



Inaugural Address of the Superior General Casa “Divin Maestro” - Ariccia, 29 May 2022

Dear brothers,

Again a warm greeting and welcome to all! We are gathered here in the chapter hall, after the celebration of the Eucharist, to begin the work of the XI General Chapter. We are gathered not as a parliamentary assembly, but as brothers, with our identity as “Pauline Editors”, starting from the profound meaning given by Blessed Alberione to this expression¹.

We are here as «communicators-apostles and as consecrated persons» – following Jesus Master Way, Truth and Life, and under the gaze of Mary, Queen of the Apostles – committed to living and proclaiming the Gospel, in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, according to the form of life interpreted by our Founder.

We participate in an event in which the true protagonists are not us, but the Holy Spirit, who is present among us with his love and his grace, who inserts us into Trinitarian communion and invites us to communion among ourselves. To him, from whom come the lights for our discernment, we entrust our difficulties, uncertainties and worries, as well as our dreams, joys and hopes.

These are some of my sentiments that I share with you, to which I add some considerations that I consider important to highlight at the beginning of this Chapter Assembly.

I. The theme of the General Chapter and the *Instrumentum laboris*

There is no need to mention all the steps taken for the preparation of this General Chapter, which started on 16 June 2019. We just want to remember that, with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020, we were forced to lengthen this journey of preparation, after having postponed the date of the Chapter several times due to the health emergency.

However, it is important to remember that the theme of the Chapter – «“Let yourselves be transformed, renewing your way of thinking” (Rom 12: 2). Called to be artisans of communion to prophetically announce the joy of the Gospel in the culture of communication» –, officially communicated in December 2019, was born after a process of consultation.

The itinerary included a questionnaire sent to the confreres of all our Circumscriptions and also the request for suggestions from the Major Superiors, based on the reflection on the interpretative reading of this questionnaire which took place during the meeting of the Superiors of Circumscriptions held in Rome from 11 to 14 November 2019, that is, before the arrival of the pandemic. This does not mean that the topic has become obsolete, as we will see in the course of our work. On the contrary, the theme, with its strong appeal, is still relevant and leads us to great challenges.

¹ James Alberione, *Prediche del Primo Maestro*, 5, 1957, p. 137.

The *Instrumentum laboris* that we have in hand and which is the result of the journey of preparation for the Chapter, despite some possible limitations, highlights some essential aspects that mark the current situation of our Congregation and which will be an important point of reference for the works of the Chapter. In this regard, we thank all those who participated in the elaboration of its content, especially our confreres of the pre-preparatory and preparatory Commissions who drafted the final draft of the text.

The three nuclei that make up the *Instrumentum laboris* – “The Pauline and his charismatic roots”, “The Pauline on mission and integral formation” and “A synodal Congregation” – invite us to reflect on our Pauline life in its various dimensions. The three moments of each nucleus, which characterize the method of discernment – recognizing, interpreting and choosing –, push us to face our Pauline life with realism and to make decisions regarding the future.

2. The time we live in

Considering that each General Chapter has its own particular significance, this “eleventh” can be considered as the Chapter of the post-pandemic, which takes place in the midst of a worrying war conflict in Ukraine.

Regarding the pandemic, even if it seems to us that the world has passed the most critical phase, the consequences are still present in our life. In any case, for most of the world, the pandemic has been synonymous with disease, suffering, death, poverty and social exclusion. We too as a Congregation have experienced deeply, with sadness, the inconveniences that the pandemic has caused, especially in our personal and community life – with the sick and unfortunately the deceased! –, in our lifestyle, in the apostolate and in the economy.

As Pope Francis reiterated «*the pandemic is a crisis and from a crisis one does not come out the same: either we come out better or we come out worse*». Surely as a Congregation we want to come out better from this period of trial and our General Chapter – with its theme that invites us to “renew ourselves”, and which perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say, to “reinvent ourselves” in the various areas of Pauline life – is a point of very important momentum to achieve this goal.

As if the uneasy situation caused by the pandemic were not enough, we also find ourselves living the experience of the war in Ukraine, after the invasion of Russia, which has already lasted for three months and which directly affects the local population and also our Pauline community in L’viv (whom we remember in our prayers!); a war that its consequences for the world we cannot yet foresee.

We certainly cannot be indifferent to this tragic situation, as well as to so many other conflicts in many nations. Indeed, as of 4 April 2022, it was possible to identify wars or crisis situations, among the various nations, even in Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar. We want to remember and keep present during our Chapter the concrete life of the people who are suffering the evil of violence and many other difficulties in various areas.

3. The Chapter as an ecclesial event

The General Chapter cannot be reduced to a congregational event, but is essentially “ecclesial”. Indeed, as our Constitutions affirm «*since religious life is inseparably linked to the life of the Church and to holiness, the general chapter is to be seen as an ecclesial happening, a salvific event, a blade of hope, a particular paschal celebration: the moment in*

which the Congregation has to tune into and live out more intensely its coresponsibility with the whole Church»². Briefly, we can use the expression of our Founder, very dear to the Pauline Family, regarding its mission: *«In Christ and in the Church»*.

In this perspective, the General Chapter is the right moment to realize where we are as a Church, a question that should also lead us to evaluate what is the “ecclesiology” we live within our Congregation. To what extent, for example, do we try to respond to the appeal of the current Magisterium to be an outgoing Congregation with the Church, in a world that is experiencing, among other problems, an “anthropological crisis” as well as “socio-environmental” from unprecedented global scale³, aggravated by the pandemic.

It is in this concrete world – also considering the cultures from which each Capitular comes – that the Church is called to bring the joy of the Gospel⁴, which is, above all, Jesus who died and rose again. He is “the eternal Gospel”⁵ who brings salvation that embraces all men⁶. As Saint Paul VI already affirmed, *«to evangelize is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity»*⁷.

Furthermore, the Magisterium of the Church reminds us that service to the Gospel does not consist only in spreading it explicitly, but also in taking care of the defense of human dignity⁸, especially of the poorest, the weakest and the marginalized. It must also lead us to ecumenical and interreligious openness, to dialogue with atheists, to the commitment to justice, to peace and to the protection of creation and to many other actions in favor of life.

This complex reality continually requires on our part, as the Church, to *«scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel»*⁹, with the awareness that *«every time we try to return to the sources and recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new paths arise, creative methods, other forms of expression, more eloquent signs, words charged with renewed meaning for today's world»*¹⁰. In fact, Jesus – the living Gospel – makes all things new (Rev 21: 3).

4. Fidelity to the charism and “Pauline” creativity

We are with and in the “outgoing” Church with our specific charism and with our identity as “Pauline Editors”. In this regard, it is important to consider during this General Chapter that *«on one hand, we are called to assume responsibility over fidelity to the Founder's charism before God, the Church and the members of our religious family inasmuch as the Founder's charism is a patrimony no one has the right to squander. On the other hand, we must be aware that no one in the Church is prisoner of the past and that the Church herself renders us responsible over the practical evaluation of the Founder's charism, measured against her “supreme law” which is the Gospel read and applied according to the actual needs of the Church and of the world»*¹¹.

² *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St Paul*, art. 211.

³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis gaudium. On ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*, 27 December 2017, no. 3.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 1.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 11.

⁶ *Lumen gentium*, n. 16.

⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 14.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 30.

⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 11.

¹¹ *Chapter Documents. Special General Chapter 1969-1971*, no. 39.

From the charismatic richness we inherited from our Founder, we have the original understanding that the Pauline apostolate is preaching and an act of salvific communication, alongside oral preaching¹². It is not subsidiary or accessory but, as Don Alberione intended, it is true preaching, which uses all the languages of communication.

In the footsteps of this ministry, our first task is rightly to proclaim the Gospel, or to give continuity to Alberione's daring dream of «penetrating all human thought and knowledge with the Gospel»¹³, without forgetting to “not talk only about religion, but talk of everything in a Christian way»¹⁴. In fact, as our Founder exhorted, «the Pauline Family has an enormous opening onto the whole world, and in its whole apostolate: studies, apostolate, piety, activities and production. Publications for all categories of people, as well as all matters and events judged in the light of the Gospel...»¹⁵.

Among the many other aspects to underline with regard to our institutional charism, there is the fundamental one that indicates that all of our life and apostolic activity receive meaning and dynamism from the “Pauline spirit”. In following Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life, we find in Saint Paul the model of disciple and consecrated person, apostolic inspiration and creativity.

It is appropriate to consider that among the characteristics that stand out in St Paul in his work of evangelization are those of the “pastoral heart” and “missionary spirit”, which push him to be everything to everyone, to be a man of communion and to work in a network, to use the most effective means of communication of his time to reach people with the Good News where and how they live.

Surely, if the Congregation lost its specific task of “being St. Paul alive today” – not a mummified St. Paul, but active in today's history, with the same style proposed by Blessed Alberione – the Church would lose a “particular color” that enriches her evangelizing mission in the world. This General Chapter will have to examine where we are as a Congregation in reference to the “Pauline” identity, considering the current culture of communication.

5. The culture of communication today

As regards our evangelization service in the field of communication, it is useful to have in mind the contents of the two seminars that we have realized in recent years: the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Editors (2017) and the 2nd International Seminar on the Pauline Formation for the Mission (2019).

These two seminars had the objective of situating the “Pauline apostolate” and “integral formation” – two realities that must walk closely intertwined! – in the context of the changes that have taken place in the culture of communication, especially with the arrival of communication network, thanks to the development of digital technologies.

We recall that from these encounters, among other things, it was highlighted that the Pauline Editor of the present and of the future is a man of relationship: relations with God, with the confreres of the community, with the lay collaborators and with the world that surrounds.

Furthermore, the “interpersonal relationship”, in particular, is one of the aspects on which the current Magisterium of the Church continues to insist when it speaks of

¹² James Alberione, *Apostolato dell'Edizione*, 1950, pp. 12-13.

¹³ James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae*, 87.

¹⁴ James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae*, 87.

¹⁵ James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae*, 65.

communication. It is not enough to use technical means or to live “connected”. It is necessary to see to what extent our communication “creates bridges” or contributes to the construction of the “culture of encounter”.

The work of “updating” that is expected of this Chapter certainly requires from us a broader vision as possible of the current culture of communication and of our apostolic activities as a whole, that is, of our publishing (paper and digital), of our Pauline centers of studies in communication, of initiatives in the biblical field, of our cultural centers... And so, step by step, from this reality we open ourselves with creativity to other possibilities, always with the aim of reaching the people of today with the means of today.

6. In synodality: “to listen with the heart” and “to speak with frankness”

The General Chapter is the highest expression of the collegiality¹⁶ of the Congregation and is a real opportunity to exercise synodality, where each participant is called “to listen with the ear of the heart”¹⁷ and “to speak with courage and frankness”, integrating freedom, truth and charity¹⁸.

Synodality asks us for the wisdom to walk together, seeking unity in the diversity of personal gifts and cultures from which each one comes. It is a process in which we are invited both to listen to one another and to listen all together to what the Spirit is saying! In fact, without the Holy Spirit there is no synodal journey.

In this sense, the synodal journey is an exercise in communication, where dialogue has an irreplaceable role, even if it is a demanding itinerary, as Pope Francis reminds us: «*The first fruit of this dialogue is that everyone is open to newness, to change his opinion thanks to what he has heard from others*»¹⁹.

It is natural that each Capitular has his own thoughts on the different themes that will be treated in the Chapter. However, a “synodal path” requires openness to possible additions and modifications that the same path of reflection can suggest. This means: «*Let us feel free to welcome and understand others and therefore to change our convictions and positions: this is a sign of great human and spiritual maturity*»²⁰.

Obviously, a General Chapter is called to look at synodality not only as a path within the Congregation, that is, in a self-referential way, but also to strive to situate our life and mission in the context of our relationships, and concretely with the Pauline Family (including the members of the Pauline Institutes of Secular Consecrated Life, the Pauline Cooperators and the feminine Congregations), with the local Churches, with other institutions (religious and civil), with the people we are called to serve, etc.

Finally, let us not forget that the synodal journey has its profound meaning in the Eucharist, which generates and nourishes synodality. We can find in the Eucharist the strength to make our General Chapter a true place of experience of fraternity, communion and sharing.

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¹⁶ Cf. *Special General Chapter 1969-1971*, no. 650.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Message for the 56th World Communications Day*, 24 January 2022.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Address at the beginning of the Synod on the Young*, 3 October 2018.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

Dear brothers, as members of the Chapter Assembly we have the demanding responsibility of planning the future of our Congregation by scrutinizing the signs of the times and with courage, among other things, to make the necessary changes regarding those realities that are no longer appropriate to the time we live in.

In this perspective the Chapter is an opportune time to re-evaluate and give some indication to the various dimensions of Pauline life with regard to our relationships (internal and external), our communities, apostolic structures, Pauline geography, administrative and apostolic organization and , why not say it, even our own norms.

Lastly, in addition to elaborating the Congregation's program for the next six years, this Chapter also has the responsibility of electing the new Superior General and the General Councilors who will be responsible for animating the Congregation in the next mandate and for coordinating the application of the decisions taken in this Assembly. May the Spirit enlighten us in our choices!

In a time with so many challenges for the Pauline life and mission, we cannot leave room for sterile pessimisms or for the “prophets of doom” influencing us. Therefore, *«let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!»*²¹. This does not mean closing our eyes to problems, but facing them with the hope that comes from the Gospel.

As never before, we have the great opportunity to exercise our vocation as true prophets of hope, driven by the “Pauline spirit”, within the horizon of our institutional charism.

May Mary Queen of the Apostles, “the Editor of God”, be beside us, with her maternal presence.

A fruitful work to everyone!

Father Valdir José De Castro
Superior General

²¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 86.