

PAPERS READ AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE SEVENTH GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY OF THE UNION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUGUST 18, 1965 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT

OUR SICK AND SENIOR SISTERS

I should like to give a Preface to the Section of Proposals entitled "The Sick and the Aged" and to say that there be a continued evaluation of our program and provisions for our sick and senior Sisters, and a constant looking ahead for the expansion of physical facilities and for the preparation of adequate, trained personnel. This is a period in the lives of these Sisters when, under desirable circumstances, there can be even greater personal holiness and advancement in sanctity. This period can be a tremendous source of edification and imitation for the younger Sisters in our Provinces, as well as, a treasury of inestimable blessings for us as Sisters of Mercy in our Apostolate of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, which apostolate is ever expanding and increasing in the service of the Church for the good of the world. This Apostolate, so prominent in our times, is a strong proof of the premature ecclesial vision of adaptation and renovation of our revered Foundress, and which should be one of the important contributing factors in her Cause for Canonization. Had it not been her great desire for the good of the Church in every land, and for all people, the Sisters of Mercy might have had a comparatively smaller sphere of influence for apostolic work than at the present time. We might not have been meeting here today from all sections of the United States to plan for ever widening horizons in the apostolic works of the Institute.

Today, ours is a life abounding with activity and opportunity for the good of the Church, of the Institute, and of each one personally, both at home and abroad. We do realize that our specific work can be offered as prayer, but to keep abreast of the times, to accomplish all possible good, to recruit subjects to carry on the works of

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OUR SICK AND SENIOR SISTERS (Cont'd)

the Institute require a spiritual reservoir, from which will come an unceasing flow of prayer, of adoration, of petition, of thanksgiving. Herein is the all important Spiritual Apostolate of our sick and senior Sisters. It can be truly said that they have through the years carried the works of the Institute on the Wings of their Prayers.

Probably their all important contribution to the Institute may not have been made too emphatic by us. Probably we have neglected, inadvertently, to express and to show our appreciation for their Spiritual Apostolate. Probably we have been slow in making them feel and enjoy the tangible hundredfold here which they so richly deserve. If this be the case a humble mea culpa is now in order.

Many of them have not had the manifold benefits which we provide for our Sisters today. Many have not had the initial physical, intellectual and spiritual Program of Formation which our Institute now carries on so admirably. Many have spent themselves physically and mentally that we might enjoy what is ours today, and that our younger Sisters might have the kind of Novitiate and House of Study in which we take pride.

Our sick and senior Sisters should be made to feel how important they are to the Community. They should be lovingly reminded that it is through their acceptance of illness and suffering, their inability to carry on their former works, their dependence on others for many services, their loneliness and, at times, discouragement, that constitute a spiritual endowment to the Institute without which it could not sustain itself, even though temporal endowments often seem to receive greater appreciation and wider publicity. Both kinds of endowments are needed, but the spiritual contribution of our sick and senior Sisters will endure unto eternity when brick and mortar no longer remain.

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RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT

OUR SICK AND SENIOR SISTERS (Cont'd)

The Sister Formation Program should impress upon our younger Sisters the fact that illness may overtake them at any time of life, and that seniority in age and declining physical strength will eventually come with the passing of the years, and that the best preparation or orientation for these periods of life is an awareness of the need for constant growth in holiness, for a generous acceptance of the God-woven tapestry of life, and for boundless generosity and love for the Apostolic Works of the Institute while they still have the mental and physical capacity to participate in them.

No sacrifice is too great, no work too absorbing, no patience too enduring, no love too expressive, no expense too lavish for our sick and senior Sisters. Without their unselfish devotion to the Institute where would we be today? They have been the Marines of the Mercy Order for, despite the obstacles encountered and endured, they have laid a deep and solid foundation on which we are building an imposing super-structure supported by the bed rock of their self-abnegation, of their hardships, and of their deep spirit and imitation of our Foundress in all the Works of Mercy of the Institute. Not even today have our sick and senior Sisters really ceased to work actively for the Institute because constant, spiritual re-enforcement is needed for our Mercy Superstructure, and this they are generously providing in this period of their lives by their prayers, their sacrifices and their sufferings. They are living examples of the ecclesial vision of our beloved Foundress, for they have worked tirelessly for the common good.

How can we in this difficult period of their lives really show our love for them, our need of them, and our gratitude to them. By providing for them in so far as it is possible, and to the utmost of our effort and ability:

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RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT

OUR SICK AND SENIOR SISTERS (Cont'd)

1. The best possible kind of Convent, in a desirable location and easy of access, which should be equipped with up-to-date facilities, for their physical, psychological, creative and spiritual needs and comfort.
2. Very importantly a Superior who is kind, thoughtful, concerned, appreciative, tender and, above all, patient to the n'th degree.

Are we asking too much for our sick and senior Sisters?----By no means---we have only to look around and see what has been done for our Novitiates and Houses of Study. It is true that we have not neglected them, but it is now time to frost their cake.

I would like to quote from the August, Reader's Digest, the title of an article which is so characteristic of our senior Sisters -- it is "The Heritage of Going Without", and at the same time to paraphrase a subtitle of this same article in reference to our younger Sisters that they do not realize the luxuries they have, because they have always had them.

To conclude the thoughts embodied in this Preface to the Section of Proposals entitled, "The Sick and the Aged", I have paraphrased two Scriptural Texts -- Suffer the Sick and Senior Sisters to come unto Me. Deprive them not for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, and Whatever you do for these, my Mercy Spouses, you do for Me.

Sister Mary Martina Conley, R.S.M.
Province of Providence

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RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT

RESEARCH AND LONG RANGE PLANNING

Uppermost in our minds during these days we have been asking ourselves the following two questions: what is the mind of the Church in regard to the topic under discussion and what would Mother McAuley do if she were here to speak to us today? Frequently, also, throughout these days there has been mention of long range planning - that is - the need to think ahead. Therefore, one senses an awareness on the part of all the delegates for the need to plan. This is a development in attitude and thinking which might not have existed for the most part fifteen or even ten years ago.

Why have we become cognizant of planning - that is long range planning? Many factors have been brought to bear upon the temporal aspects of our apostolic works even prior to ten years ago which in a sense have forced us to restudy what we are presently doing in the light of what we could or hope to do.

You are familiar with many of the changes following world War II:

1. The concentration upon rebuilding of America's private enterprise; this included the introduction of and implementation of rapid technological changes brought about by research and discovery, sociological changes, and expanding populations
2. as well as, improved commercial and international air travel, communication systems, along with a freer interchange of ideas, plans, and the use of resources between countries and
3. an aggressive competition resulting from a stymied growth of the post-depression and war years accompanied by a strong motivation to recapture role, status and financial security in families, in enterprise and in society.

Perhaps, we were not as sensitive to these external needs with the ensuing changes and developments. Consequently, we have been unable to anticipate the dramatic effects of technology and research in a changing world rapidly approaching the seventies, eighties - so close to the year two thousand.

Our major superiors and ecclesiastical authorities became aware of the need to plan in the late forties. In the introduction to the Everett Report published by the Sister Formation Conference, Mother Philothea, Provincial Superior of Seattle, Washington, and at that time National Chairman of the Sister Formation Conference, wrote in 1958, and I quote, "The Everett Planners did not proceed immediately in their workshops or in their report to the details of planning a curriculum for Sisters. They believed that a preparation of Sisters for these three social-service professions - teaching, nursing and social work - was a matter of equipping religious women to meet the circumstances of the next two quarter centuries." This was a profound statement and a bold step in thinking and planning. She further indicated that the study had produced some basic principles of educational planning. She also said, "Churchmen of courage and penetration exhort us to plan boldly, along the best possible lines, with the full knowledge that we plan for the works of the Church and with the blessing of the Church. Bishops and priests give us their insights into the social, cultural, technological and even religious changes and movements which we may expect in the years ahead and which will affect the Sister's

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AUGUST 18, 1965 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT - RESEARCH . . . (Cont'd)

basic apostolates in education, in the health field, and in the field of social assistance. . . . The greatest single good which we may expect from this work, however, will be the encouragement given each individual community to engage in long range planning. . . . she went on to say, the organization of religious life in women's institutes is not always well adapted to this kind of looking ahead. The canon-law limitation upon the terms of general and provincial superiors is a good and wise restriction, but it should also be recognized that the possible weaknesses brought by frequent changes should be provided for in other ways. One feature of such provision certainly would be the establishment of an agency for long range planning." She not only pointed up in a very apt way the future trend for planning for, but also pointed up some of the weaknesses which are deterrants to long range planning within a religious community.

Six years prior to the Everett Report, the Sisters of Mercy of the Union had launched their plans for the formation of the Sisters in pre-service preparation under the direction of our own dear Mother Mary Bernardine Purcell. Much thought, much concern and much planning preceded this forthright decision. If we were not thinking in terms of long range planning in the various provinces at the time of the implementation of this program, one thing is certain, there must have followed planning in each province in order to meet the apostolic demands then facing the major superiors. Many of you present in this Chapter room were very much involved in the implementation of the program for our Sisters.

Today, planning takes on even greater proportions as we witness the even more rapid changes, in society, in the world and in the Church and our relationship to these changes as an integral part of the Church. Today seems to be almost too late. . . .

Certain questions keep coming to mind as we ponder the need for long range planning in our Institute. If long range planning is the order of yesterday, where and when do we begin? What should we do immediately to plan for planning in terms of the broad scale demands which the world, the Church, and the society, which we serve, is asking of us?

Some basic considerations are necessary. All planning must be based upon existing knowledge, facts or truths and then projected with reasonable prudence into the future. The future should be classified as immediate, that is, 2 - 5 years, immediate with a span of 5 - 10 years and long range which encompasses anything beyond 10 years, or more. In order to acquire an accurate knowledge of existing realities or circumstances, a careful, laborious inquiry or investigation must be conducted. This, in essence, leads us to the consideration of the role of applied research as a basis for sound planning.

Research is the scientific investigation of technological production, product, material, or sociological problems which affect or are affected by organizational operations. We are not concerned with fundamental research - the search for knowledge for knowledge's sake, but rather we are concerned with applied research which has a specific end - objective in view, namely, developing improvements in existing operations, creating new services, new processes or methods to be used in the production of service. It takes

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AUGUST 18, 1965 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT - RESEARCH . . . (Cont'd)

into consideration all of the variables which bear upon the given circumstance under study and devises the means to substantiate or defend the hypothesis which can become the factual foundation for realistic projections for the future.

It is management's responsibility to make research possible. Therefore, management establishes the atmosphere and provides the means for applied research. The means include prepared personnel, finances, physical facilities, and all other resources essential to conducting a thorough study - such as - time, equipment, materials, supplies, and factual data. One of the most valuable tools of applied research is the data or information already available for study through management reports, statistics, and other data. Cooperation with external agencies, which agencies are resources for valuable statistics, is also, an essential counterpart in research, otherwise, valuable time and energy is expended in the gathering of data prior to its being analyzed, classified, and tested before basic conclusions can be reached.

Research cannot be carried on by management itself as a practical systematic procedure. It must be planned for and provided for as an essential auxiliary service to management. Research is costly in terms of money, personnel, time materials, and other essential resources required to support it. . . . but authentic and realistic planning should be based upon sound applied research if it is to be practical in today's world.

Planning is the responsibility of every member of an enterprise because it requires participation by every individual, every unit, and every organized group in the total organization. At the very top of the organization it is recommended that the planning function be separated from the manager's function of implementation or execution of decisions. Some reasons for supporting this tenet include:

1. the urgency of day by day execution of the functions of management takes precedence over other activities and drains the manager of his or her full energies;
2. the managers may have a too firm attachment to the past and/or present conditions existing in the organization - they are too close to tradition;
3. planning requires valuable time to think, to discuss and to test ideas;
4. planning requires an overall view of all phases of activity and needs to be done by someone who can be objective - someone away from the immediate pressures of the day by day management milieu.

Planning to be effective must always be oriented to the goals of the organization and the relationship of these goals to meeting the needs of a changing environment.

In view of these considerations we should ask ourselves "What are some of the implications for our Institute in regard to long range planning and research based upon the tremendous heritage of our foundress and her successors through the past thirty-six years of our amalgamation?"

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AUGUST 18, 1965 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT - RESEARCH . . . (Cont'd)

Would it be possible to visualize a Sister prepared in research assigned to the Generalate, supported by other Sister personnel who could be made available from time to time in order to carry out the necessary investigation basic to decision making and planning? We have been deeply impressed with the wealth of factual information available as portrayed to us in Mother General's excellent report to the delegates of this Chapter.

What then must be done to involve the Sisters, the institutions and the Provinces in cooperating with the development of research and long range planning for our Institute? It appears to me that an excellent example and a foundation has been laid in the extensive preparation and involvement of the Sisters in the entire Institute for this Chapter. The Sisters are ripe and the time is ripe . . . what must we do? Or as Father Lombardi says, What is to do?

Even at the risk of taking your precious time, may I quote to you from Father Joseph Henry Fichter, SJ, on this subject which also serves as an appropriate conclusion?

"No matter what the size or age of the ecclesiastical organization, its major superiors are strong on long-range planning. It has trained superiors in depth, a well defined organizational structure, with clear delegation of authority and responsibility. Within the organization there is centralized policy control and decentralized operational control. Superiors are flexible in their attitudes, able to shift apostolic works to meet new demands, ready to support research, zealous and imaginative in reaching new converts and in promoting an apostolic laity. Above all, this ideal religious organization (diocese, order or congregation) is working now to develop its future leadership - the capable, decisive people who can meet the coming challenge."

Research and long range planning can be of assistance to us as one of another means to achieve the goals of our Institute.

It can continue to enhance the spirit which prevades us at the present moment, which Cardinal Suenens caught in four beautiful phrases to describe our spirit when he was exposing the theme of "Pacem in Terris" - they are

Truth is its foundation
Justice is its rule
Love is its driving force and
Liberty is its atmosphere

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PAPERS READ AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE SEVENTH GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY OF THE UNION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUGUST 18, 1965 - SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

RELIGIOUS GOVERNMENT - RESEARCH . . . (Cont'd)

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