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Letter of the Holy Father to the participants in the General Assembly of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the centenary of the death of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, patroness of Migrants (Chicago, 17-23 September 2017)

The following is the letter sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the General Assembly of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the centenary of the death of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, patroness of migrants (Chicago, 17-23 September 2017).

Letter of the Holy Father

To the Reverend Mother

Sister Barbara Louise Staley

General Superior of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The centennial of the death of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini is one of the main events marking the journey of the Church both because of the greatness of the figure commemorated and because of the contemporary nature of her charism and message, not just for the ecclesial community but for society as a whole. Through this message of mine and my prayers, it is my wish therefore to participate in spirit in the General Assembly which as the Institute of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its lay collaborators you will hold from September 17 to 23 this year in Chicago near the National Shrine named after your beloved Foundress and Patron Saint of Immigrants.

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini accepted a missionary vocation from God, which in those days could have been considered unusual – to train and send consecrated women all over the world setting no limits to missionary horizons, not just as auxiliaries of religious institutes or male missionaries but with their own charism as consecrated women religious. At the same time, these women were willing to collaborate fully and totally with

both local churches and with various congregations dedicated to proclaim the gospel *ad gentes*. This clearly feminine, missionary consecration born in Mother Cabrini came from the total and loving union with the Heart of Christ whose compassion surpasses all limits. She lived and instilled in her sisters the impelling desire of reparation for the ills of the world and to overcome separation from Christ, an impetus that sustained the missionary in tasks beyond human strength. She took St. Paul's claim, "I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me" (*Philippians 4:13*) as her motto. This motto was borne out by the surprising number and by the importance of the works that she undertook during her lifetime in Italy, France, Spain, Great Britain, the United States, Central America, Argentina and Brazil. But her love for the Heart of Christ translated into the evangelical fervour that shines out in the care Frances Xavier Cabrini gave to those who today are considered emarginated in society. One such example was when Mother Cabrini opened a house in the most infamous Italian quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana, just one year after the cruel lynching of Italians accused of having murdered the city's Chief of Police.

The charism of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini enlivened a total and intelligent dedication to the immigrants who left Italy for the New World. This choice was the fruit of her sincere and loving obedience to the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, and it extended to other fields of missionary work as well. Today's epoch-making population movements with the inevitable tensions they create make Mother Cabrini a very contemporary figure. In particular, the Saint focused attention on situations of greatest poverty and fragility such as the needs of orphans and miners. She combined that with a lucid cultural sensitivity by continuous dialogue with local authorities. She undertook to conserve and revive in the immigrants the Christian tradition they knew in their country of origin, a religiosity which was sometimes superficial and often imbued with authentic popular mysticism. At the same time, she offered ways to fully integrate with the culture of the new countries so that the Missionary Mothers accompanied the Italian immigrants in becoming fully Italian and fully American. The human and Christian vitality of the immigrants thus became a gift to the churches and to the peoples who welcomed them. The great migrations underway today need guidance filled with love and intelligence similar to what characterises the Cabrinian charism. In this way the meeting of peoples will enrich all and generate union and dialog, not separation and hostility. Nor must we forget that the missionary sensitivity of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini was not sectorial but universal; that is the vocation of every Christian and of every community of the disciples of Jesus.

The present centennial celebration is an invitation to take a new look at all this with intimate and joyful gratitude to God. This is a great gift above all for you, the spiritual daughters of Mother Cabrini. May your whole Institute, every community and every religious receive an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit that revitalises faith and the following of Jesus in accordance with the missionary charism of your Foundress. May your many faithful lay collaborators share and support your evangelical work in the current social context. For my part, I assure you of my remembrance and prayers with deep affection, both because I have always known the figure of Mother Cabrini and because of the special concern I devote to the cause of immigrants. While I ask you to pray for me and for my ministry, from my heart I send a special Apostolic Blessing to your Assembly, to the Congregation and to the whole Cabrinian family.

From the Vatican, 29 August 2017

Memory of martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist
