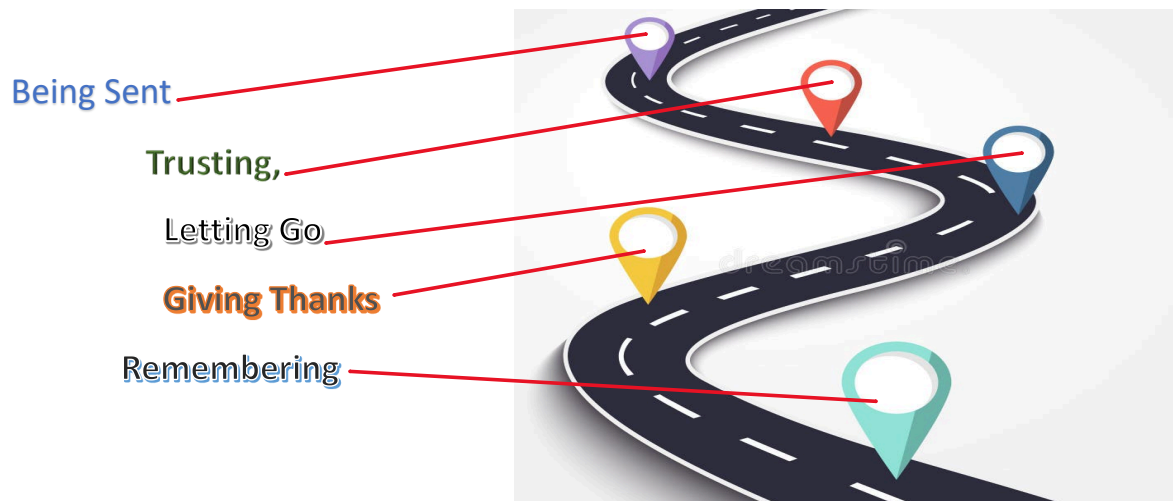




A REFLECTION, END OF THE BICENTENARY JUBILEE
AND
ENTERING INTO THE THIRD CENTURY
(S. Njah Bongnavti Caroline, Superior General)

11/10/2026

Entering the Third Century:



A warm welcome to everyone,

As the Bicentenary draws to a close, we stand at the sacred threshold of our third century, carrying with us the memory of a cherished past, the gratitude of the present, and the promise of a future still unfolding.

As I said in my opening address of our Bicentenary Year, 'the Jubilee is not simply a celebration of two hundred years. It is a moment of grace: a moment to look back with gratitude, to look around with honesty, and to look forward with hope.

We stand, as it were, at the doorway between what has been and what is yet to be. I hear the words of the prophet Isaiah appropriate for us today:

"See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?"
Isaiah 43:19

The question is not: What have we done during these two hundred years?

The deeper question is: **What is God doing now, and what is God asking of Holy Union as we enter our third century?**

I would like to invite us into this reflection through five key action words:

1. *We remember.*
2. *We give thanks.*
3. *We let go.*
4. *We trust.*
5. *We are sent.*

We Remember

We cannot enter the future without remembering the past. Two hundred years ago, in Douai, at La Place de la Prairie, four courageous women responded to the needs of their time. They could not have known what their small beginning would become. They could not have imagined the communities, schools, missions, countries, and cultures into which Holy Union would eventually travel. They could not have imagined us gathered here today. They simply responded to what God placed before them. And perhaps that is one of the great lessons of our history: God rarely gives us the whole map. God gives us enough light for the next step.

Our Congregation was not born from certainty about the future. It was born from faithfulness in the present. Father Debrabant's vision was rooted in relationship and communion. He reminded the sisters:

"You have received that name only that you may form all together a union of heart, mind and affection in Jesus and Mary." (Circular of 1842)

Those words were spoken almost two centuries ago, yet they still speak powerfully to us today. We had a felt sense of this during our pilgrimage in June.

Union is not simply our name.

It is our gift.

It is our vocation.

It is our responsibility.

In a world, and likewise in our communities and Areas, increasingly marked by division, isolation, and polarisation, union is also our prophetic contribution.

Let us ask ourselves:

What do I personally wish to remember? (Pause)

We Give Thanks

When we look back, we realise that we did not come this far alone. We stand today on the shoulders of countless women and men who gave their lives so that the charism of Holy Union might continue.

We remember:

- Our Founder and the pioneering women.
- Sisters who are gone to the Lord,
- Those who crossed oceans, learned unfamiliar languages, entered new cultures, served in difficult circumstances, educated children, accompanied families, stood beside the poor, and brought hope where hope was fragile.
- Sisters who remained faithful when the work was difficult.
- Those who stayed when it would have been easier to leave.
- Those who began something and then moved on.
- Those who prayed when they could no longer minister in the ways they once had. (*Art. 62*)
- Those who quietly carried the Congregation through times of uncertainty.
- Our friends and collaborators who have stood by us, and those who stand with us today.
- All the people whose lives have been touched by Holy Union.

Who and what would you personally wish to remember? (Pause)

And so today we say: Thank you, Lord.

- Thank you for the grace of two hundred years.
- Thank you for the people who have been entrusted to us.
- Thank you for the opportunities we have been given to serve.
- Thank you for the mistakes from which we have learned.

- Thank you for the surprises through which you have revealed yourself.
- Thank you for the doors you opened, and even for the doors you closed.
- Thank you for the moments when we did not know where we were going.
- Thank you for the moments when we had to walk by faith.

What else do you wish to thank God for? (Pause)

Above all, we thank you, God, because through all our human frailty, you have remained faithful.

We Let Go

A Jubilee is not only a time for remembering; it is also a time for letting go.

We cannot enter a new century while trying to carry everything from the past.

Some things must be treasured.

Some must be transformed.

Some must be released.

Perhaps the Spirit is asking us:

What must Holy Union let go of in order to be free for the future?

Could it be:

- Our fear of becoming smaller?
- Our attachment to structures that once served us well but may no longer serve the mission?
- Our need to know what the future will look like before we have the courage to enter it?
- Our understanding of what it means to be a “successful” Congregation?
- Or perhaps something else?

What else do you think we must let go of? (Pause)

The question cannot simply be: “How do we preserve Holy Union for another two hundred years?” Preservation looks backwards.

The deeper question is: “What is the Spirit asking Holy Union to become for the sake of God’s people?”

Mission looks towards where God is calling us. Our future will not look like our past. We know how the first century unfolded because we can look back. We know how the second century unfolded because we have lived its latter chapters. But the third century is hidden from our eyes. And certainly, that is exactly where faith begins.

- Some communities/Areas may be smaller and some grow bigger
- Our ministries may change.
- Our ways of living religious life may evolve.
- The places where we are present may change.
- Some works we have known and loved may come to an end.
- New forms of presence and service may emerge that we cannot yet imagine.

And this may be painful but the Gospel asks us not to fear the unknown.

Jesus does not say, “You will know everything.”

He says: in John 21:22 *“Follow me.”* That is enough.

We Trust

Sisters, in all of this, we are called to trust. As we enter the third century, we carry many questions:

- What will religious life look like?
- How will young people encounter the Gospel?
- Where will our communities be?
- How will we respond to migration, poverty, war, ecological crisis, and the wounds of our world?
- How will we live our charism in a world transformed by technology and artificial intelligence?
- How will we remain close to those who feel forgotten?

- How will we build bridges in societies increasingly marked by division?
- How will we become a prophetic presence among people who are searching for meaning, belonging, and hope?
- And of course each Area is asking what will our Area look like?

What are some of the questions you carry? (Pause)

Sisters, we do not have all the answers and we do not need to.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the missionary disciple goes forward with Christ, discovering that the Lord is already present and at work along the way.

So, we enter the third century not as people who possess a complete plan for the future, but as pilgrims who trust the One who walks with us.

We may not know the road, but we know the Companion.

We may not know what Holy Union will look like, but we know whose mission it is.

We may not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

And this is where faith becomes courage.

We will continue to live Union in a divided world, where our charism speaks with renewed urgency.

Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, calls us to a fraternity that crosses boundaries and refuses to allow differences to become reasons for exclusion. So perhaps our mission for the third century can be expressed in these words:

Where there is division, let us build union.

Where there is exclusion, let us make room.

Where there is loneliness, let us create belonging.

Where there is despair, let us carry hope.

Where there is injustice, let us stand with those who are vulnerable.

Where creation is wounded, let us become people of care.

Where there is hatred, let us become peacemakers.

Where people feel unseen, let us see them.

Where people feel unheard, let us listen.

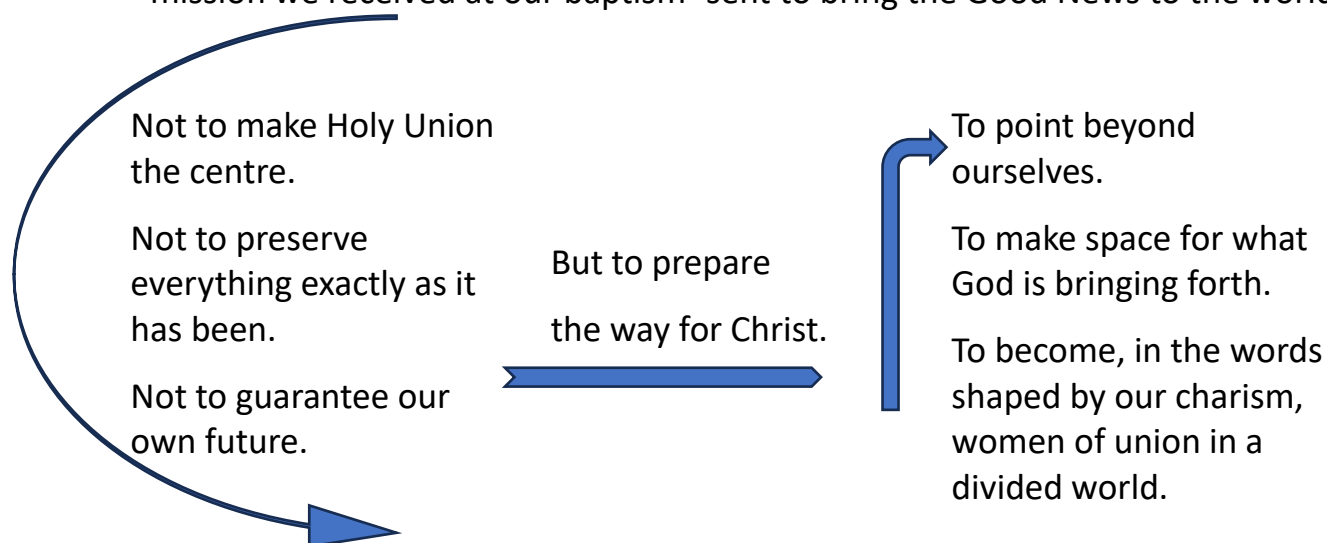
And where people struggle to recognise God, let our lives reveal God's love.
(*Constitutions, Art. 1*)

We Are Sent

And now, the fifth and final key action word: We are sent.

Sisters, the Jubilee is ending, but the mission is not. Two hundred years have brought us to this moment. We stand surrounded by memory, gratitude, and grace. But we are not being invited simply to admire the past. We are being sent into the future.

Our Founder took Saint John the Baptist as a model. John understood that his vocation was not to make himself the centre. His vocation was to prepare the way for Christ. This is also our vocation as we enter the third century. It is the mission we received at our baptism- sent to bring the Good News to the world.



we can hear again the prayer of Jesus:

"That they may all be one." (John 17:21) This prayer is both our foundation and our mission.

A Prayer for the Third Century

let us make this our prayer for the third century:

Lord, give us eyes to see what you are doing.

Give us courage to embrace the new.

Give us wisdom to discern your Spirit.

Give us humility to let go of what we must leave behind.

Give us compassion for the wounded world.

Give us fidelity to the gift entrusted to us.

Give us courage to cross new boundaries.

Give us openness to new collaborators and new ways of being Church and Congregation.

Give us the grace to listen to one another, to young people, to the poor, to creation, and to the cry of the world.

And above all, give us one another.

Keep us united in heart, mind, and affection.

The God who was faithful in Douai will be faithful in the places we have not yet seen.

The God who began something small through four women can bring forth something new through us.

The God who carried Holy Union across cultures and continents can carry the charism into a future beyond our imagining. Let us enter it holding fast to the gift of Union entrusted to us:

The mission continues.

We remember.

We give thanks.

We will let go.

We will trust.

And we will be sent.

Into the third century, together, as one Holy Union, revealing God's love.

Amen!

