

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

A happy and holy New Year to all of you!

We look back on a tumultuous 2008, a year we will remember for its dramatic financial woes and adjustments and its historic political decisions. Even with the hope that a new year brings, we still face the reality of the world's many troubles. No matter what, we cannot stop trying to make things better in our world and our church.

What better inauguration to the year than to look to Mary, our model of faith, who, in one of history's bleakest and most violent moments, sang a song of gratitude that God keeps every promise and never forgets those who are in special need. On January 1, we also celebrate a World Day of Peace. In a time when destructiveness, war, the degradation of the environment, and other sins seem to be gaining the upper hand over peace, goodness, and the treasuring of God's creation, Mary abides with us in our hope for a reign of peace. In a 2001 letter, Pope John Paul II prayed, "*O Mary, Help of Christians, in our need we turn to you with eyes of love, with empty hands and longing hearts. We look to you that we may see your Son, our Lord. We lift our hands that we may have the Bread of Life. We open wide our hearts to receive the Prince of Peace.*"

We know that peace is not easily accomplished. Fear is a powerful deterrent, and we seem to live in a culture of fear. We think the way to eradicate fear is by making war against terrorism. We live in suspicion of one another and of any stranger. We gate our communities and search our travelers. We hunker down and hope for better days. But we who sing Mary's *Magnificat* daily know it is not a song of fear but of freedom. Can we imagine that "God who is mighty" will do great things for us, will keep the promise of blessings and life for us? Do we really believe it?

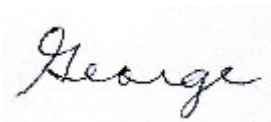
We cannot create this kind of peace by our own power, but we can prevent it by surrendering to fear. This is the reason we need to sing the *Magnificat* frequently to strengthen our hope that God is indeed mighty in faithfulness. We must never tire of working for justice and the sharing of the world's goods. Then gradually our hearts will expand and overflow with God's good gifts. With full voice we will sing with Mary: "My whole being proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. God who is mighty has truly done great things for us."

As we begin this new year with Mary, those of us in the Province of the United States are most conscious of the progress of our strategic planning process. I strongly urge you to confide this process to Mary's guidance. At the same time, I encourage us to rediscover the role of Mary in our lives, both individually and communally.

From time to time, I will send out from the Office of Religious Life some stimulus to your reflection on Mary and prayer to her. Perhaps in your communities you can spend time pondering together what this Woman of Faith means for us and how we can make her better known, loved and served. This was the constant call of Blessed Chaminade. Feel free to share with me any thoughts you have on this project and the results of your discussions in community. Let's make 2009 a time of deepening and strengthening our commitment to Mary and to her mission!

Attached to this e-mail is a list of liturgical celebrations for January.

Affectionately yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

George J. Cerniglia, S.M.
Assistant for Religious Life