



Letter of the Superior General

TO THE BROTHERS OF THE POLAND-UKRAINE REGION

Programmatic Lines 2018-2021

Dear Brothers,

Grace and peace!

A warm greeting to each of you and my thanks for the welcome given to Fr. Vito Fracchiolla, Vicar General, and to Br. Luigi Bofelli, General Councillor, on the occasion of the canonical Visit to your Region realized from 10 to 22 last June. Thanks also to Fr. Bogusław Zeman for his service of animation for the last six years as Regional Superior and to Fr. Wojciech Turek for accepting this responsibility for the next mandate (2018-2021), a ministry that can certainly count on the collaboration of all.

The Poland-Ukraine Region, in view of the next Regional Assembly, is living an opportune circumstance to evaluate the progress made up to now and to project itself towards the next three years. We wish that everything could be thought out and lived in the light of the Gospel. In fact, we know that «*the Church does not live of herself but of the Gospel and from the Gospel always and again takes orientation for her journey*»¹. It is also for us, Pauline, that we have evangelization as the main goal towards which our apostolic vocation is proceeding².

We are counting on your commitment in seeking together how best to respond today to the challenges of life and the Pauline mission in this territory, that is, how to live and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Master, who came so that everyone may have life and have it abundantly (See Jn 10:10). Everyone can have this life in himself in order to witness to it, following the apostle Paul, as true “men of communication”, both in interpersonal relationships and with our means of apostolate. To help you in this discernment, we present some reflections that can sustain you in the concrete choices that will have to guide you in the coming years.

I. Apostolate: to respond to the signs of the times

In your Region, the apostolate is concentrated mainly on the publishing and book sector, absorbing in these areas the greater commitment of human and financial resources. Continue to do well the apostolate with the press, seeking, at the same time, a greater openness to the new forms of evangelization in the field of our mission, especially as regards the digital environment. Today, that you have a good solidity and economic-financial-structural availability, we believe that it is the right time to invest in the search for new and current paths of evangelization. This search must, however, be the fruit of study and comparison both within the

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 51.

² Special General Chapter 1969-1971, *Chapter Documents*, no. 71.

Circumscription and outside, and we hope that its result would be shared and endorsed by the Region.

We know that it is not enough to be present in the communication environment with the technical means at our disposal, but we must be clear who we want to reach and with what content. Looking concretely at the social reality, specifically in Poland, we perceive a gradual growth in the number of people who turn away from the life of the Church. This observation, which certainly causes some uneasiness, should not scare us. On the contrary, it becomes a challenge to be faced with faith and audacity. Let us remember that, just thinking of the people who were distancing themselves from the parish communities, Fr. Alberione started our Congregation (and then a whole family!) To evangelize, at first with the press and then with all the means born of modern technologies. In fact, he said: *«But the live voice flies, while the press is well-established. The live voice arrives to those present, the press arrives to the distant ones, to the men of all time; one is transitory, the other is well-established»*³.

Without forgetting those who participate in the life of the Church, the distant ones must be in our hearts as privileged recipients of our mission. Furthermore, as the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers reiterated, in addition to the contents to be transmitted, it is essential to “create relationships” with these (and with others), our interlocutors and recipients. Effectively, *«to evangelize requires, first of all, the capacity to meet the men and women of our time, with their wounds and their anxieties, their doubts and the fears they bear in their hearts to seek to offer them encounter with the God of hope who tears down the wall of indifference and offers a motive of life, a motive of hope»*⁴.

In this perspective, the Apostolic Project of the Region will require harmony with the document “*Editorial Guidelines. Identity, content and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate*”, approved recently by the General Government, and which is the common apostolic guide for the whole Congregation. In addition to the aspects of contents, strategies, organization and administration, this document contains those concerning human relationships, which motivate them to work in synergy and in a team, to create an environment where the Paulines and lay collaborators feel valued and all work by allowing forces to converge towards the same end and contributing to the success of our mission.

In fact, the *Editorial Guidelines* of the Congregation insist that each Circumscription should have *«an up-to-date, clear, concrete and strategic Apostolic Project, fostering synergies and collaboration between the various initiatives and apostolic areas, with common criteria and objectives. This means integrating all persons, communities, activities and initiatives on a single track, aware that the Pauline Publisher is always a community subject»*⁵.

Considering these elements and having in mind the apostolic reality of the Poland-Ukraine Region, we offer below some questions with the aim of helping you in your discernment, in view of the choices you will have to identify for the next years: 1. How is the relationship between the Paulines and lay collaborators? What to do in order to work in synergy? 2. Who do we want to reach with our offerings? With what contents? With what means? 3. How are the relationships with our interlocutors and recipients? What can we do to open up ourselves more? 4. With regard to the biblical apostolate, how is the mission of the circumscription St Pauls Biblical Centre proceeding? What to do to give it more dynamism? 5. What can be done concretely so that our bookstores become true centres of evangelization, of culture and of encounter?

³ James Alberione, *Haec meditare II*, 4 (1944), p. 165.

⁴ Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Communication models for the Church in today's world*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publisher*, Ariccia, 16-21 October 2017, pp. 100-101.

⁵ *Editorial Guidelines. Identity, content and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate*, I.5.

2. Community life: place of communication

The Pauline lives the charism of communication above all starting from his own community, in living together with his confreres. In fact, our Constitutions say: «*Since the specific goal of the Society of St Paul is attained through an apostolate that is par excellence communitarian, all the members are to cultivate fraternal collaboration and friendship and to give to one another that mutual help to correspond to their common vocation*»⁶.

The community is that vital space in which the Pauline is called to develop his own vocation as a “man of communication”, which manifests itself in his relationship with God, with himself and with others. Indeed, «*the identity of the Pauline does not coincide only with his work in the specific environment of communication, but also with his understanding as a “man of communication”, as a person of true relationships, which has in the dimension of communication a constitutive part of his being and of his acting*»⁷. The Region is now living an appropriate time to evaluate to what extent this identity is lived in practice and aims at overcoming difficulties, examining mainly the human relationships within the communities and in the apostolate.

In addition to these aspects, which are essential for community life, I would like to underline a certain feeling of “tiredness”, perceived by some members of the Region, also expressed by some of you. It is not enough to note this fatigue, but we must go to the bottom to find out where the causes reside, to try to eliminate the evil from its root. It is certain that excessive work (mental and physical) results to fatigue, and that the right balance between activity and rest must be sought. The question could be this: the fatigue of which we are accused of, the weight has its roots and motivations in the hard work we have or instead we need to look for reasons elsewhere?

In fact, there is another type of fatigue that can determine, other than from a stressful rhythm, even by the lack of motivation, to the point of causing a certain sloth, in all senses. Regarding this theme, and referring to the pastoral work in the Church, Pope Francis makes an observation, which helps us to think also about our quality of life: «*The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue*»⁸.

We must then ask ourselves how Pauline life is lived in its entirety, what space do moments of personal and communitarian prayer occupy in it and to what extent our life of prayer is not only formal, but is connected with concrete life, that is, with the personal, communitarian, ecclesial, apostolic and social reality in which we live. It is therefore worthwhile to always return to what our last General Chapter has indicated as one of the priorities: «*The double table of the Word of God and of the Eucharist, which build up the community, be for every Pauline the source from where he draws strength to rekindle the gift received in order to increase apostolic vigour and to overcome whatever could create division*»⁹. Never forget that «*sharing the Word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community*»¹⁰.

Everyone should strive to make his contribution to creating a serene environment and dialogue in the community, dedicating time to “listening”, so as to create a true culture of encounter. «*The culture of encounter is not only something to be disseminated through our means of*

⁶ Constitutions and Directory of the Society of Saint Paul, art. 15.

⁷ Annual Letter of the Superior General “Apostle Communicators for a culture of encounter”, 2018.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 82.

⁹ X General Chapter, 2.2.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 142.

*apostolate but, above all, it is a reality to be put into practice starting from our interpersonal relationships. We ourselves must first be challenged to make our contribution to promote this culture starting from the small daily gestures within our communities and our apostolic structures»*¹¹. The recognition and awareness of the differences existing between each of you, made of lights and shadows deriving from our character, from our education, from our personal history with his life experiences, allows us to start human relationships of comparison but constructive. To be conscious and recognize our frailties and weaknesses yes, to be rejected no!

Bearing in mind the reality of community life, let us ask ourselves: 1. Do we have a clear “Pauline” identity in the culture of communication today? What is missing? 2. Does each of our communities have a clear objective that justifies the reason for its existence? 3. To what extent are the moments of prayer and celebration linked to the concrete life of each day? 4. How is interpersonal communication, communication in the communities and in the same Region? What to do to improve it?

3. Vocation Promotion and Formation for the Mission

Vocation Promotion continues to be a challenge for the Region and cannot be a separate reality from the life of the communities and of the apostolate; it cannot even be a solitary and exclusive activity delegated to the one responsible of this area. It is certain that we need a regional appointee for the Vocation Promotion and a team that supports him, just as we must have a clear program to be implemented. However, we cannot forget that every member is a “vocationist” by means of his testimony of Pauline life.

There is an interesting passage on this statement in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the next Synod on young people that makes us reflect: «*In a context of uncertainty and fear about the future, young people no longer connect to institutions as such, but to the people within them who communicate values with their life testimony. Both at personal and institutional level, consistency and truthfulness are fundamental factors for credibility*»¹². On this, already Pope Francis expressed himself: «*I am also certain that there is no vocational crisis where there are consecrated people capable of passing on, by their witness, the beauty of consecration. Testimony bears fruit. If there is no testimony, if there is no consistency, there will be no vocations*»¹³. Witnessing is an important factor not only to attract new vocations, but also to help those who are already with us to persevere. Vocation is born and is built by contamination, by attraction.

Regarding formation, in the next update of the *Formation Iter* you will have to try to work to put this dimension of the Pauline life as provided by the document *Editorial Guidelines. Identity, content and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate*. In fact, among other things, we take into consideration those aspects that represent the current gaps of our formation in this epochal change that we are experiencing, and which affect the quality of our daily and community life: the difficulty in establishing good relations, teamwork, the danger of self-sufficiency and self-importance. Finally, it is necessary to help the Pauline, both in ongoing and in initial formation, to become a true man of communication and to insist on study in the perspective of “*studiosità*”¹⁴.

Let us remember that our Founder was aware that study, when lived in the sense of “*studiositas*”, helps to open the mind in order to meet the challenges of the mission. The insistence

¹¹ *Annual Letter of the Superior General “Apostle Communicators for a culture of encounter”, op. cit.*

¹² *Instrumentum Laboris of the Synod of Bishops. XV Ordinary General Assembly: “Young people, the faith, and vocational discernment”, 2018.*

¹³ Pope Francis, *To participants of a meeting for formators of consecrated men and women sponsored by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*, 11 April 2015.

¹⁴ Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General “Study in view of the Mission”, 2017.*

of having an open mind and a big heart is present in his exhortations. He affirms: «*Universality! Do not have a small, narrow head, and only see your own hole. Feel and try to help even from home to home. When there is a small and narrow head, it is doubtful if there is a vocation, because we live with selfishness, we cannot see but ourselves and some small circle of people around. [...] Big heart! Heart of the Apostle, heart of Jesus! Expand the heart!*»¹⁵.

Therefore, in front of the complex but urgent reality of Vocation Promotion and Formation, I present to you some questions as an aid in tracing the path of your Region regarding these two important dimensions of Pauline life: 1. What initiatives to take to dynamicize the pastoral care of vocations in the Region? How to be more present in the digital environment to bring young people closer together? 2. Considering that the year 2019/2020 was declared a Vocation Year for the Pauline Family, what can the Region do concretely to make the Vocation Promotion more dynamic? 3. With regard to initial and ongoing formation, what to do concretely to help develop the “Pauline, a man of communication”? 4. Considering the Pauline reality of Poland and Ukraine, which specialization courses would be needed to respond to the needs of our mission, today?

4. Presence in Ukraine

After the significant effort of the Region in which human and economic resources have been invested, we now have a stable situation in Ukraine. This is a source of joy for you and for the whole Congregation. Now we need to think about a project of development and sustainability of our presence in that country, which will oblige you to choose some fields of action, proper to the Pauline, while giving continuity to the ecumenical work that you have already begun both in terms of interpersonal contacts and through our publications.

In this perspective, it is better not only to respond to requests that are made of you, but to have and create initiatives in certain specific areas of ours: for example, giving courses on the Bible and communication, creating a family centre for family problems, or other pastoral initiatives that would help us to open up ourselves and strengthen our relationships with our interlocutors and recipients.

We believe that today we have a good network of collaborators and volunteers, which we hope would always be better confirmed. Sometimes they are generic and isolated collaborators, who do not have an ideal that can join, unite, motivate them. It is therefore necessary to start a work to create an ever closer bond, not only with the Pauline in charge (even if this is important in the process), but above all with the Institution, so that it would not happen that when the responsible person is changed all this treasure is lost. We believe that little by little we will have to unite these people, with the maximum freedom of each one, who knows, perhaps as Pauline Cooperators, in order to give them a core of values, motivations and spirituality. The same argument could be for the Aggregated Institutes to be born.

Regarding the juridical-institutional aspect, it will be necessary to move from a foundation linked to a person to a foundation belonging to the Society of St. Paul, which will have to subsist and develop even when that person should be transferred.

5. Conclusion

Dear brothers, it seems that today the Poland-Ukraine Region is asked for a qualitative leap in all the dimensions of our Pauline life: personal, communitarian, apostolic. This leap, we

¹⁵ James Alberione, *Explanation of the Constitutions (uso manoscritto)*, Ariccia, 1961, p. 83.

cannot have if we remain closed, protected by our walls, always ruminating on problems that we cannot solve. We need to go out, to relate with people, with the Church, with society. Evidently, not going where everyone wants, but within a Circumscription project. Certainly from this “going out” it will be possible to receive stimuli to improve our quality of life and also new creative stimuli of Pauline presence.

Remember that in this Region, among the foundations of Father Alberione, we are not alone. We are together with the other Institutions of the Pauline Family. Therefore, search with the members of the female Congregations, with the Aggregated Institutes and with the Pauline Cooperators, not only to maintain the meetings on the level of spirituality, but also on a concrete collaboration, especially in the apostolic field and the pastoral care of vocations.

“To do everything for the Gospel” is the challenge to be put into practice, through our charism, in the ecclesial, social and cultural reality of Poland and of Ukraine. I end this letter by saying that every Pauline, by vocation, is a publisher, in the theological sense that was given by our Founder, Blessed James Alberione. *«Every Pauline, by his specific vocation, is a “publisher”. This is the “only purpose” – Father Alberione would say – of his life and his action, of his vocation and mission. The Pauline is a man called by Christ and consecrated to be an apostle of communication, to be essentially a “publisher” who gives form to an experience, who writes or translates his personal and community life of faith and encounter with Christ in words, texts, images, sounds, videos, bytes or in any other form that the technology gradually develops; but also in experiences and initiatives where every language is at the service of the inculturation of the Gospel with and in communication. One who, after the example of Mary, gives (edidit) the Saviour to the world»¹⁶.* With joy and hope, through the intercession of the Apostle Paul, may you carry on this beautiful mission!

Faternally.

Rome, 27 July 2018

Centenary of the death of Venerable Maggiorino Vigolungo



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¹⁶ Editorial Guidelines, op. cit., I.2.