Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We wish you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we commemorate the death of our common Founder, Cardinal Lavigerie. We thank God for the gift of his life and of his vision, of his courage and his hope, of his ability to address some of the most important questions of his time. We are proud to be his sons and daughters today and we ask him to intercede for us so that we may know how to read the signs of our times and how to do our best to give appropriate answers as followers of Christ.

On the 8th December 2014, we sent you our first letter concerning the celebration of the 150th anniversary of our foundation. We thank all of you who have sent answers to our questions as well as numerous suggestions and a prayer. We have now named these our sisters and brothers to a Central Coordination Committee:


They will receive all the proposals made by the members of our two Institutes, see how efforts can be coordinated, and then dialogue with the two General Councils who will take the necessary decisions. They will present us with the agreed common actions and encourage all of us to move forward in the process that we are now launching. A first meeting is planned of the General Councils with this Committee on the 3rd December 2015.

We see the celebration of our foundation in three acts:

In 2016, we will center our prayers, our reflection and our activities on **Looking at the past with gratitude**.

In 2017, our common theme will be: **Living the present with passion**.

The year 2018 will have as scope: **Living the future with hope**.
At the end of 2018, we would propose to hold common festive celebrations to commemorate the foundation of our two Institutes.

Our letter today wants to launch us into the first act: **Looking at the past with gratitude.**

“Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way, we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.” (Apostolic letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the year of consecrated life, 21st November 2014)

When we, the two General Councils, examined our common past, we came to the understanding that we have received from Cardinal Lavigerie a “pearl of great price” (Mt 13, 45-46), our common charism and mission. This common heritage can never be overstressed.

We want together to thank the Lord for the vision of Cardinal Lavigerie, who realized that he needed both men and women apostles in order to bring the Good News to Africa. We want to thank the Lord for the heroism of so many of our brothers and sisters, who have worked so as to announce the Good News and to bring about the birth of the Catholic Church in a number of African countries. They were not put back by difficulties and hardships. The formation of the local clergy as well as of twenty-two female Congregations is a tangible fruit for which to praise the Lord. Our continuing presence in Muslim countries is another.

Let us take time, during this year, to go back on our story and to share about it among ourselves, sisters, brothers and fathers so as to recognize its beauty and be full of gratitude.

As Pope Francis clearly states, when we look at our history, whether individual or collective, we find inconsistencies and weaknesses. Our common history is not an exception. Once we have dwelt long enough on what we appreciate in our common story, we are all invited to identify and name the hurts that we have inflicted on each other and that need healing. This requires courage and honesty.

When we, the General Councils, delved into the history of our two Institutes, we identified some particularly difficult moments, which have still repercussions on our attitudes and behavior towards each other today. We invite you to take advantage of the Year of Mercy in order to bring to light our painful memories and come to forgiveness and healing. Let us all ask for the gift of conversion so that we really appreciate each other as brothers and sisters, endowed with this one precious gift, the charism and mission inherited from Cardinal Lavigerie. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for insight into the way we have sometimes dealt with the local people throughout our story so as be able to
ask for forgiveness. Let us together recognize the times when we were not so faithful to our charism and vocation.

Celebrating our history together, both in what has united us as in what has separated us, will help us know each other better so as to be ever more faithful to our common vocation. As brothers and sisters, we are called to collaborate in order to bring the Good News through our daily lives. Let us together speak to Cardinal Lavigerie about our past and receive from him appreciation and advice.

May the activities we undertake during this coming year help us look at our past with gratitude as well as with realism, so as to gain more energy for living our present challenges!

May Cardinal Lavigerie bless us in all our endeavors!

Your sister and brother in the Lord and in Lavigerie,

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