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Dear nursing colleague,

On this wonderful feast of Our Lady Guadalupe may the Queen of heaven protect and support you – today on her special feast day – and throughout the year.

As I am writing to you I am aware that so much has happened in the past year, both here in Europe and around the world. In the UK governments have come and gone, and political change is felt all over Europe as people are struggling with high inflation and insecurity leading to protests even riots. Our patients and clients are telling us about increased poverty and their social problems. Meanwhile, in the wider world - there is renewed armed conflict in Palestine and the war in Ukraine is still claiming too many lives; and yet throughout all this nurses are expertly looking after patients; delivering their care with compassion and love.

Earlier this year in February, newly elected CICIAMS officers met in Rome at the organisation's offices in the Vatican, and later together with CICIAMS' president Dr Khosi Mthethwa I attended a June gathering of lay organisations affiliated with the Holy See – where we were encouraged to reconnect with our initial vocational charism of service to the sick and infirm – in the light of our universal primary Christian duty of apostolicity and evangelisation. We left the meeting with renewed energies. As Catholic nurses we are convinced that we evangelise best by being good healthcare professionals – with Blessed Hanna showing us the way.

The first session of the Papal Synod on Synodality held in Rome this autumn has now successfully concluded. We are now praying – with the whole church – and studying the Synod reports in preparation for the second session next autumn. It would be good if the voice of nurses and healthcare workers was also heard at those meetings as we confront renewed pressures around euthanasia, abortion rights and for some even work place discrimination.

In April and May of this year I went to the USA and Canada with some relics of Blessed Hanna Chrzanowska in order to promote her among Canadian Catholic nurses. The relics were left in Canada where patients and nurses can continue to pray through the intercession of Bl. Hanna. I am also happy to report that there is now an excellent short biography of Blessed Hanna in Spanish and we are working on having a French, Italian and Portuguese version.

While in New York City, I was present at the award ceremony at the UN, for International Nurses' Day on the 12th May, where I accompanied Sylwia Juszkievicz a CICIAMS Polish nurse from Kraków, who had made a massive impact through her volunteering work (driving ambulances in the Ukraine), and I witnessed a

posthumous award being given to the midwife Servant of God Stanisława Leszczyńska, who was a midwife in Auschwitz concentration camp. She delivered several hundred babies while there, a few of whom managed to survive the camp. Her award was given posthumously for the first time, highlighting the importance of Stanisława's (almost forgotten) work. At the same ceremony American nurses received an award for a film they produced about eugenics and nurses' work during the Third Reich – called *Caring Corrupted*. You can watch the film at: <https://vimeopro.com/fastcutfilms/caring-corrupted/video/183083910> It is well to remind ourselves how easy it is to become brainwashed about an ideology.

Later in the New Year I will attempt to come up with a plan so that I can either visit you in person if that is possible or talk with you over a ZOOM meeting, so we can feel we are more of a community of European nurses. At the same time I apologise for my lack of or insufficient communication with you – so far. I endeavour to improve. I would very much like to be able to represent you more fully and authentically at the CICIAM board meetings, and certainly when I go to the CICIAMS African regional congress in August 2024 next year. That regional CICIAMS African congress in Nairobi is open to all Catholic nurses – so please check on the CICIAMS website for more information and consider attending or sending someone from your organisation to attend. The more of us that can manage to go from Europe the better.

We are now in Advent and our thoughts are focused on the coming feast of Christmas. There is much to do around the house and in the kitchen (I have already baked my ginger cakes and biscuits) but crucially we need to prepare spiritually for the Birth of Christ. As Pope Francis encourages us - *Let our restless hearts embrace the restlessness of the Spirit. The world expects from believers a new burst of enthusiasm for the things of heaven. Like the Magi, let us lift up our eyes, listen to the desire lodged in our hearts, and follow the star that God makes shine above us. As restless seekers, let us remain open to God's surprises...*

May your prayers and work for the church, your commitments to your local communities, families and patients all bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit – so desperately needed in our fractured and wounded world. May you find in your nursing practice God's joy and the confirmation of His ever present beauty and goodness.

With fondest wishes for a blessed and peaceful Christmas and a happy new year and promising to remember you before the Newborn of Bethlehem this Christmastide, *Gosia*

Dr M Brykczyńska, RN
CICIAMS Regional President for Europe
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