

**INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
LAY CANOSSIAN ASSOCIATION
5-7 August 2011**

**REPORT
INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING TEAM**

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Dear friends, Lay Canossians,

I have prayed very much to the Holy Spirit for this Convention so that He may illumine our Association, render our witness fruitful and promote this moment of encounter and spiritual-programmatic sharing.

My report focuses on two points: the first is metaphoric, that is, it is about our Association and I will use an analogy; instead, the second will deal with the questions we must analyse together during this Convention.

I like to think of our Association as a small flat within a big block of flats, which is the Church.

Four rooms and a bathroom are enough for us: we can see the sky from this flat!

This dwelling may become a metaphor of the life of our Association and of us as Lay Canossians, because precisely within this place we live our daily life in the way most congenial to each one.

Let us begin our spiritual journey through the rooms of this small flat so as to learn that even rooms have a spirit. It is an itinerary that goes through two imaginary rooms, a connected bathroom, kitchen and store room, well-known to each one of us. In this way each place is transformed and takes on new meaning. These are the stages of this route:

LIVING ROOM: the room of change.

In our itinerary this room represents both **the International Coordinating Team** and Provincial/Territorial Coordinating Teams. Once it was a room set apart, always tidy, that was used only when guests arrived. Today, the living room is used more; it is where the daily life of the family takes place. It shows a movement from the formal conception of human relationships to a more authentic and spontaneous conception of relationships. In this simple room one lives a community atmosphere and the need to unite different demands and attitudes: no problems arise if there is mutual respect and attention. **It is the place for communication among the family members and with others.**

On the **table** of this living room let us try, during our history, to identify God's life in whom we believe. We do not want to nurture inconclusive relationships, of remaining together simply to pass the time. At this table words become concrete actions which are useful to others. Welcoming others means bringing the living room to life: sometimes a large or folding table can be necessary, other times it is necessary to knock down a wall...

In the living room there is a **door**, a symbol of our capacity of opening ourselves to others, allow ourselves to be involved by their life, and a symbol of the relationships that comfort us, encourage us, relieve us in situations of anguish and warms our hearts.

In the living room we live the liturgy of welcoming: how and when do we practice it? What difficulty do we have in sharing? How much are we ready to give of ourselves in time, attention and material goods? Here we may practice concretely the virtue of hope and be ready to accept changes in our lives. We must try always to see the positive side of every situation, even though it is not always easy to face the unexpected with serenity. Continual struggle may cause us moral tiredness and little will to adapt. One must not be mean in loving!

Sometimes we experience difficulty in opening the door: if a sense of belonging risks being secondary and not the substance of encounters, it is difficult to write shared words that help us live our charism in daily life.

Finally, regarding this room, what could we say to Jesus of Nazareth if he came to this living room? We could tell him of our bewilderment, our errors, but even the joy of meeting others and the discovery of God, we could tell him we had learned to trust, to count on Someone who is not us and our certainties, our presumption of being the possessors of truth, but that we are only "a part" of the truth. We could reaffirm that we entrust ourselves to His Word so as to scan the horizon and rejoice for the seeds of God's Kingdom in our midst.

For this reason we need a living room, metaphor of the International Coordination Team and the Provincial/Territorial Coordinating Teams to continue communicating, celebrating, relaxing, welcoming others, talking of God and to God.

- **THE KITCHEN: flavour and flavours.**

In this small flat naturally there is a kitchen which, in our Association, I imagine to represent the **local group**.

It is the place where we dedicate a series of actions and times to prepare food.

This kitchen/local group may be a warm and welcoming place that promotes relationships or a cold and sceptic place in which one cooks without love and with pre-packed food. In the kitchen one learns how to distinguish the **likings and preferences** of each person. It is here that the transformation of food takes place and relationships become deeper. The **smells** that one identifies in the kitchen are a sign of how much love there is in the group and how much it is willing to give in welcoming and helping others.

In the kitchen there are four fundamental elements: **air – water – fire – earth**.

* **Air which one breathes:** a good smell dissolves into the air, whether it is morning coffee or sweet smelling cakes... these fragrances are signs of tranquillity, of relaxation and rest.

They are signs of how much love there is within us.

The fragrance of fresh baked bread and good wine remind us of the last supper. In the Song of Songs the bride recognises the bridegroom by his perfume.

There is a kind of "perfume of God" in the relationships we live, a perfume thanks to which we may enter into a relation with others so as to walk together towards the source of this perfume ...

* **Water that quenches our thirst:** it is a basic element. In the kitchen it is used for coking, rinsing fruit and vegetables and washing dishes ... In Scripture water is abundant throughout Biblical events. Life may become arid without fresh living water, commitment, a plan inspired by ideals, that opens to hope for a new present and a new future for everyone..

Water flows abundantly in the kitchen: one offers others something clean, fresh, elaborated with our care and attention and, when we are guests, we receive care and attention and are satisfied by others. Relationships may be fluid like the water gushing out of the tap or very cold like ice from the freezer! Having running water is a privilege of which often we are not aware: let us try not to waste water!

* **Fire that warms:** by means of fire different foods are mixed together and these are the fundamental ingredients of every relationship, which is love and care of others. In certain situations the preparation of food is not always lived serenely. It is necessary to cook on a low fire, for a long time and with great care; to respect cooking times, the right times for each person ... It is the fire that should enflame us from within and bring the world new love and new hope.

* **Earth that nourishes:** transformation of the products of the earth: cleaned, elaborated, made usable. It is a metaphor for becoming different, receive nourishment to be what we are.

- **BEDROOM: the room of encounter**

It is the metaphor of life in the family and at work. In a bedroom one gets up in the morning sustained by hope and by a common project. It is the place (for us it is family and work) in which we learn to be a **gift for the other** person, the manifestation of a God who decided to take on human nature and become communion. It is in our family and working life that our identity as Lay Canossians is forged: it is the unconditional love of Christ which makes us able to bring peace, unity and joy within our family, our profession, our social and pastoral commitment, as our Statutes indicate.

- **THE BATHROOM: isolation**

It represents our **personal life**. The bathroom is the place where one discovers one's body and the need and pleasure to take care of it. But it is also the place of a painful experience because time is passing and we must accept our limitations. This room reminds us of moments of isolation, searching for a refuge, and detachment from problems and frustrations. Just like Jesus, the essential and fundamental choices of life need moments for being alone; solitude is necessary to regain one's identity and question oneself about the journey made so far.

The bathroom is a metaphor of a place of refuge, an absolutely personal and private place; it recalls to mind **moments of desert and solitude** that are necessary for making choices which help us offer life rather than keeping it for ourselves, just as Jesus did, to appropriate one's identity, to evaluate the journey made so far and succeed to regain strength to open our door to others by listening and dialogue. It is not enough to live daily life without deepening our spirituality, listening to the Word of God and praying.

- **THE STOREROOM: the place of remembering**

The storeroom is the place of remembering, of the search for one's roots, of the history of each one of us and, in our metaphor, the history of our Association.

We tend towards the future but we cannot do without what has taken place and what we have been, neither reflecting on the journey accomplished until now. The storeroom means giving the right value to the past and, even if in houses today there is no specific place to put old things and if today's reality has accustomed us to consuming and not conserving things, there is always a place in the mind, a space in our hearts, which contains the memories of every life. We carry everything with us and nothing of what we have experienced will be lost. It is in the storeroom that we must look for a **lamp that illumines the dark**.

If God is the light of the world, or better, because He is the light of the world, our God, who became man for us, must be the light in our bedroom (family—work) so as to give divine depth to our “doing”; in our living room (International Coordinating Team and Provincial/Territorial Teams) to make our discussions wise so that they guide our daily choices; in our kitchens (local groups) to teach us to share the joy of food prepared, offered and tasted together on our balconies full of beautiful flowers that illumine the faces of those who risk passing by indifferently and unobserved; in our storerooms so as to bring out new meaning to all that we have lived, with sorrow or with love, but not to be forgotten.

Now, after having visited this virtual flat, which in my imagination represents our Association, I would like to start the second part of my report sharing with you **some important points** regarding the life of our Association.

1. The International Coordinating Team, which has worked over these last five years, is composed completely of Italians: Adele and Giancarlo Cremonesi, Sabrina Sonda, Barbara Santinon, Cesare Zuppa, Sr. Mariangela Casagrande, Sr. Anna Maria Babbini, Fr. Antonio Papa, Fr. Gianluigi Andolfo and, during the first two years Sr. Teresita Pamplona.

All of us have dedicated ourselves to the Association with trust, commitment and sound realism; no one of us had thought that he/she had to occupy this role of service. None of us went to school to prepare ourselves for this role!

We accepted this task with simplicity, goodwill and the precious and generous help of the Sisters.

2. The previous International Coordinating Team (2000-2006) was composed of members coming from various continents. During the IV Convention of the Lay Canossian Association it was noted that the work of coordination, as it had been established, presented difficulties in communication, language and economic support for the travel expenses of members taking part in meetings, and these limitations weighed heavily on reaching our objective. During this Convention, since an International Coordinating Team was composed of Italian members, it was decided to establish **Regional Representatives** as Reference people for each continent with the task of keeping communication flowing among the five continents, helping information to circulate within the Association. Certainly, the role of these representatives must be revised and better defined .

3. I would like to call your attention to the meaning of the word “**coordination**”; a dictionary gives this definition: “**to order** (= put in order, that is, in a rational and harmonic way) **together various elements so as to constitute a whole, according to the aim that people want to reach – create a relationship**”.

All Coordinating Teams, at all levels, are called to achieve this: operate so that our Association may proceed in a rational and harmonic way and become a single body, conformed to the aim established, that is, to live the Canossian charism and make it known.

Over the last five years, our International Coordinating Team has worked more on planning around the table, rather than visiting other realities in Italy, except for a few meetings in Sicily, Brescia and Milan. We would have liked to meet personally the various realities of our Association.

Those few meetings we did have, enabled us to identify the groups and people we met, coming to know something of their history. We would have liked these occasions to be more frequent and not limited to Italy, but it was not possible because there was always something else to which we had to dedicate ourselves rather than the Coordinating Team, – family, work – and certainly even the expenses to be met were an obstacle to fulfilling our desire.

During these five years we have reached certain goals, through the efforts we have made which, today, make us desire to go even further.

4. We present to you, and to those who will continue to serve our Association through the International Coordinating Team, some elements that have qualified our work during these five years. I will present a schematic outline which is neither systematic nor chronological. We have tried to:

- promote mutual knowledge of the various realities of the Association
- stimulate collaboration regarding common projects of formation for all the Association
- work of research, elaboration and circulation of material for reflection which help the Lay Canossian Association to live the itinerary of the Church during these years: the Canossian charism – like every charism – is, in fact, bestowed by the one Spirit of Christ. Our specific contribution as lay people consists of being involved in the life of the world to which we must give true witness in order to build the “earthly city” without losing sight of the “heavenly city”.
- represent the Lay Canossian Association together with the Sisters, Fathers and the Lay Canossian Family.

All this was carried out in many different ways:

- . **the outlines for a three-year formative itinerary:** in the first year of our mandate the Coordinating Team prepared the official Acts of the Congress 2006. From the theme: “Prophets of Communion” an itinerary of on-going formation at international level was elaborated, to be carried out in the course of three years (Prophecy as listening, – as grace of forgiveness – as commitment to promote reconciling communities).
- . **the Social Doctrine of the Church:** this compendium which we have prepared was expressly requested in 2006, when we were asked to elaborate a feasible document on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. This course of formation, for individuals and groups, is an instrument of deepening the Magisterium in the social sphere. The aim proposed by this school of formation is to make known the essential principles of the social doctrine of the Church, concretizing the contents, dealing with points relevant to our life as Lay Canossians, called to proclaim and witness the Gospel in every ambit: family, work environment, culture, politics, economy, by participating actively in the local Church and collaborating in the ministries characteristic of the two Religious Canossian Institutes. Every chapter contains a summary of the social doctrine, a charismatic reflection, a celebration and some questions for personal and group reflection. The double dimension of the presence of Christians and Lay Canossians in society was underlined: the need for personal witness, on the one hand, and the need for a new plan for a new civilization. The two dimensions, personal and social, must not be separated. This course of formation, therefore, is an instrument for the personal witnessing of an adult, Christian life, deep and mature, and for an Association which is committed to bringing about a society of solidarity, that respects human rights, peace, social and economic justice.
- . **revision of the Statutes:** this work was carried out by a special Commission formed by a few members of the Coordinating Team, Fr. General, Antonio Papa and by Fr. Gianluigi Andolfo when Fr. Antonio was absent, by Sr. Annamaria Babbini and Sr. Mariangela Casagrande. The presence of the Canossian Fathers was important at the moment of unifying the two lay movements. The revision was requested after the Convention of 2006 in which it was decided to share the Statutes so that all Lay Canossians connected with the Canossian Fathers and the Canossian Sisters could follow the same itinerary. The need for renewal was taken into consideration so that the Canossian charism may preserve its relevance today and be brought to the whole world.

The first draft of the Statutes was sent to the whole Lay Canossian world, and the Provincial Coordinating Teams made various suggestions and expressed a positive judgement about the new version of the Statutes. The indications received were taken into account and various re-elaborations concluded in the final version. Once the work was concluded the Commission sent the text to the “Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life”. After careful examination, the Congregation approved the text of the Statutes with the included modifications. With the printing of the Statutes the work of up-dating the Statutes was concluded and the text, which will be distributed, will be explained in detail in a future session. I would like to underline the importance of the Statutes: it is a very important guide for us, to be lived with fidelity, both personally and as a Association. It is an instrument that must be taken seriously since it should be used as a guide.

- . **the web site of our Association** <http://www.laicican.org/>: this too is one of the instruments which allows us to be continually up-dated and in contact with one another. Here we may find everything that helps us grow together; the site contains some historical information, all the documents and communications of the Association. Let us learn to use it regularly, at least once a week, for example on Wednesday, the Canossian day. The up-dating of this site requires a lot of attention and not always we were able to be punctual, but its use as an instrument of communication was always very clear, both within and outside the Association.
- . **the International Newsletter**: three times a year (Easter, Our Lady of Sorrows, Christmas) we produced and sent the Newsletter by means of the web site. We thank those who, during these five years, sent us articles, news and information on their particular area. We recommend all of you to be more active in this regard, because it is the means through which we may come to know one another better and share our experiences. We realise that it is not sufficiently known and distributed: it would be necessary to encourage the Coordinators at various levels to value it as a wealth for our Association, especially because it reflects our internationality.
- . **Plan of Formation**: after the elaboration of the guide lines for the Plan of Formation of the Lay Canossian family, the International Coordinating Team drew up the Plan of Formation of our own Association. This too has been inserted into the Statutes and is an important instrument that presents the typical identity of a lay Canossian belonging to our Association, specifying spirituality, formation, its specific objectives in the human, Christian and charismatic dimensions, the sources from which to draw and the phases of formation. The Formators of our Association may find the essential and indispensable elements for their task.
- . **sign of belonging**: the Coordinating Team studied the possibility of having a sign of belonging to our Association, the same for all members throughout the Canossian world. The production of this emblem has had its cost which will be communicated during the report of the International Bursar.
- . **Relations with the Lay Canossian Family**: the International Coordinating Team met regularly with the International Commission of the Lay Canossian Family, as it was already underlined on the first day of the Congress. From 2006 to the present the Coordination of this Commission was given to our Association.
- . **Preparation for the Congress and Convention 2011**: we worked hard so that the sessions of this very important five-yearly event may be carried out in the best way.

- **Schedas of preparation:** the International Coordinating Team elaborated a preparatory scheda on the theme “I recommend to you my beloved poor”, through an instrument of formation designed to mature in lay people an attention for the theme of poverty. The plan contains twelve chapters, one for each month; every chapter is formed by an in-depth study on the theme of poverty and solidarity, taken from the social doctrine of the Church which has been recalled for everyone, especially those who have never used it before, and from the works of mercy. The material provided is rich in contents that should be used both personally and in group. Let us not forget the question of self formation: we have chosen to be Christians and Lay Canossians not by tradition, habit or any other reason. Consequently, even the material offered should be used both personally and in group. This work may be continued over the next few months, until the Acts of this Congress and the new plan of ongoing formation are ready.

It may happen that the urgency of doing things may obscure our identity: a characteristic that must yet grow among us is the overcoming of considering ourselves as a point of reference, an attitude found among groups at various levels. Therefore, to develop this attitude we need greater unity among us, greater knowledge and esteem of the diverse situations in the world, greater attention and consideration for the requests made by the International Coordinating Team **respecting deadlines with fidelity** regarding the things asked of you, the article of the Newsletter and any other thing, without waiting to be continually pressed for an answer... This is the principal obstacle to be overcome for greater agility, precision and concreteness in the work to be carried out. Delays, lack of answers, inattention to requests cause continual organizational and operative difficulties which have been patiently borne by the good will of those responsible, causing them many sacrifices. During these years it has not been easy to cope with these practical situations.

The main resource of the Lay Canossian Association is the Canossian charism which expresses itself in the life of each one of its members and in the lives of its groups. This “virtuous” resource risks, however, to remain “virtual” if that channel of belonging is not nourished, which the International Coordinating Team desires and must represent, through the real circulation of all the realities of the various groups throughout the Association. We have **the Statutes** which the Association must take into account. **The sense of belonging** becomes real when we live what the Statutes indicate, both at a personal and organizational level, in Provincial and International groups. It is no longer acceptable today that groups do not have a coordinator, a secretary and a bursar, as indicated already in the Statutes of 1991! What is requested, has the aim of sharing the Canossian charism as a special gift of the Lord to the Church and for the Church, through **a simple but indispensable structure**.

The richness of this International Congress and Convention must be made to circulate in the near future in the Provinces and Territories with applicatory Conventions to transmit what emerged from the International Congress. We know of many positive experiences made on a local level: it would be important to communicate these events to the International Coordinating Team before they take place and not as an accomplished fact! Sometimes certain Provinces hold a local Congress before the International Congress. To these Congresses it would be fitting to invite some of the members of our Association as well as some members of the Lay Canossian Family.

We would like to thank all those who, in various parts of the world, have helped with translations of the various texts, documents and information in the local language: we express our gratitude for their precious work.

It would be inspiring to circulate **the experiences of Lay Canossians, living and dead**, who have enriched our Association with the witness of their lives.

Other reports will analyse the revision of the Statutes, the Plan of Formation, the financial situation and, for this reason, I will not comment on these questions.

We must commit ourselves with passion and determination so that lay people may assume the responsibility of the Coordinating Teams at all levels and learn how to conduct the Association without always expecting that the Sisters and Fathers should be the motor that makes the local group function. Let us take on the responsibility of identifying and forming those who may assume this task, in the local, Provincial/Territorial and International group.

This slogan could be necessary:

WORK LESS IN ORDER TO WORK BETTER IN ORDER TO WORK TOGETHER.

* **Work less**, that is, choose priorities with a good measure of sobriety and simplicity.

* **Work better**, that is, take care of the style of our being Lay Canossians. Do we have a real passion for our Association?

* **Work together**, that is, have mutual trust, compete in mutual esteem, appreciating the talents of everyone, knowing how to work together, stirring up responsible collaboration and valuing existing good.

At this point I have concluded my report which I hope may arouse reflection, discussion and further analysis.

I would like to leave each one of you with a **small gift**, as a sign of the conclusion of my service as President-Coordinator during the last five years.

The photocopy, well prepared, that I will personally give to you is a sign I leave you, dearest Delegates of about 2,500 Lay Canossians: in the example of each one of you and in you I see the outline of that holiness to which all of us are called.

It is a picture to hang in your flat which will help us to remember this Convention 2011.

Thank you and walk well!

... My Beloved Poor!

Magdalene of Canossa