

CIRCULARS OF MOTHER PETRA



**DSS GENERALATE
PATTUVAM
2015**

CIRCULARS OF MOTHER PETRA

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Message of the Superior General

Dear sisters,

As all of us know, the most authentic source of the charism of Dinasevanasabha is the Circulars written for us by our Foundress Mother Petra Dinadasi, the Servant of God. These Circulars are nothing but the way of the Gospel set before us by our Foundress so that we may fruitfully walk by it with joy and fulfillment befitting consecrated persons.

With regard to this foundational source of our spirituality, our responsibility is a threefold one: listening to it (*sravana*), pondering over it (*manana*) and treasuring it up in our hearts (*nididhyasana*). In this process of going back to the sources Mary, the mother of Jesus, is our best example. She listened to the Word of God (Lk.1:38; 11:28), pondered over it (Lk.2:19), and treasured it up in her heart (Lk.2:51).

It being so, we are to listen attentively to the words of our Foundress, prayerfully reflect over them, and lovingly treasure them up in our heart so that we may be 'not merely hearers of the word but its doers' (Jas1:22). The purpose of making these Circulars available to us in a new re-print is to enable our sisters to go back to the central source of our spirituality so that we, the Dinadasis, may bring it to the present (*aggiornamento*) by drawing power and inspiration for our consecrated life and apostolic service in the present-day society.

It is my earnest prayer and hope that these letters, in which our spirit and spirituality are very beautifully and compactly enshrined, will enable us to carry out our responsibility to God, to our own Community, and to the Church, especially the poor and the abandoned. Let us earnestly make use of them with this purpose in mind.

May I avail myself of this opportunity to thank most sincerely Rev.Dr.Cyriac Kanichai CMI for the enlightened and enlightening Forward with which he has graced this new re-print. Undoubtedly, his introduction to the Circulars will to a large extent help the formees and the formators so that they may easily get at the mind of Mother Petra in writing them to our Postulants, Novices and the entire Community.

May Mother Petra intercede for us before God so that His Holy Spirit may shower on us the light and strength to put these precepts of consecrated life in our day-to-day practice.

DSS Generalate
Pattuvam

Sr. Daniela DSS
Superior General
1st June 2015

FOREWORD

CIRCULARS OF MOTHER PETRA

A Blueprint of DSS Spirituality



As is the case with every Founder/ Foundress of a religious institute, Mother Petra Dinadasi was indeed the ambassador deputed by God to translate to her daughters the Gospel way of following Jesus Christ in their time and place. She was sent in order to train, inspire and assist them in mastering the art and science of the Discipleship of Jesus Christ. This she did primarily by the example of her life itself and then through her formative writings and spiritual instructions. Those first members who lived with Mother Petra were blessed to see for themselves her saintly personality, to hear her living words, and to be instructed and formed personally by her. Now, with the passage of time, the number of sisters in the Dinasevanasabha, who were not privileged to have the grace and blessing of either seeing her in person or being trained by her directly, has increased. As the only way for these sisters to get first-hand acquaintance with the vision and teachings of Mother Petra is to study, reflect and pray over the Circulars she had prepared for the constant use of her daughters of all times. And these circulars are a time-tested spiritual treasure by which all the DSS sisters, from the very beginning up until now, have profited beyond words spiritually, religiously, and apostolically. Therefore, it is very laudable, useful and even necessary that the DSS General Council has taken pains to print again the Circulars of Mother Petra, which were not available for long.

These Circulars give us a clear conspectus of a total plan and programme of prayer, formation, community living, and service which she had chalked out in view of instructing systematically the DSS candidates at the different stages of their formation. Her original plan was to send one circular each every week. The purpose of the Circulars has been described by Mother Petra in the very opening Circular dated July 27th 1972 in the following words:

- For the mistress of novices, the leader of postulants, the leader of the branches - to serve as guidelines in their instructions,
- For the group leaders to be a help in leading the discussions,
- For all to serve as matter for spiritual reading,
- To provide an enlightening impetus to your meditations, and, in fine,
- To be a resume of my instructions, explanations and exhortations to the whole Community as well as to every single one of you.

She wanted her Community to benefit by these Circulars by reading them, reflecting over them, discussing them, contributing their ideas and proposals and bringing forward their doubts and questions and difficulties. She intended these Circulars to work as the leaven by which the spiritual and mental capacities of her daughters could be activated and permeated so that they might come to maturity and be ripened into precious fruits for our Lord.

The Circulars: Their Formative Value and Role

Sr. Petra wanted that the formees be given a systematic and comprehensive education and training with regard to the various aspects of religious life: of these the most outstanding are the Theological, Christological, Ecclesial, Vowed, Evangelical, Communitarian, Spiritual, Ascetical, Mystical, Missionary, Social, Poor-oriented and Personal aspects of it. She has presented the themes in such a way that the formees could realize the theoretical foundations of them through study and discussion, personalize and assimilate them through prayerful reflection and put them in practice in the context of their life of service in the community and society.

A. The Circulars to the Postulants

In the Circulars to the Postulants the main accent of Mother Petra is on the following themes:

1. Community Life

The nature of a religious community in general and of the Dinasevanasabha in particular is explained to the candidates. The aim of our life in the Dinasevanasabha is condensed in the motto '**service in charity and poverty**'. The true dynamism of a Christian Religious Community consists in making its members ready to follow Jesus Crucified and Risen by completely forgetting themselves in view of fully loving God and their neighbour. Mother wants to instill into the hearts of the young aspirants the foundational role which the Cross of Christ, the Word of God, Obedience to the Church, Loyalty to one's own Community and the Love of the Poor have to play in forming oneself as a worthy religious.

As aids to Community-building she emphasizes on the following points: co-operation, community dialogue, personal

responsibility and reliability, power for silent and prayerful reflection, self-discipline, conscientiousness, mutual charity, good and social manners, esteem for religious life and vocation, balance in the contact and relationship with one's family, proper knowledge of facts of life and Christian morality.

2. A Life of Work

The two purposes of our work is to serve God and others. As we have to be primarily Servants of the Poor, we shall serve them in response to the words of Christ: "What you have done to the least of my brothers, you have done to me" (Mtt. 25:40). Mother writes: "Our hands are not only for working, they are also for folding... Time spent in prayer is never wasted... Work without prayer runs empty...If we were only to pray and talk to God without listening to what God has asked us to *do*, our prayer would not be sincere... Both, **honest work** and **faithful prayer**, are marks of a heart open before God" (Circular No.6, February 8, 1973).

Other main points insisted on by Mother Petra with regard to work are the following:

Ability to regard all works as equal, the application of one's natural and supernatural gifts to work, right use of time, spirit of co-operation and mutual charity in work, spirit of poverty and responsibility to Community in the works entrusted to each one.

3. Life of Prayer

Mother says: "Prayer is our dealing with God, our life with God, our service of God, our expression of love towards God". (Circular April 19, 1973). We have to earnestly and perseveringly train ourselves in the five fundamental acts of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, repentance and petition. Vocal prayers are important in this that we are to pray to God not only in our singleness but also as members of a Religious Community.

Laziness, haste and mechanical repetition of words without proper reflection and devotion are the main defects to be avoided in the practice of vocal prayer. Prayer of the Faithful is very important as they make us truly religious who are called to be in relationship with the entire human family. While bringing Holy Communion to the sick it is our special duty to prepare them spiritually. Religious and devotional songs can play a great role in helping us to elevate our hearts to God as well as to praise and honour Him.

Prayer, though it is a gift of God to the soul, has to be practiced with care and perseverance. The following defects can hinder our progress in prayer: lack of earnestness, neglect and distaste for spiritual things, curiosity for preoccupation with unnecessary outer things, lack of silence and talkativeness, a mind worried with one's own things and self-interest, inordinate attachments and relationship with persons and, above all, a sinful life, especially a life of sin against love and charity, with a mind filled with the thoughts of grudge, revenge, and unwillingness to forgive.

One has to be careful in dealing with the so-called aridity (dryness) and crisis in prayer. With proper examination of conscience and guidance of spiritual directors one could find out whether one's distaste for prayer is due to the above-mentioned faults. If not so, one should accept such times of spiritual dryness in total submission to God's will, in a spirit of humility and as a reparation for one's sins thereby letting God purify one's soul through the inner suffering He wills. Spiritual reading is a great help for progressing in the life of prayer and love of God. Mother Petra lays great importance in the celebration of Sundays which have to be devoted to the service of God and creating a glad and joyful community. She proposes Saint Angela Merici as the special patroness of the Community, wanting the members to learn from

her the art of living their religious life in prayer, mutual charity and service of the poor.

4. Life of Meditation

Meditation has a very central role to play in the prayer-life of a religious. It is both an art and a science. Therefore, more than being a matter of different methods, it is something for which we have to prepare ourselves with proper knowledge, disposition, willingness and perseverance.

A good life, thirsting after God, is itself the best remote preparation for meditation. Persons not combating against pride, sensuality and dissipation cannot aspire to reach the path of meditation. Meditation should be a time for us to place ourselves completely before God in adoration, praise, thanksgiving and repentance. We should start our meditation by opening up our mind and heart to God so that God's Spirit may enlighten our intelligence, inflame our will and sublimate our emotions. Meditation will serve the purpose of transforming our life only when it is concluded with proper resolutions which have to be taken by relying on the grace and help of God. The resolutions have to be practical and care should be taken that we persevere in fulfilling them. We should be careful lest we should make our meditation merely an intellectual exercise. True meditation has to lead us to affective prayer, that is to say, it should strengthen in us the feeling and conviction that we are loving God and being loved by God.

Mother Petra proposes the following themes particularly for meditation under the title Text Meditation: The Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, and the Hail Mary.

5. Our Vocation to a Life of Service

Our vocation to Dinasevanasabha is at once a call and choice of God. It being a call, we have to respond to it all along

our life together with Mary, saying: “See, I am the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). Since God has chosen us we have to fulfill the mission assigned to us by the Lord, which is a mission of forgetting ourselves completely and following Him so that we may love Him and work for Him. Growing in one’s vocation entails in the first place the forming of the right motivation in each one of us. It also requires that the candidate frankly and sincerely let herself be guided by her formator and spiritual director. We must be always on our guard lest we be influenced by wrong motives such as security in the community, external respect one receives from others as a religious, personal growth or gain etc. The right motive for a religious should be his desire to serve God, to follow Jesus Christ and to serve the interest of his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Our vocation also demands readiness from us to do whatever work that is entrusted to us and to go wherever we are sent and to accept whatever God wills in our case. It also demands of us that we renounce our family for the sake of Jesus and His Gospel.

Our vocation to Dinasevanasabha is a vocation of readiness to live in poverty, to serve in the community and to love and serve the poor. We have to make ourselves totally available and faithful to the Church. Since it is a vocation for a life in celibacy we have to train ourselves in such a way that we find fulfillment and fruitfulness of love in serving God, the Church, the Community and the People of God, especially the Poor.

Mother Petra brings to the notice of the candidates the symptoms against vocation so that each one may be able to examine whether she is making herself confirmed in her vocation. Of such symptoms the most important are: egoism, unreadiness for service, unwillingness to accept corrections, undue concern for one’s personal growth by way of studies, jobs, offices etc.,

vanity, familiarity with others unbecoming of a celibate person, lack of uprightness and honesty, love of security and comfort, aversion or hostility to others, revengefulness, spitefulness, quarrelsome character, inner mood of depression and isolation, lack of charity, destructive criticism, etc.

For Mother Petra Jesus is the perfect model of a religious whom we have to follow and imitate. A religious should be as humble and serene as Jesus. Therefore pride, vanity, ambition, arrogance and presumption cannot go with the image of a religious. She must be one simply living for the glory of the Father and salvation of the world. As followers of Christ, we have to be simple, diligent, honest, loving and selfless, communicating and radiating the merciful love of Jesus to all, especially the poor coming into contact with us. In short, a religious has to be a “Living Gospel” creating good news by her life, words, thoughts and deeds to all – to God, to the Church, to one’s own Community, to the People of God, to the Poor, and to the entire Cosmos or Nature. In short, our vocation to Dinasevanasabha is essentially a vocation to be servants together with Jesus who is the Servant *par excellence* of God and Humanity, offering his life to both of them as a sacrifice of love upon the Cross, so that he may rise up to live for God and Humanity by serving them in love for all eternity.

B. The Circulars to the Novices.

In the Circulars to the Novices the main accent of Mother Petra is on the need of acquiring and fostering the natural (cardinal) virtues, of eradicating the root-sins in us, of conquering the self in us and of practising personal (psychological), human (social) and the Christian (evangelical) virtues. She also enlightens them on how to draw nourishment for their spiritual, religious and apostolic life from the Word of God, Liturgy and Sacraments and the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church.

She explains to them the responsibilities attached to each stage of formation such as Aspirancy, Postulancy, Novitiate and Juniorate.

1. Natural/Cardinal Virtues

Her treatment of the Natural Virtues is based on an analysis and exposition of the four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Self-Control and Fortitude. As virtues, they call for the strength and habit of practising them, which the novice must be at a constant endeavour to arrive at. Prudence requires an ability to act in accordance with right thinking or reasoning which is not possible without openness to truth. Justice would demand of us to deal with others with an equal sense of fairness, sympathy, interest and love. Self-Control would entail evenness of mind in situations of joy and sadness, control of the mind, body, especially of the tongue. Fortitude will make us persevere through the trails of life in our vocation unto the end, without losing faith, hope and love.

2. Virtues Proper to a Consecrated Person

Together with the practice of the above-mentioned Cardinal Virtues Mother insisted that for a successful consecrated life qualities of behavior too are needed, of which some are **psychological**, others **social** and others **religious**.

- i. Of the **psychological qualities** the most important are: diligence, amiability, gentleness, adjustability, politeness, reflection and self-awareness.
- ii. The **social qualities** required of a religious are: soberness, impartiality, maturity, efficiency, warm-heartedness, loyalty, simplicity of behavior, patience, meekness etc.

iii. A novice should prepare herself for consecrated life by caring to acquire the **religious virtues** too. It consists essentially in conquering one's basic inclination for self-enjoyment by chastity, longing for possession by poverty and desire for power by obedience. Without these three our vowed life would be impossible. Victory over one's inclination for self-enjoyment requires a life of purity and asceticism, sacrifice and prayer, self-control and self-discipline. Our instinct for possession can be subdued by detachment to things and money, by generosity to others and by working selflessly for the good and benefit of others. Our longing for power has to be overcome by humility, submission, spirit of co-operation and mutual service.

3. Uprooting the 7 Capital/Root sins

Practice of virtues entails overcoming the 7 root sins of **laziness, unchastity, intemperance, envy, avarice, anger and pride**. Laziness is to be overcome by **diligence** accruing from the **gift of the Spirit, Fear of the Lord**; unchastity by **purity and asceticism** due to the **gift of the Spirit, Piety**; intemperance by **self-control** animated by the **gift of the Spirit, Knowledge**; envy by **charity** strengthened by the **gift of the Spirit, Fortitude**; avarice by **generosity** prompted by the **gift of the Spirit, Counsel**; anger by **patience** supported by the **gift of the Spirit, Understanding**; pride by **humility** the foundation of which is the **gift of the Spirit, Wisdom**.

4. Growth in Faith, Hope and Charity

Over and above the natural virtues, we, as religious, have to practise the three **theological virtues** of **faith, hope and charity** which are infused into our soul through Baptism and

increased through the reception of the Sacraments. However, charity or love is the fundamental virtue of Christian religion which includes loving God and one's neighbour to the fullness of one's power.

5. Religious Life: A Call to the Beatitudes

Mother teaches that the practice of Christian virtues, especially in the case of a religious, should pre-eminently embrace the practice of all the beatitudes preached by Christ on His Sermon on the Mount.

From a religious point of view she laid greater emphasis on the spirit of poverty, resignation to God's holy will, loving and serving availability to others, the readiness to forgive, and heroism in undertaking sufferings and sacrifices for the sake of God and our neighbour.

6. The Word of God, the Church and the Sacraments

Mother Petra insisted that the novitiate formation should be strongly founded on the Word of God. The novices should be imparted necessary knowledge of the Scripture, so as to help them to discern how the Word of God was operative in the formation of Human History, of the Church, of Culture and of their own Personality.

The formation of the novices should be equally founded on the Holy Liturgy, on the Sacraments especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, on the Sacramentals, on the Liturgical seasons and on the importance of the Lord's Day in their life.

They must be taught to integrate themselves with the visible Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, to think in submission to the Magisterial Teachings of the Church, to get involved and interested in the pastoral and missionary activities of the Church. They have to be properly educated in knowledge of the Sacraments

so that they themselves can grow in the grace imparted through the reception of the Sacraments as well as prepare others to receive the Sacraments worthily and live responsibly to them.

7. A Life of Intimate Friendship with Jesus

Above all, the novices must be helped to grow in personal love and friendship with Jesus, for which the most efficacious means is to continually meditate on the events connected with the mysteries of Jesus, namely, His Incarnation, Passion and Death and Resurrection. They must be helped to persevere in their vocation by making full use of all the helps, natural and supernatural, provided them by God, the Church, the Community of Dinasevanasabha, the People of God, especially the Poor of God whom they are to serve first and foremost in charity, poverty and love unto the end of their life.

C. Common Circulars to the Community

In the 7 General Letters written to the Community the following are the important points stressed by Sr. Petra:

1. To keep Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, as the ideal and model of our religious life.
2. In proposing St. Angela Merici to be the Spiritual Mother of our Community, Sr. Petra wanted to bring home to us the following characteristics of the spirituality of the saint: a life of intense prayer, obedience to the Church, openness to the world, readiness to stand for the empowerment of women and protection of children, personal poverty, service of the poor, a life of penance combined with warm heartedness and kindness, charity towards all who come in contact with us.
3. Mother wants the sisters always to keep in mind the origin of our Community in poverty and simplicity and exhorts the sisters to keep our Community as one of friends and

associates of the poor, placing our security only in God and remaining determined to follow Christ, the poor and the burdened for the sake of others.

4. Mother reminds the members that religious life is not democracy in the secular sense of the term, but a Community of God united in love, submission to the will of God and the authority of the Church, mutual love and service of others. Therefore the different charisms of the individuals should not tempt us to create parties or groups in the Community but to place them all to the building up of the Community so as to keep the Community united with God, with the Church, with the Members and with the People of God in love and service. Then only ours shall be a Community united with Christ, its head, through whom the Holy Spirit of God will flow into us profusely.

Conclusion

Through her 220 circulars (99 to the Postulants, 105 to the Novices, 9 Excurses and 7 to the Community). Mother Petra has, indeed, provided her daughters with a comprehensive *Instrumentum Laboris*, with which they have to plan, work out and bring to completion their entire life in the Dinasevanasabha: their formation, their union with God through a life of prayer and vows, their life of charity in the Community of Dinasevanasabha and their mission of the Service of the Poor in the Church. It is up to you to translate Mother Petra's vision and message embodied in these Circulars into your day-to-day life by praying and reflecting over them personally and in community. The foundation-stone of this task has to be solidly laid down during the years of formation so that the formees, with the instructions and interpretations of these Circulars by the formators, may be able to assimilate the spirit and charism enshrined in them and respond to them

effectively, responsibly, knowingly, willingly and lovingly. But this has to be a life-long process to be undergone by all the members unto the end of their life so that the entire Dinasevanasabha may be formed and grow unto the fullness of Jesus Christ, a fullness to be sacramentally offered to the Father in consecration so as to be broken sacrificially for all His people, especially the poor, sick and the abandoned.

Carmel Bhavan
Chalaky - 680 307

Fr. Cyriac Kanichai CMI
1st June 2015

Circulars of Mother Petra
A General Conspectus
The Circulars are Divided into 3 Sections

Section One

In this Section are included the Circulars written by Sr. Petra to the candidates who are in the period of Postulancy (6 months). There are 99 Circulars in it. They are written from August (date not given) 1972 to July 11, 1974.

Section Two

In this Section are included the Circulars written by Sr. Petra to the novices. There are 105 Circulars in it which are written from 18th July 1974 to 29th July 1976. They also include 9 excurses written from 4th March 1976 to 3rd June 1976.

Section Three

Besides these 213 Circulars written for the Postulants and Novices she has also written 7 General Circulars to the Community.

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