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**General Conference of the *Catholic Fraternity* (Southern Europe Region)
Rome, 3-4 November 2018**

CHARIS: THE NEW SINGLE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

1. Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am happy to meet you on the occasion of this General Conference of the *Catholic Fraternity* (Southern Europe Region), on the theme “Charisms in the Church and Catholic Charismatic Renewal” in the light of *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s letter (May 15th 2016) on the relationship between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church.

My intervention has the goal of illustrating the fundamental characteristics of CHARIS, which, as you know, next month will become the ‘single’, ‘new’, international service for Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In fact, this is a direct request from the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

During his pontificate, and even before, Pope Francis has been able to follow with particular attention the life and development of this current of grace in the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, called Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Here, it is worth

remembering that the last responsibility that Jorge Mario Bergoglio received from the Argentine bishops' conference while he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires was as the spiritual assistant to CCR in his country. Once he became Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church, Pope Francis made several interventions on the subject of CCR, and these are at the basis of the project for CHARIS. Please allow me, now, to remind you of them, and to encourage you to re-read these papal discourses. They can all be found in several languages on the Holy See's official website. There are five major speeches, pronounced between 2014 and 2017, which, in my opinion, clearly constitute a key body of teachings:

1.- The address to participants, coming from all over the world, in the 37th Convocation of Renewal in the Holy Spirit, Rome, Olympic Stadium, June 1st 2014.

2.- The address to the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, in Rome on October 31st 2014.

3.- The lecture given to priests gathered in Saint John Lateran, on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, on June 12th 2018, on occasion of the 3rd Worldwide Priests' Retreat.

4.- The address to the members of Renewal in the Holy Spirit in Saint Peter's square on July 3rd 2015.

5.- The address to the participants at the Golden Jubilee of CCR, gathered in Circus Maximus, Rome, on June 3rd 2017, during the Pentecost Vigil.

In these interventions from Pope Francis you will certainly find his teaching concerning CCR.

2. The 2015 Letter and Message from Pope Francis

The starting point in CHARIS' itinerary came in June 2015, on the occasion of the third world retreat for priests, when the Pope wrote a letter to the Presidents of ICCRS and the Catholic Fraternity. In the letter, dated June 12th 2015, and in view of the CCR Golden Jubilee, Pope Francis shared his thoughts, in order for them to be reflected upon, and carried in prayer and intercession: "Perhaps the time has come in which this unique current of grace - as you know, the definition is not mine: it comes from Cardinal Suenens - , might have a single international service, here in Rome, where ICCRS, Catholic Fraternity and the other realities might be represented equally with the same rights, and where the Holy Spirit would be the unique guide and leader. This does not mean losing one's identity, it means growing in the life of the Spirit, each with one's own charism, in a mutual enrichment, all born of the Spirit in the same current of grace. Moreover, this will reinforce unity in international Charismatic Renewal, which, as you know, needs to be reinforced... Think about this, and discern whether this is where the Holy Spirit is carrying [Charismatic Renewal] fifty years after having awakened it. In Argentina this began some years ago, and it is an experience that can be useful to you."

After this letter from the Pope came his message of October 30th 2015, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Holy See's recognition of the Catholic Fraternity, where he writes: "in this service of conserving what is essential and reforming what is accidental for a better service of the men and women of our time in which the Church is engaged, I believe that this is the moment to discern together, Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS, in light of the experience of communion that you have begun to live, the need to further deep this communion through the forming of a single service for worldwide Charismatic Renewal, which would represent this single current of grace, without losing the specific characteristics of its parts. This means that both of you, Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS, can offer your lived-out experience to the multifarious variety of expressions that the Holy Spirit has willed to exist across the world. I ask you that the

Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS continue to progress in this path of communion. Deepening and ‘broadening the tent’ (Is. 54:2) of this communion is the best way to celebrate the Jubilee. In this communion all are strengthened and no-one loses their identity - that would be a uniformity that certainly does not come from the Spirit – a communion in diversity awakened by Him”.

To this call from the Holy Father, the presidents of the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS replied together to the Pope, with a letter dated November 9th 2015, manifesting their commitment to walking together in prayer and discernment in order to bring to fulfilment this new indication from the Successor of Peter.

3. The Holy Father’s letter of April 27th 2016

On April 25th 2016, the Holy Father received the presidents of the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS, along with a small delegation, on the subject both of the celebration of the CCR Golden Jubilee, and of the single service for this unique current of grace. Two days after this meeting, the Holy Father sent a letter to the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, informing him that he had named two coordinators and two secretaries, charged with bring to fulfilment the project of a single international service for CCR, and asking the Dicastery to accompany this. The Cardinal President replied immediately to the Pope, manifesting his complete availability to undertake this task. Since September 1st 2016 this task has been carried forward by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, which succeeded the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

4. The Constitutive Act of the new single service for CCR and the statutes of *CHARIS*

A determining step in this process took place with the Constitutive Act of the new single service for all the expressions of CCR, signed by the four persons appointed by Pope Francis, in Rome on May 29th 2017, a few days before the celebration of the CCR Golden Jubilee. On this subject, during the Pentecost Vigil in Circus Maximus on June 3rd, the Pope said this: “I thank you in particular for the fact that the request I made to you two years ago, to give worldwide Charismatic Renewal a single international service based here, has begun to take shape in the Constitutive Act of this new single service. This is a first step, others will follow, but soon this unity, work of the Holy Spirit, will be a reality. ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Ap. 21:5) says the Lord”. Indeed, with this act the signatories manifested their will to constitute a new, single service for CCR.

A next step was the presentation to the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life of draft statutes, developed with the Dicastery’s help, containing the general norms for the functioning of this body. This took place in March of this year.

It seemed opportune to briefly mention this itinerary, begun in 2015, in order to better understand the origins and the signification of this work.

5. A Service for All Expressions of CCR

CHARIS is designed to be, for all the expressions of CCR, without excluding anyone, a proposal of service from an international body recognised by the Holy See, available to all in order to generate communion, cooperation, proximity and fraternity.

The needs of CCR are many, and some of these needs have already been identified. The Holy Spirit will guide the development of this unique international service, which will of course count on the cooperation of many people. Thinking of the shape CHARIS will take, it seems important to me that we underline and reflect on the notion of ‘service’. As a service body on an international level for all the expressions of CCR, CHARIS will not exercise any authority over these expressions or over CCR in general. Each charismatic reality will remain what it is, with its identity fully respected, and under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical authority upon which it currently depends. Each of these realities, however, will be able to freely take advantage of the services CHARIS offers: providing services is CHARIS’ fundamental goal.

Moreover, CHARIS will be neither an association of the faithful, nor a federation of associations of the faithful: it will be a service body at the disposition of all the charismatic realities that exist, across the whole world.

At the beginning of December 2018, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life will erect CHARIS and approve its statutes. These statutes will come into effect on the Solemnity of Pentecost 2019. After this date, the statutory objectives of the Catholic Fraternity and of ICCRS will be fulfilled by CHARIS and, therefore, the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS will cease to exist (see: press release from the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, 31st October 2018). Moreover, on March 14th 2018, the Prefect of the Dicastery wrote to the Presidents of the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS to confirm that at Pentecost 2019 the patrimony of the Catholic Fraternity and of ICCRS is to be transferred to CHARIS, in order to dot it with the financial means necessary to undertake the mission wanted for it by the Holy Father. The same letter indicates that, during the actual transition period, the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS must avoid all extraordinary expenditure or any other actions that might affect their stable patrimony or in any other way compromise the finances of CHARIS.

At the time of CHARIS' erection in December 2018, the Dicastery will appoint a first moderator for CHARIS, the 18 members of its International Service of Communion, and its ecclesiastical assistant, for a first mandate of three years (for the names of these persons, see: press release from the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, 31st October 2018). Some of these persons will represent the diverse regions in the world, but also in this international service there will be three representatives of charismatic communities: one representative from the international association that have already been canonically recognised by the Holy See, and two from other communities: all this to guarantee a significant presence.

In conclusion: CHARIS represents, without doubt, an innovative instrument in the service of CCR. It is not completely new, in so far as today the Catholic Fraternity and ICCRS still exist, and from these two realities CHARIS will be able to draw from a wealth of experience and best practices serving CCR which have been developed in the past, while further expanding its horizons to all charismatic realities. This is why I would like to invite each one of you to welcome, and to help others to welcome, with a sense of hope and of trust, this new objective that Pope Francis places in front of us all, in the service of the current of grace in the Church and for the Church, that is called Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

Thank you for your attention

Rome, November 3rd 2018