



Presentation of the theme: **GO TOWARDS:**

**“No one goes among the people
like the Daughters of Charity do...”**

SVP Conference 24 August 1659 (CCD X, 527)

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In the Bible, **to GO**, in its many variations, means **“to pursue a way of life, to go forth, to seek”**. **“Go!”** is **a command to action, a moving in the direction one is sent**: “The Lord said to Abram, *“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you”* (Gen 12:1). **It is a call to mission**: *“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”* (Ex 3:10). **It is a commissioning**: *“Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation”* (Mk 16:15). **It is a promise of joy!** *“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me”* (Mt 28:10).

When we were barely an intuition in the hearts and minds of Vincent and Louise, God already had, in His plan, a group of women who will **pursue coming and going as a way of life**, thus the Charter... **“for cloister, the streets of the city”**; a group of women **always on mission** because **“no type of distress should be foreign to them”** (C. 11a); a group of women **commissioned to be servants and to seek out “the poorest and most abandoned”** (C. 11b); and finally a group of **women who find joy in going** because **“A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she’ll find God there”** (SVP Conference 13 February 1646, CCD IX, 199).

The **GOING TOWARDS** of the Company, and of every Daughter of Charity is a purposive, deliberate and intentional going. **“From the very beginning, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise... sent forth their Daughters on the highways of the world”** (C. 25a). Across the centuries, we have inherited from the Sisters who came before us a legacy of single-mindedness in serving the poor no matter the cost, and a stout-heartedness that enabled missionaries to cross oceans and learn languages all in the name of bringing God’s tenderness to the poor.

Every going towards, then and now, is an act of fidelity to the Charism, an affirmation of belonging to the Company, and a declaration of a free, unconditional availability to the will of God. This is not to say that we do not feel the sadness of loss, the regret of having to leave much loved services, communities, places of mission and people who have defined us for so long, and have given us much joy. But after the example of the Sisters who have gone before us, we affirm that we **“belong neither here nor there, but wherever**

God wants [us] to be... [we] are chosen to be at the disposition of Divine Providence.” (SVP 31 July 1634, CCD IX, 10). And we know how threatening this can be at times because God has a particularly unique way of overturning our plans and our lives.

In her May 9 letter, Sr. Françoise assures us: ***“This “yes” to God does not remove all difficulties for undertaking the mission entrusted to us or any other form of change: of local community, in stages of life, in health.”***

St. Louise encourages us: ***“Go then courageously, advancing moment by moment on the path on which God has placed you in order to reach Him...”*** (SL, L. 360bis, Spiritual Writings, p. 412).

“Where does the Company have to be and how should this presence be at the beginning of the 3rd millennium? There, where darkness reigns; there where the taste of life should be given; there where the dough should be transformed.” (Quintano 2003: The Company in the 3rd Millennium)

And so today Sisters, in this historic General Assembly held amidst a world situation of sickness, anguish and death, but also of so much compassion, grace, generosity and solidarity that broke physical and geographic frontiers, Vincent reminds us: ***“Like the Apostles, you go from place to place”*** (SVP, 2 November 1655, CCD IX, 117) and exhorts us:

“Go, therefore, [Sisters], go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally that He may bring you back in perfect health and full of good works” (SVP to SLM, 6 May 1629, CCD I, 64-65).

I now invite Sister Solange from the Province of Belgium-France-Switzerland to share her experience of going towards people in situations of prostitution and a glimpse of what she has learned from them.