

Reverend Mother of Novices

The obligations of the Mistress of Novices have grown in number, we cannot hide the fact; they are grave; they are sacred. But the Holy Rule also invests that high official with special prerogatives. Just as no authority lower than His Grace, the Archbishop of Malines has the power to reduce those very important duties; no one may diminish those rights or hinder the free exercise of them.

You have to form the members for the religious family of Mary and Joseph or the Ladies of Mary; you have to assist the efforts of those of your pupils who are called to the supreme prerogative of Spouse of God the Savior. But to fulfill those noble functions, as your Institute requires and Holy Church desires, you have to know in depth each and every one of your children. You owe them instructions in common; you owe them individual ones. Now, to know them you have to surround yourself with lights and those lights you must seek wherever they may be found.

From these principles, it naturally follows:

- 1) You must follow and observe your novices, in public in the midst of their companions, or when they are with the community, and in particular when they are alone. On those who are already employed in studying, teaching, or boarding school supervision, you will get information from the Mistress General of the Ladies of the boarding school. You will question the Lady charged with the direction of the domestic work about those of your children who are engaged in that work. You will see and you will control all their correspondence.
- 2) In exceptional and extremely rare cases when the well-established needs of one or other of our houses makes it obligatory to employ a novice elsewhere than in the novitiate, you will retain towards her the same duties and the same rights as if she was in the novitiate. You must follow her in spirit, you must get to know her and guide her. From this it results that you must have regular correspondence with your novice, and that correspondence is secret to the extent that no Superior has the right to get to know the contents of the letters to novices write to their Mistress, nor of those the Mistress writes to her pupils.

Such is the spirit of your Constitutions, and of all the Rules of the Mistress of Novices in religious Institutes.

Your very devoted Father in Jesus Christ
C. G. Van Crombrugghe

Ghent, 4th of the month of your Holy Patron, 1858