

THE ROLE OF THE DELEGATE

Whatever its size, authority, and composition, the General Chapter is to be representative of the whole Society and to be a sign of unity. Delegates should be drawn from a broad range of members with different ages, apostolates and geographic regions represented. In order to ensure broad representation, a balance between *ex officio* members i.e. those who are delegates by reason of the office they hold, and delegates or elected members, needs to be achieved. (cf. Canon 631)

Delegates are elected to the Chapter according to the constitutions of our Society. Each delegate brings his own gifts, experience, education, and expertise, offering these for the good of the Society through service in the Chapter. Regardless of whether a delegate is *ex officio*, elected or co-opted, he does not represent a 'constituency' or carry a particular agenda, theological perspective or mandate for action. The common good of the Society and its precious heritage are to be served by each delegate in the General Chapter. (cf. Canon 631)

Delegates are elected and co-opted to represent the Society and not any particular individuals, regions or interests. They also represent the range of experience and wisdom available in the Society, and they should take responsibility for this. Delegates need to acknowledge, and resist, any attempt to influence or pressurise them.

On the part of the delegates there is need to distinguish between 'Data gathering' (preparing themselves for the work of the Chapter) and discerning, the task for which they have been elected.

Discernment is the gift of listening to the word of God and interpreting it. This comes to us in all kinds of ways: through scripture, through revelation, in people, in events; through our understanding, our intellect, our imagination, our feelings – in all the immediate realities of life.

Discernment is the gift of distinguishing one way from the other: the free from the un-free; the true from the un-true.

The gift of such discernment suggests that the deepest desire of the heart is to 'do the will of the One who sent me' and that this be the motivating factor which moves every decision and choice.

It is precisely with that desire that the Chapter delegates will gather and it will be in and through everyday business that they will engage in discerning the spirits. In such an atmosphere, life can be reviewed, decisions can be made, elections can be held in union with God, and one another, in liberty of spirit and courage and the purpose of the Chapter will surely be upheld.