



Roma, 9-13 / 05 / 2016

**Commentary for the Joint Report - President and Executive Secretary of UISG
Sr Carmen Sammut, MSOLA - Sr Patricia Murray, IBVM**

1. Carmen: UISG at the Service of Communion and Solidarity:

Sr Patricia Murray and myself decided that we would give you a joint report of the executive board and the executive secretary because our service is one and the same. We will do this as a conversation, sharing on how we have tried to fulfil the aims of the UISG during the past three years. As you listen to us, you need to keep in mind the many sisters and lay staff who have been involved in the work that has been done in the last three years : the members of the executive board, the members of staff, sr Josune Arregui who was with us as executive secretary for the first year.

The great dedication of each of these women, the love and care we have carried in our hearts and our lives towards the UISG, has made the hours of work a light burden for us, because we had a common goal, that of bringing forward our union so as to represent who we all are as religious and how we want to be recognized in the Church and in the world. I thank each with all my heart for the great family atmosphere that was created. It was really a great privilege to be with all of you.

2. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity

The UISG is at the service of communion and solidarity and the image that represents our deep identity is that of the Trinity. Rublev paints the Trinity as three distinct persons, communicating with each other, ready to move, with a staff in their hands. The way they are seated leaves an empty space where we can slide in, to be at table with them. As a union, our individual congregations remain distinct, each with their own charism, yet there is deep unity as we share the same table of the common charism of religious apostolic life. Our communion is mission, we also are constantly ready to move on together wherever the Spirit calls us.

3. Pat: When I took up the position of Executive Director one of the first things that I did was to trace the history of the UISG. It is a very interesting one and you will hear much more later in the week when Sr. Grazia Loparco, fma will outline developments over the years by examining the articles written in the Bulletin. It is sufficient here to note its official beginning on the final day of the Vatican Council. It was something desired greatly by Pope Paul VI I who wanted women religious to have a similar group to that of male religious. Initially Pope Pius XII had established a Roman Union for Superiors General based in Rome but almost immediately these

women wanted to establish a worldwide association of all women religious. Once established the leaders of the congregations based in Rome were asked to inform all the Superiors General that they met on their canonical visits to different parts of the world about the new Union, encouraging all to join. Today I want to invite you to encourage leaders of congregations in your countries, who have not yet become members of UISG to consider doing so. It makes us stronger when we are united.

4. Pat: Aims of UISG.

Fr. Molinari SJ was one of two consultors appointed by the congregation for Religious Vatican to work with the first Council of UISG to develop the statutes and structure of UISG. The Council did such a good job that the original aims are still being used today. In the following slides we will look at each of the aims and see how we are responding to each in the context of religious life in today's world. You will see how the words of communion and solidarity echo through the aims.

5. Carmen: Aim 1 – To bear witness to the charism of religious life:

The first aim of UISG is : to bear witness to the charism of religious life and to help support the development of Religious Life in the Church and in the world.

6. Carmen: Aim 1 – What we did

- (a) We, the executive secretary and the board members, did our best to respond to the invitations we received to attend and participate in constellation meetings and in meetings of religious in various countries as well as meetings of Continental Conferences among which : Australia, Nigeria, Lithuania, Spain/Portugal, Belgium, ACWECA, COSMADT, LCWR ... we have received here in Rome delegates from CLAR and from LCWR. Sr Pat also attended the Vocation Promoters' Conference. We had a policy of trying to respond to the invitations we received so as to support the various groups, and to be able to share the riches of one region with another, to serve as bridges between the various actors.
- (b) We also attended and took part in press conferences, like the one on the occasion of the World Cup of Football, denouncing trafficking for sex. We wrote articles and answered many requests for interviews from the press, at all times and especially during the Synod. We have really tried by the means offered to us, to make the UISG known, and through that the charism of apostolic religious life.
- (c) I will not speak now of what we did for the Year of Consecrated Life or for the Day against trafficking for we will come back on all that in details in the slides that follow.

7. Pat: Aim 2 – To promote deeper collaboration by providing opportunities for Superiors General to share experiences and exchange information and promote worldwide communication.

It is very clear that in today's world communication is vital means of building a sense of belonging. With new means of communication we can build a global community and share information and experiences using various means according to different contexts. The important thing to realize that this deeper communication is built through the participation of each member of UISG throughout the world.

8. Pat: Aim 2 – What we did.

- ✓ **Appointed a communications officer in 2015:** The appointment of Patrizia Morgante was a very important development for UISG. This was the first time that we had a dedicated person

for communication. She is able assisted by Sr. Anna Sanchez Boira who as well as doing translation work, does much of the graphic design work that you will see on folders, brochures and on the website. Then there is the challenge of translation material into so many different languages. We are particularly aware of that 85% of the members of UISG do not live in Rome and we want to continue to develop a variety of means to communicate worldwide.

- ✓ **New website, facebook and twitter:** We hope that you will begin to visit the UISG website regularly. Within a short time there will be a private side for members of UISG to share information and for the Executive Board to communicate more sensitive materials – minutes, reports etc. to members via the website.
- ✓ Reorganizing communication system so that we can use **Skype, email Superiors General directly:** in the past all communications from UISG went to the members through the Delegate from the Constellation. In the future most communication will go directly to each congregational leaders. We will send a regular newsletter which we hope will contain the kind of information and news that will be help and interest to you. If the Executive Board wants certain matters to be discussed by the Constellations, then the Delegate will be contacted.
- ✓ Reorganization of the staff to be more at the **direct service** of members: When you check the website now you will see that certain staff members are looking after various language sections and other are focused on finance and administration.
- ✓ **Appointment of an Assistant Executive Secretary:** It became very clear that the Executive Director could not attend to the many increased demands and in 2015 the Executive Board appointed Sr. Elisabetta Flick, former Superior General, as the Assistant Executive Secretary. Her appointment has been an enormous help and she has taken particular responsibility for the new Project in Sicily.

9. **Pat: Aim 2 – Building a global community of sisters** – through regular contact. We speak now about building “global sisterhood” because our common challenge is to promote the charism of religious life throughout the world and to support and encourage one another as sisters in different ways. To help you and the members of your congregation to reflect on religious life today, we search for articles for the Bulletin from different parts of the world. You can help us if you have sisters who could contribute articles that nourish our spirituality and help us to explore various aspects of religious life from a theological perspective. The bulletin is translated in 7 languages and on occasions some of the articles are translated into other languages. In the future when you receive the printed copy of the Bulletin, you will know that it is available at the same time in the Members Only section of the website. So if you need one article in several languages it can be easily downloaded.

I mentioned the renewal of the UISG website and now I would like to draw attention to two other websites that UISG has helped to develop:

- With the USG, we have developed the Vidimus Dominum website, which focuses on news about religious life throughout the world
- The Talitha Kum website is dedicated to the worldwide networks of consecrated women and men and their collaborators.

Both are very valuable sources of information.

10. **Pat: Aim 2 – Building a global community of sisters**

Therefore in order to communicate with you we need your up-to-date email information and more importantly when there is a change in the Congregational Leader please make sure to send the changes in names and contact information to the UISG office.

We are delighted to welcome Superiors General to visit whenever you are in Rome and many do so. In addition the building is home to many meetings and conferences organized by the various commissions of the UISG-USG. Increasingly the fruits of these meetings will be shared on the website, through short videos or written accounts and reports.

11. Carmen: Talking about the synod

In the same line of sharing among ourselves I gave a long account of my presence at the Synod on the Family “from the back bench”. We had time to discuss and to give our views. Many other sisters shared their experiences here.

12. Carmen: To reflect on global challenges

Each of our congregations is called to reflect on the challenges of our time and to search for appropriate responses. At the same time we need to reflect on the global challenges that come to us and for which a collective answer needs to be given. Besides the fact that a burden shared is a burden halved, we all know that today we need to put competences and human resources together if we want to remain significant. We will later speak of the UISG projects through which we try to collectively give an answer to the challenges of our time.

13. Carmen: Doing this in conjunction with the USG

We try to examine and search for responses to global challenges in conjunction with the USG through our biannual joint meetings of the executive boards and secretaries and through various mixed commissions.

The Executive Councils of the UISG and USG meet twice a year; we also have a joint meeting twice a year with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life where we have been working on *Mutuae Relationes* and the Congregations for the Evangelization of Peoples.

There are also joint commissions:

-Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

-Education Commission

- Commission for Health

-Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue

-Theological Commission

-Canon Law Commission

They represent the two Unions at meetings with various Vatican Departments and liaise with different Catholic organizations and International NGOs.

The two unions have helped organize the various meetings which took place during the Year of Consecrated Life.

In the past few years the relationships and contacts between UISG and various Vatican Dicasteries has strengthened. Increasingly there is a desire to consult religious women worldwide about various matters. Last year the Congregation for Evangelization asked UISG to help to circulate a questionnaire to missionary congregations. In the near future you will once again be consulted by the Congregation for Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life as part of the process of rewriting the document *Mutuae Relationes* which focuses on the relationship between bishops and religious women and men.

14. Carmen: Aim 4: To strengthen relationships and engage in collaborative dialogue with the Holy See especially with the Congregation for Religious, Propaganda Fide and various Councils.

15. Pat: Aim 4: What we did

- ✓ **Acquiring representation at the Synod on the Family:** It took some time to acquire 3 official places at the Synod on the Family. Our brothers at USG automatically get 10 places as their canonical status is the same as that of Bishops. The USG were very supportive and volunteered to give us 50% of their places if we were unsuccessful in our appeal. Fortunately through representation at various levels we were assigned 3 places and Srs. Carmen Sammut, Bertha Maria Porres (Costa Rica) and Maureen Kelleher (US) represented UISG at the Synod.
- ✓ We had to go to Card Parolin, then to Card Baldisseri to get our representation as auditors. However, as auditors, we could still give our three-minute contribution and participate in the group discussions.
- ✓ **Mutuae Relationes (Council of 16);** The council of 16 – 8 male and 8 female Superiors General meet twice a year. For the past 18 months the focus has been on the review of the document Mutual Relations. The participants agree that what is needed is a new rather than a revised document.
- ✓ **Establishing and accompaniment of new congregations (Council of 18):** The council of 18 – again 9 Superiors General male and female meets twice a year. Looking back over the history of the foundation of religious congregations, it is clear that new congregations were usually accompanied by a member(s) from another congregation with a similar charism. We have looked at how best to offer this type of accompaniment today and at the process of actually approving new congregations. There is some concern that some congregations have no clear sense of their charism and this is often confused with the apostolic works of the congregation.
- ✓ **Relationships with Pontifical Councils:**
 - ✓ **Justice and Peace:** we have had much contact with the Council for Justice and Peace in relation to our worldwide anti-trafficking initiative. The UISG/USG Commission for Justice and Peace has recently collaborated with this Pontifical Council and Pax Christ International in organizing a conference on Non-Violence.
- ✓ **Pontifical Academy of Science** is also another partner in the Church's anti-trafficking initiatives. They have been given responsibility by Pope Francis for inter-faith collaboration against human trafficking. They hosted a meeting of the Talitha Kum worldwide coordinators in January.
- ✓ **Migrants.** We have had contact with the Council for Migrants when planning the UISG Migrants project
- ✓ **Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU).** Each year we meet with the students who study at the Bossy Institute of the WCC in Geneva to speak about religious life and women's role in the Catholic Church.

16. Carmen: The Year of Consecrated Life

Year of Consecrated Life (Pat and I) : The executive secretary and the staff of the UISG has worked very hard to help CICLSAL set up the last week to end the Year of Consecrated Life, where

religious men and women of all branches were invited together to Rome. This was a first experience and a beautiful one. Pat tell us a bit about what this entailed.

I gave a talk to end the part about apostolic religious life with a paper entitled : Apostolic Religious life looks at the future : vision and pathways and was on the panel on the last day.

17. Carmen Aim 5: to provide a forum and a meeting place for all Superiors General of female congregations of Apostolic life and of female diocesan congregations. We do this through the Assembly every three years, through the Bulletin and letters, the website and especially the meetings of constellations.

18. Carmen: Council of Delegates in Nemi

In February we held the Council of Delegates in Nemi. We had planned to go to Ghana and we must here thank very specially the delegates of Ghana for all they did to prepare the meeting. However, because of fear of Ebola, different delegates had said they would not come. We saw that this defeated its purpose, and so we decided to change the venue to Nemi. We were very sorry about this. During this meeting there was deep sharing of experiences in the form of symbols. We saw how many of us are living in difficult circumstances because of war, poverty, abuses of all sorts, diminishing numbers, aging... the reasons were varied. We were able to deeply feel for and with each other and grow in communion.

19. Pat: Arrangement of the Constellations worldwide. The members of UISG were organized into units or Constellations based on language/geographical proximity in 1998. Here is the map of the worldwide Constellations: Asia (6); Oceania (2); Europe (8); Africa (10); Continental north, central and south America (10). A Constellation has 1 or 2 delegates depending on its number of members. They meet immediately after the Plenary Assembly and mid way between the Assemblies. They perform the following important tasks: (a) They elect the Executive Board from a list of nominees that come from the Rome Constellation – who are multi-cultural and multi-lingual and come from different parts of the world (b) They work with their Constellation to carry forward the outcomes of the Plenary Assembly and (c) They contact members of the Constellation periodically to ask them for feedback, suggestions etc. to matters that come from the Executive Board. Some Constellations function very well and others are much weaker. The success depends on the participation of each member.

20. Carmen: What we did

What we also did was to try to provide a forum and a meeting place for you all : We have already spoken of plenary assemblies, meeting of delegates, constellation meetings, meetings with continental conferences. What we also did was to consult the delegates and through them all the members for the strategic plan which we are undertaking for the first time in the history of UISG, we consulted you for ideas about Mutuae Relationes (the relationship with the Bishops), we asked you for names for participants at the Synod.

21. Pat: Aim 5 – To express solidarity and collaborate in projects of general Interest

When we hear later in the week about the historical development of UISG we will see that from the very beginning this commitment to solidarity among ourselves and in outreach to the needs of the world was a very strong focus. One of the first commissions in the 1970's focused on Latin America and its particular needs at that time. At the Plenary Assemblies and in the UISG Bulletin there was a

constant reference and commitment expressed to the big social challenges of the day. Our day is no different and thankfully our collaborative outreach has continued and even been strengthened.

22. Pat: What we did do

We will comment more fully on each of the following but it is good to list the various collaborative initiatives that have emerged or been strengthened during the past three years.

1. Strengthened the Talitha Kum office

- Appoint a fulltime coordinator
- Visits to Local/Regional networks
- International Meeting of regional coordinators

2. Solidarity with South Sudan

- Continued to support the office here at UISG
- Help with the search for personnel and financial support

3. Regina Mundi in Diaspora

- Support for the theological education of sisters in the Global South

4. Launching the Migrants Project in Sicily in response to an appeal from Pope Francis and as Jubilee Project

- Co-ordinating team
- Selection/training of community members
- Two communities established

5. Zambian Research Project

- Just completed a study of the formation and educational needs of sisters for mission and how to help congregations plan for future needs

6. Canon Law Service

- Ongoing canonical support for leaders of congregations re canonical matters. During the year at certain periods this service is available through visits, Skype and phone calls, emails etc.
- The Canon Law Council has organized two meetings – one for 40 sisters who are already trained as canon lawyers and the recent workshop for SGs.

7. Theme of Assembly 2016

23-25. Carmen: Talitha Kum

Strengthened the International coordinating office and website. The UISG anti-trafficking initiative was approved at the General Assembly in 2004. Various training workshops were held in many parts of the world in coordination with the International Organization for Migrants (IOM). There are currently 17 networks of religious sisters and their associates, worldwide working in over 70 countries. Direction: Sr. Gabriella Bottani cms.

Many initiatives have been taken to strengthen the network, for we realise that trafficking in humans is happening everywhere and that many religious men (especially) and women do not realise that this is going on at their doorsteps.

We were asked to launch and promote the international day against trafficking requested by Pope Francis in 2015 on the feastday of St Bakhita - February 8th. We had a meaningful Eucharistic celebration, then we went for the Angelus in St Peter's square and in the afternoon were able to meet with three young women who had been trafficked here in Rome.

The second international coordination meeting of Talitha Kum was held in Rome (at UISG office and elsewhere) in January 2016. The participants were 27 sisters of 25 different congregations,

representatives of all the member networks of Talitha Kum . The aim of the meeting was to define the priorities of Talitha Kum and to formulate a strategic plan for the three years 2016-2018.

26. Pat: Project 2 – Solidarity with South Sudan

This project was initiated in 2006 by both the USG and UISG in response to an appeal from the Bishops of Southern Sudan **in 2005**. The signing of *the Comprehensive Peace Agreement*. There are currently 27 **religious** from approx. **22 congregations** living together in community... **training teachers, nurses, mid-wives, pastoral workers and farmers**. Unfortunately, South Sudan is still very much in the news because of the recent civil war. We are thankful that the first steps have been taken in the formation of a government of national unity because it is the people who suffer when the leaders haggle over power. We are grateful for the commitment of the sisters and brothers of Solidarity who have stayed with the people during this difficult time at great personal risk and sacrifice. We remember also the other diocesan and international congregations present in South Sudan and assure them of our prayers.

27. Pat: Project 3 – Regina Mundi in Diaspora. The Regina Mundi Pontifical Institute closed in 2006. However, in 2012 the Executive Board established the “Regina Mundi in Diaspora Grant Programme.” Each year about 100 sisters from the Global South receive tuition grants for theological studies. In 2015, 110 sisters received grants

28. Carmen: Project 4 – *Zambian Research Project:*

The UISG has received funding from the GHR Foundation to study the education needs of women’s congregations in the Global South in terms of future congregational and ministry needs. Zambia (through ACWECA and ZAS – *Zambian Association of Sisters*) was chosen for the study which aims at developing a planning tool that will be useful for congregations worldwide as they seek to plan their own educational needs into the future.

29. Carmen: Project 5 – Refugees and Migrants

To mark the Jubilee of UISG in a practical way, we decided to launch an appeal to set up an international inter-congregational community in Sicily with the various language, legal and counseling abilities needed to help migrants. We want to thank you for your prompt response in naming sisters for the project, in sending financial help, in lodging the sisters here in Rome for more than two months as they prepared to go to Sicily.

UISG is appealing to its members to attend to the needs of refugees and migrants in every part of the world. We hope that other inter-congregational ventures can be undertaken by women religious, and we have a new call from the Vicariate of Anatolia in Turkey.

Later in the week Sr. Elisabetta Flick will give an account of how the project is developing.

30. Pat: Project 6 -Canon Law Service

Thanks to the generous support of the Conrad Hilton Foundation this is a new initiative to provide canonical services to congregational leaders throughout the world. During the past 18 months the following steps have been taken:

(a) A Canon Law Council of 5 Sisters has been established. Led by Sr. Mary Wright (Australia) they include the following Sr. Marjorie Gallagher (Canada) Sr. Licia (India) Sr. Mary Gerard (Nigeria)

and Sr. Tiziana Merletti (Italy). So they are from different continents and can offer advice in different languages.

- (b) They have provided canonical consultation here in Rome at certain periods which have been advertised. During those time periods and indeed beyond in some cases, they have offered consultations by phone, email and Skype.
- (c) They have helped to organize two meetings – one for 40 religious women canon lawyers at Nemi (December 2015). These canon lawyers came from many different countries with the majority coming from Africa and Asia. This meeting was an updating and the first step in establishing an international network of women religious canon lawyers. We intend to publish a list of these sisters on the member's side of the website so that you will know who you might consult in your part of the world. We continue to add to this list as we learn the names of others. A trained canon lawyer is a resource to be shared with other congregations.

31. Pat: Project 7 – Improved Communication Capacity

You will hear a lot about communication this week and our efforts to really connect the membership of UISG globally. Again with the support of the Conrad Hilton Foundation, UISG has begun to improve its communication capacity in order to improve relationships with you the members. When you look at the membership of UISG – 1860 in total – the vast majority don't live in Rome or in Italy. Therefore, our capacity to communicate globally is essential. Many envy our international network and we need to commit to connecting with each other, as part of our mission to today's world. There are many networks that bring destruction and evil and we see signs of those in our world. Our network has enormous capacity to do good and to challenge the forces of evil in our world but we will only be as strong as the weakest link!! So we want to communicate regularly with you and so we must have up-to-date information re your email and telephone. We can't tell you how important it is to hear from you what is happening in your country or region and what the world needs to know. It is being acknowledged more and more that the people who know what is really happening on the ground are the sisters who are close to the people. So it may feel that it is another burden to carry when we ask you to communicate but sisters this is the new way of being in solidarity and of witnessing to God's reign.

As well as our communication with you the members of UISG we also want to expand our relationships with national, regional and continental conferences and with other groups and organizations who want to be part of who sisters are and what they are doing in the world. Believe you me that this number is growing.

32. Carmen and Pat - How did we do this?

- (a) Reorganization of the office
 - auditing of finances - departments - increase of full-time staff
- (b) New relationship with Embassies to the Holy See: US, Australian, UK and Ireland.
- (c) Financial Support in Solidarity from Congregations
- (d) New Partners :
 - Conrad N. Hilton Foundation,
 - GHR
 - SC Ministry Foundation
 - Arise Foundation
- (e) Major partnership: USG
- (f) INGOs and other Church based Organizations: Caritas Internationalis, WUCWO, JRS etc.

33. Carmen: Moving Forward – Strategic Plan – Mission

As an International body rooted in the Christ, and representing Congregations of Women Religious throughout the world, UISG seeks to witness to and proclaim the identity of apostolic religious life in all of its diversity. Through weaving global solidarity and opening new frontiers, we animate, support and stimulate leadership of religious to be a prophetic voice and witness in the Church and the world.

34. Pat: Moving Forward – Strategic Plan – Values

The work of UISG is being carried out while keeping the following values in mind:

Discernment: there are many choices to be made in relation to the promotion of the charism of religious life for women and therefore we need discerning hearts

Collaboration: working together has to be a key value for all of us in a world that is fragmenting. The days of competing against each other as congregations should be over. I believe that we should never do alone what we can do together.

Celebrating Differences: At Executive Board level, in Commissions and Committees ; in our collaborative projects we need to show forth and celebrate the richness that difference brings. This is a prophetic witness in today's world.

Unity in Diversity: Our very differences bring so many perspectives into play and yet we can witness to the fact that in the midst of this diversity we can remain unity – why because we are followers of Christ and we seek to serve the people who are in need. With this at the core pour very differences can build a multi-faceted unity.

Mutual Support: We will support each other at every level of UISG in whatever way we can – often a listening ear; a space for conversation and then other more practical helps in times of great need, times of suffering and sadness or indeed in times of celebration.

Integrity and Transparency: This is an urgent call to each in the context of authentic witness. We must be seen to be people of integrity and transparency in everything that we do and are. Our systems and procedures whether financial or related to personnel must demonstrate these important values.

Rooted in the Word of God: Finally our lives at personal and community levels are rooted in our contemplation of God's living word.

35. Carmen: Moving Forward – Strategic Plan – Vision

That UISG will be a vibrant and recognised international organization, with a prophetic voice within the church and the world. We will communicate effectively to support and offer hope to religious women. We will collaborate as a global community responding together to critical issues in today's world.

36. Pat and Carmen – some future hopes

Sustainable development goals (maybe during this assembly we will manage to choose one or two of these goals towards which we will work together in the next three years - proposal that we focus on SDG No. 5 - Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Worldwide network of religious women theologians and biblical scholars.

What do you suggest ?

37. Pat – Pope Francis

Pope Francis has spoken very clearly through his various encyclicals about the needs of today. He has also spoken clearly to religious about the need to “leave your nests” “go out on the streets” “go to the frontiers” leave the centre and travel to the peripheries” and “reach the fringes of humanity.” In the days ahead we will explore together how to respond to these challenging words. We know that our

conversation with Pope Francis later this week will be an important part of our journey into the future, for the sake of the Reign of God.

38. Carmen – Final Words

The commitment to global solidarity is a most beautiful and complex enterprise which needs patience, creativity and skill. And like weaving it starts with one stitch and goes on, one stitch after another, growing nearly imperceptibly.” We have been weaving the past together. Let us begin now at this Assembly to weave the future together.

(The slides of this PPT Presentation are available on the UISG website: www.uisg.org)