

Good morning. When we presented our petition to the CJs at their General Congregation in Nemi, we used the powerful image of a river with candles to mark significant moments of the journey of Mary Ward's Institute. At that moment Jane in her response to us said

*This river, charting our history, poses one question to us all – What, in our time, are the Holy Spirit and Mary Ward asking of us, inviting us to?*

Over the last 8 years in particular I have reflected a lot on the fact that Mary Ward's founding story is incomplete. She was called very clearly by God to found one congregation of apostolic women and to take the same of the Society. 413 years later she and we are waiting to complete her foundation and to fulfil her vocation. We know she responded yes and that her yes was blocked and blocked and blocked again, but she remained faithful. Over the last 400 years members of her congregation have in our vocation a DNA, a desire to fulfil her vocation. Sometimes it has remained dormant but at others it has raised its head, it has been given expression, attempts and desires to and unite her congregation as one body. I often think that the opposition, the suppression, the destruction of the dream of Mary Ward, signifies the deep beauty and the extraordinary gift that her vocation was and is for our Church. And it still is a significant and seems to become more and more significant for the women of our Church and world all the time.

Over the 400 plus years the opposing spirit has raised its head on many occasions through individuals, (mostly Bishops and unhappy, jealous or disgruntled members) but the fidelity and the faithfulness of her followers, of us her followers, of individuals over the years, allows us to continue to hold and nurture her vocation, whether it was Teresa Ball writing and preserving the original constitutions and bringing them from York to Rathfarnham, the sisters who preserved our Painted Life heritage, those great women who met in Rome in 1900 or whether it is today's individuals and committed members like Chris Burke and Bosco in Manila, who have lived in a IBVM-CJ community for over 10 years, Liliana from Argentina who is working with IBVM in Lima or Maria Lopez and Victoria Ripa working together in Asilah, women who are committed to live as one Mary Ward family, quietly but with conviction and also all the women we have known over the years who have kept the flame burning.

As our world fragments we offer the witness of union and unity. To help us to do this I would like to draw your attention to the resources that are available on our website: the December 2021 booklet *Becoming One*, the petition made to CJs at their GC, Jane's response etc.

Also our human resources present here at the GC, our CJ sisters: Veronica, Pragya, Poonam, Mariana and Amadea with us, And we have our Canon Lawyers, our wisdom figures. Our membership certainly made sure that this GC was fully resourced.

We are grateful to John who will lead us in this discernment, who has walked the path with us, not just these days and over the last 3 years, but since 1995 with the Mary Ward team in the refugee camp. John will lead us in prayer, in discernment and spiritual conversation, to the point where we will vote on Friday to ratify the petition that we made to the CJ General Congregation. These days are reflective, prayerful discerning days. We will meet and have meals as normal and then on Friday perhaps after a mass of Holy Spirit and before the actual vote lunch will be in silence.

Some have asked why we need three days to make this decision, is it not already made? Yes 95% of membership have said that this is what we want, 85% are happy that the process will be a fusion or merger with the Congregatio Jesu. But these decisions to date need to be ratified by a decision of the General Congregation.

We are on sacred ground, this General Congregation, you, we, hold a sacred responsibility at this moment in our history, together we hold a treasure, and we need to honour that responsibility and that privilege, taking the time to relish what it is that God is asking of us, taking the time to ensure that what we are doing is of God. Mary Ward has waited 413 years for her foundational grace to be fulfilled, it is ours to fulfil, let us give it our heart and our prayer for 3 more days. At the beginning I spoke about going into the cave of our hearts, now we can go deeper to the cave of our hearts, to the cave of our Institute's heart, to the cave of Mary Ward's vocation and heart, we can touch and experience the deep desire, the deep longing for oneness that is ours. This responsibility, this privilege, this gift to our Institute, this is ours to give. Jesus say Amen.

