



REPORT FOR THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY 2019

President Sr. Carmen Sammut msola and Executive Secretary Sr. Pat Murray ibvm

How have we lived Assembly 2016 at UISG? The overall theme was: Weaving Global Solidarity for Life: with the focus on three aspects: (a) Life for the Planet (b) The major social Issues of our times and (c) Religious Life itself.

Our joint report will outline some of the ways in which we have developed these three overlapping dimensions during the past three years. We are grateful for your support as leaders and for your participation and encouragement. Developing UISG so that we meet the needs of congregations in today's church world and today's world has been achieved because of a very commitment Executive Board and a very generous and well-qualified staff who work for you, way beyond the call of duty. You owe both groups an enormous depth of gratitude and we would like you to show your appreciation to them now and during the days ahead.

1. Weaving Global Solidarity for Religious Life

In this section we are going to describe many different initiatives in relation to enhancing religious life at the worldwide level.

- a. Delegates Meetings:** There have been two delegates meetings since Assembly 2016. At the first meeting immediately after the Assembly the Executive Board for 2016-2019 was elected. Several members of the previous Board agreed to accept a second mandate and Sr. Carmen Sammut msola was reelected as President and Sr. Sally Hodgdon csj reelected as Vice President. At this meeting an overview was provided with regard to developments at UISG in terms of finances, projects, and the

projected future use of a section of Regina Mundi in the UISG complex. From 2008-2016 the whole of the Regina Mundi building had been rented by a US Company which provides courses for US University students. From 2016 onwards they decided to rent two instead of four floors.

The second Delegates Meeting held in Manila in November 2018 had a focus on several important themes - child protection, interculturality and communication as a way of building intercultural community. These and other topics which surfaced have shaped this Assembly's theme and workshops. The Conference of Religious of the Philippines assisted us greatly in organizing this meeting and we are deeply grateful for their support with regard to many practical and organizational matters.

- b. A Questionnaire** about the needs of Congregational Leaders was circulated in 2016 to determine how best UISG could meet the needs of you as Superiors General and your members. The response rate was very high; thank you for your participation. Since then our various formation programmes and initiatives have been developed as a result of your responses. The results were very clear – ongoing formation was requested across a wide variety of topics to be held in Rome, in regional centres and most especially on-line. In addition the training of formators was identified as an important area, noting that the UISG had offered such a programme in the past. It was clear that such initiatives needed to be offered in various languages and should reach to the ends of the earth. We are grateful to several Foundations who are supporting UISG in order to offer various outreach programmes in canon law, training for anti-trafficking ministry, new approaches to child care and a future international theological seminar where sisters will develop and present papers on different aspects consecrated life, from different cultural perspectives.

c. Formation at the Centre for Religious Life at Regina Mundi

The Executive Board discerned that the best use of the empty floors at Regina Mundi was decided to develop a formation centre for various aspects of religious life. Significant contributions from 4 congregations in late 2016 (2 each from the US and Europe) helped UISG to begin to install the latest technology. This enables UISG to

stream meetings or presentation with simultaneous translation enabling a presenter to speak one language, yet be heard on-line in three other languages by those on-line or in the room. It also enables conversations to occur across languages on line across languages.

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and GHR also provided additional funds for this sophisticated technology and the furniture required to equip *The Centre for Religious Life at Regina Mundi*. In addition GHR has enabled the UISG to appoint a programme coordinator for the Centre for these initial years and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has funded the development of a new data base.

We are also fortunate at UISG to have a very competent Communication's Department led by Ms. Patrizia Morgante supported by Sr. Therese Raad, and an electronic engineer Sr. Florence de la Villeon rscj; they together with the Executive Secretary played an important role in identifying the technological needs and to develop the content of the on-line programmes. They also send out regular newsletters and information about various developments within UISG and religious life.

Many of you have expressed thanks for the UISG Bulletin which is published three times a year in 7 languages. Ms. Antonietta Rauti takes great care to select and to commission articles that will be of help to you as leaders. She also archives the past issues of the Bulletin so that you can easily find articles of interest. Sr Cecilia Bayona keeps a meticulous archive of the bulletin and other materials which serves as a useful resource now and will do so into the future. There is an increasing interest in writing about women's religious life and its beginnings in various parts of the world and the archive is consulted periodically, most recently with regard to articles written for Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ, former SG of the Jesuits whose cause for canonization has just begun. Ms Patrizia Balzerani and Svetlana Antonova are part of a team that help to dispatch the bulletin to you in a timely fashion.

Since September 2018 **conferences, meetings, and workshops have been held on a wide variety of topics** including child – protection, interculturality, migration, anti-trafficking initiatives, many different canonical topics, presentation of material to study Laudato Si, leadership training, discernment, communication etc. These various initiatives have often been offered both at the Centre and simultaneously on-line. We see individuals but also whole communities and small groups gathered around the computer or projecting the event using a data projector so that many may participate. This technology has also been used to have conversations with the delegates of UISG. In the future a part of the meetings of the Executive Board of UISG (held in May and November) will include a session on-line with the delegates. This technology has been an invaluable help in shrinking time and space and helping us to connect worldwide. Please alert your sisters to this possibility. If they have a smart phone and an internet line they can participate.

One of the more important initiatives which began this year is the **five month training programme for formators** - those sisters who are preparing for or who are already engaged in formation. There are 33 sister attending this year's programme chosen from 46 applicants. The programme is offered in English and the morning sessions take place at UISG. This year the afternoon programme has taken place at the Mater Dei Institute at Pontifical University of the Angelicum which offers an English programme for the preparation of formators. We are currently evaluating the programme as we plan for next year. During the 5 month programme the sisters receive spiritual accompaniment twice a month and have had an 8 day retreat in Nemi (outside of Rome.) It is envisaged that the programme will continue for as long as there is a demand. The coordinator of the programme is Sr. Cynthia Reyes sra assisted by Ms. Claudia Gianpietro.

Another important initiative has been the **Interculturality Training Programme** which was held for two weeks at the end of January 2019. There were 45 congregational teams (180 sisters in total) participating. The programme was streamed between the upper and lower halls of the Regina Mundi building with translation in 4 languages. The training was led by a team made up

of the Divine Word Missionaries and the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit and UISG personnel. We are very grateful to both congregations for their generosity in making this international team available. Both congregations generally have programmes for their own congregations of women and men at that time of year as they have been training their own leadership personnel in the area of interculturality over the past 5 years. This year they opted to support the UISG initiative. They have presenters qualified in the areas of anthropology, missiology, psychology, intercultural studies and theology. Each of the 45 congregational teams had to develop an action plan by the end of the workshop. Half of the participants presented their plan in a Plenary Session and all plans were submitted to the organizing team. Over the next two years UISG will ask for feedback on how these action plans have been implemented, every 6 months. In July 2020 we intend to offer a similar type in Nairobi and perhaps another the following year.

Sr. Gabriella Bottani cms of Talitha Kum organized an important **training programme for TK leaders of anti-trafficking networks** over an 18 month period during 2018 and 2019. She is assisted by Ms. Nicoletta Lalla. The Course was organized in conjunction with the Pontifical University at the Antonianum. There three parts:

The first is On-line: This included topics such as communication, fund raising, public speaking, leadership models and their impact, social teaching of the Church, interreligious competences, networking, human rights and protection policies.

The second involved Two Meetings in Rome: One was in June 2018 and the second in 2019. This enables leaders to have workshops and practical experience of collaborating and networking at an international level.

The third part is an Internship / Capstone project : Each participant, will have the the support of a qualified mentor, to address a concrete challenge in their local network.

This programme supported by Porticus was offered by the Talitha Kum office in Rome in conjunction with the Pontifical University of the Antonianum.

d. Relationship Building with the Vatican Dicastries.

Both the Executive Board and UISG Staff Members have developed very good working relationships with different Vatican Dicastries during these past years. Let us look at a number of these working relationships.

(i) Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life:

The Council for 16 (eight SG of men and eight of women) meets twice a year and the focus for the past several years has been on updating the document *Mutuae Relationes* (which details the relationship between Bishops and Religious). Conferences of Religious were asked to provide answers to several questions and the UISG also sent the questions to its members. These collated responses were given to the writing committee. A draft text has now been produced and reviewed recently at the Plenary meeting of the Congregation. Four representatives of UISG participated in that review.

(ii) Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples:

The Council of 18 (9 SGs of women and 9 of men) also meets regularly with members of this Dicastery. The main focus of the last few meetings has been on the *Mese Missionario Straordinario (MMS)* – the Extraordinary Missionary Month which will be held in October 2019. The whole Church is being asked to reflect on “mission ad gentes.” Many very helpful resources have been developed which can be accessed at www.october2019.va. The website has many different section including theological reflections, witnesses, formation for mission animation, media and a guide on the theme: *Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ in Mission to the World*. Printed copies of the Guide in several languages are available here at the Assembly. We as sisters are asked to promote this missionary month in all our institutions, projects and programmes and to support the many diocesan and parishes activities.

(iii) Congregation for Integral Human Development:

Many of the UISG staff and especially the staff members of the USG/UISG Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission liaise with this Dicastery about many different themes and topics. Obviously the Care of Creation and the Encyclical

Laudato Si is central to its mission. Pope Francis has reminded us that “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.” This Dicastery focuses on poverty, apostolate of the road, apostolate of the sea, stateless people. It also links Catholic Social Teaching with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. During our Assembly we will hear more about the promotion of Laudato Si.

(iv) Migrants and Refugees Section:

This is a special section which is directly under Pope Francis. Obviously Sr. Gabriella Bottani cms (Talitha Kum); Sr. Elisabetta Flick ac (Sicily Project) and Sr. Florence de la Villeon rscj (International Desk – Migrants) liaise regularly with this Section and they are consulted on many different aspects of migration e.g. IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), Unaccompanied Minors and Safe Migration. This sector has been wonderfully supportive of the work of Talitha Kum as you will see during the week.

(v) Pontifical Academy of Science

The Pontifical Academy has had ongoing contact with Talitha Kum. It hosts regular meetings of the Santa Martha group – which was set up by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales led by Cardinal Nichols – who collaborate with Talitha Kum. The Santa Martha group brings together heads of police forces and mayors from different cities in different parts of the world to discuss methods of tackling the trafficking of human beings. Sisters have played an important role in these meetings, especially in detailing what is happening on the ground and the prevention mechanisms that are being developed in various parts of the world.

(vi) Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

During these past months we have had several meetings with the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors. As religious congregations we need to make sure that every institution, project and programme has a child protection policy which is also truly operational with a nominated child protection officer. From past experience we need to learn that our present policies, programmes and behaviors will be judged by future standards. While your country may currently

accept the corporal punishment of children, sometime in the future this approach to disciplining children will not be accepted. According to the latest Vatican statistics in 2016 there are 9552 orphanages, 11,758 infant nurseries in the care of the Catholic Church and 35,746 other institutions, many of which probably contain children not to mention, the thousands of schools, hospitals and clinics. The recent GHR-UISG workshop on May 2-3, Sowing Hope for Children in Our Care, focused on new approaches to residential care for children in need.

We need to focus on educating ourselves and the members of our congregations about best practices with regard to child protection and the creation of environments where children can flourish. We can't wait for governments or Bishops conferences to take the initiative. We can share best practice with one another. We will work with the Commission to share samples of child protection policies in various languages with you through our website. It seems timely also to consider the establishment of a UISG-USG Commission for the Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults. We will shortly begin this discussion with USG who have already expressed openness to the idea.

(vii) Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

Each year UISG participates in a formation programme for the Boissey students from the World Council of Churches (WCC) to help explain women's religious life. The participants come from many different Christian denominations from different parts of the world and it is always a mutually enriching exchange. For some this is their first meeting with sisters, brothers and priests who are members of religious congregations.

(viii) Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Sr. Carmen Sammut msola is a member of this Vatican council. The USG/UISG Commission for Dialogue has met with members of the Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. They have requested that we gathered information focusing on different examples of the dialogue – especially in what is called “the dialogue of life” – where in various projects and programmes, Sisters work with members of other religious

traditions. So if in your ministry you have such examples, please send the information to UISG. In addition if there are particular difficulties in your context please let us know also.

e. Increased Official Representation at Meetings

- **Attendance at the Synods:** At both the Synods on the Family and on Youth the membership by the UISG representatives was determined by the Synodal Office and therefore only one female Superior General was actually present at each Synod. In the recent Apostolic Constitution of the Holy Father on the Synod of Bishops, *Episcopalis Communio*, presented in Rome on 15 September 2018, the UISG and USG are specifically named in relation:

(a) To being consulted....and through them, their major superiors.

(b) Transmission of contributions from their members to the Congregation of
Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

So we foresee that through UISG, you the members will be consulted in preparation for various synods in the future.

- **Attendance at the Vatican Meeting on the Abuse of Minors.** It was very significant that on this occasion the Secretariat of State when inviting UISG to attend the meeting did not prescribe the number of the participants or who might attend. UISG determined that the Executive Board and Executive Secretary would attend - just as the USG had decided. We hope that this may be a pattern for future Synods and other official Vatican meetings.
- **Attendance at the Plenary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.** Unfortunately no sisters have yet been nominated as permanent members of the Plenary Council of the Dicastery. For this and the previous Plenary, 7 sisters were invited to be present. For this we are grateful but we hope that nominations for the next Council will include sisters.

- **Attendance at meetings of the Dicastery on Integral Human Development** e.g. the focus of the most recent meeting was on Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Staff members from UISG and also Sr. Sheila Kinsey and Fr. Felix
- **Attendance at various consultative meetings regarding Trafficking in Persons, Migrants and Refugees**

There are periodic consultative meetings in which UISG project leaders participate and which help to develop the Vatican's policy documents on these important topics.

2. Weaving Global Solidarity in relation to the Social Issues of Our Time

We have already outlined some of our collaborative partnerships in relation to today's global issues. During this Assembly we will be presenting reflections and information concerning UISG three main projects: anti-trafficking, migrants and refugees and the Laudato Si initiative. At this point we will just draw attention to some key aspects of the projects.

- (a) **Migrants and Refugees:** The UISG Sicily Project began a formation period for the sisters who arrived in Sicily in December 2015. Communities were subsequently established in Agrigento, Ramacca and Caltanissetta – each of which has lived in demanding and constantly changing contexts. Currently many of the government funded centres are closing and staff are no longer being paid. Cardinal Montenegro asked UISG: “Are you also going to go away?” pointing out that when times get tough these are the very times when the presence of religious is crucial. We as religious women are being called to be a prophetic presence in many parts of the world as anti-immigrant rhetoric is being used by different political parties.
- (b) **Anti- Trafficking and the expansion of TK.** During these past years TK has extended its network worldwide and has now 43 national networks and 7 regional networks. When we meet Pope Francis later this week he will celebrate with us the 10th anniversary of Talitha Kum with the launch of a campaign called: Nuns Healing Hearts. In addition an international committee has worked with Sr. Gabriella Bottani to develop a long term

strategic plan. A key component will be a focus on creating new networks and deepening existing networks in Africa. This work is being supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Conrad. Hilton Fund for Sisters has supported existing networks and SC Ministries has helped Talitha Kum to strengthen its communication capacity. Finally a new programme called “Wells of Hope” focuses on bringing Muslim women and Catholic sisters together in the Mediterranean Basin to work together against human trafficking. This programme is being led by Sr. Marie Claude Naddaf rgs and supported by the GHR Foundation who have a special commitment to inter-faith initiatives.

(c) **Accompanying Victims of Sexual Violence During Conflict.** The UK Government has established a high level panel and a protocol with regards to accompanying those who have been victims of sexual violence during conflict. They have provided resources to UISG to help organize training workshops for religious sisters, brothers and priests who provide pastoral accompaniment for survivors. Two workshops have been offered – one in DRC and the other in Uganda. These workshops have been led by Sr. Sheila Kinsey from the JPIC Office and they have been a transforming experience for the participants and for those with whom they minister.

(d) **Relationship Building with Foundations and Embassies**

In your name we would like to thank the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation; the GHR Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters, Porticus, the Sisters of Charity Ministries and the Galileo Foundation who have helped UISG to develop many different initiatives both in Rome and most especially in other locations. Each of these foundations has a special commitment to support sisters and we thank them in the name of women’s religious life on every continent. Many of you also receive grants directly from some of these foundations and we thank them also in your name.

Embassies to the Holy See: We have been developing good relationships with many of the Ambassadors who represent their countries at the Vatican. Many of these ambassadors are women and are very supportive of UISG and its projects and programmes. The following embassies have provided funds and/or visibility for the work of sisters worldwide – UK, Irish,

Australian and US Embassies to the Holy See. Other Embassies have attended events at UISG or met with UISG staff members for briefings on various projects or issues. These include the Philippines, Peruvian, Georgian, French and South African Ambassadors to the Holy See. Many Ambassadors ask us to encourage sisters to visit their embassies in different countries throughout the world. As sisters we have a special perspective of life from the perspective of the people who are most in need and we can raise our voices to challenge government policies.

3. Weaving Global Solidarity for Life on this Planet

- Laudato Si Campaign – every congregation is invited to nominate ONE representative linked to the UISG Campaign as soon as possible. This is an important initiative which is growing in importance. UISG is partnering with the Catholic Global Climate Movement (CGCM) and there are various initiatives each year which invite participation all over the world. AS Sr. Sheila Kinsey will be speaking to you later this week, we are not going to take up much time here – except to say that the care of the planet earth and care of its people are so intrinsically linked that we cannot attend to one without attending to the other.

- The Board of the Solidarity with South Sudan project which was established by the two unions, USG and UISG is grateful for your continued interest and support. They are represented here at the Assembly and would like to speak with any congregational leader who would consider sending a sister to work in this inter-congregational project which trains teachers, nurses, midwives, farmers and pastoral workers. This year Solidarity is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its presence in South Sudan and have produced a film to show the work of these past years. Please call in to see the film in the side room on the first floor corridor.

These new Initiatives at UISG have required enhanced financial and other types of administration. Ms. Aileen Montojo has been restructuring the financial department and financial procedures helped by Ms Patrizia Balzerani. This has been a demanding task but the new system is now almost fully operational. Ms. Svetlana Antonova has taken up responsibility for the new data base and during 2019 you will be asked to fill in your statistical information on-line and this will be imported into the data base. Ms. Rosalia Armillotta has been the main contact with congregations through visits, phone, email, text, WhatsApp and any

other means available. She makes your connectionj with UISG easeful. Mr. Angelo Spadavecchia works with the leaders of the various UISG projects and initiatives to monitor and evaluate the outcomes from projects. This team is vital for the successful implementation of We thank each staff member on your behalf.

New Areas Emerging:

- a. Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults – needs to be a worldwide educational initiative for understanding the extent of the problem and also learning how to develop guidelines and good practices. This overall area included the examination of New Approached to Institutional Care for children and young people.
- b. New Synergies: Faith and Praxis (Leadership Training) and WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women) who have offices in the UISG building.
- c. Seminars outside of Rome: Interculturality (Nairobi – July 2020); Training to accompany victims of sexual violence in conflict areas (South Sudan); Canon Law (Locations in Africa and Asia).
- d. Theological Seminar in Rome for sisters who have undertaken doctoral studies in theology and Bible so that they become writers on Religious Life.

Finally we once again express our gratitude to all the members of UISG. Your support and encouragement mean that together we can face the future with hope and courage believing that the Lord “Knows the plans he has to give us all a future and a hope.”