he engaged in the social advancement of women. Following in his footsteps, your Institute today is called to help women in difficulty rediscover their dignity in accordance with God's plan and their vocation of love. Recognizing the proper role of women in society helps to protect the values of the family, of life and of peace.

In this perspective, I would especially like to present to you for your consideration and commitment my Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. The instructions it contains will help to bring you success in your mission at the service of the human and religious advancement of the world of women.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, guide you in this effort and obtain for your Religious Family the gift of numerous holy vocations. As I assure you of my special remembrance in prayer for this intention, I warmly impart my Blessing to you, Reverend Mother, and to the entire family of the Institute of Divine Love.

From Castel Gandolfo, 11 September 2004

JOHN PAUL II